

The 7 Secrets of Success

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Foreword: The *7 Secrets of Success* is one of the best things you will ever read. If you want to be successful in any area of your life...here's your guide. If you are struggling to 'get it right'...this can help. If you are happy and you want to be happier...keep reading. The message is clear and unmistakable.

Each of the *7 Secrets of Success* adds to the other; they are joined as body parts, and yet, each *Secret* stands on its own merit. You could say that they form the perfect union – and make perfect sense – in the way that they speak to the CORE of each of us.

The *7 Secrets of Success* de-mystifies the mysterious nature of success by unapologetically advocating a resounding message that everyone can understand and live. But more than that, it uncovers the 'stuff' that makes us tick, disregards the silly fables that many of us cling to, and latches on to our mindset in a way that begs for our action and attention...in order to make us better.

By their nature, *Secrets* are supposed to be kept silent. Yet, while it may be the right thing to keep your friend's personal remarks to yourself, the *7 Secrets to Success* should be etched in stone and into your character. And they should be part of every person's daily diet.

The total message of the *The 7 Secrets of Success* calls us to confront our character – our very selves – with a measurable response, instead of a looking 'elsewhere' for a measuring stick where we always come up short.

You can attend many worthwhile personal development seminars in your life...and read a lot of good books. You can focus on improving your technique, strengthening your resolve, and pressing forward. And most of us do a good job of giving it our all and trying our best. But *The 7 Secrets of Success* aren't interested in slogans, or buzzwords, or clichés. The *7 Secrets* are poised to make you great. The *7 Secrets of Success* possess the 'stuff' you need to adapt to your character...to make you unstoppable!

Lots of folks spend countless hours at the gym, lots of time and money preparing their diet, and untold amounts of time hacking away at technique and attitude; with the hope of finding peace and joy in their lives...and their efforts are to be commended. But most of us realize – that without the right design to our lives – we'll just be hacking away like a bad golfer or lousy cook. We all need a roadmap to success...and *The 7 Secrets of Success* offer us that roadmap.

God Bless you, your family, and your loved ones. Enjoy...and best to your success!

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#1 - GREET the STANDARD

Standards are Fixed. They are already there. They are waiting for you and your response to them. We all need to recognize that standards are the fixtures to adhere to, to aspire to, to shoot for...in all aspects of our lives. There is a standard of excellence in sports, in music, in literature. There is a standard in any and every type of business, in relationships, in physical fitness. It's up to each of us to greet each standard on its terms; and adhere and adapt our lives to them as best as we possibly can...instead of the other way around.

For whatever reason, this secret is becoming more and more elusive to most folks. Physically unfit folks tend to make a lot of excuses as to why they have extra fat on their bodies and often feel sick. Financially poor folks scratch their heads and wonder how they will ever make it; thinking that folks with money must somehow be lucky or devious. People without love in their lives often bemoan a host of reasons why their lack of relationships is causing them great pain. The list of frustrating stories, and troubled lives, and therapy sessions could fill oceans.

Yet, most of us never talk about the root cause of our frustration and disappointments...and that is: not recognizing and not greeting the standard (of anything) on its terms. It's like trying to shove a round peg into a square hole; and we're all guilty of it. We so often approach so many things – and do things – *how* we want to do them, and *when* we want to do them. And then we wonder why we don't get the results we want. We wonder why we're coming up short more often than we'd like.

A standard is a measurement of something. And there is a standard of excellence in any endeavor. There is a standard (or model) of good behavior, of disciplined work in anything – and everything – we do. Whether we're baking a cake, or running a business, or caring for a child. We can all have different tastes and preferences in life; that's the variety that makes life so fascinating and worth living. But we can't mix cake ingredients from scratch in 15 seconds; and then try to bake it at 925 degrees for 2 minutes and expect a delicious treat...that's a recipe for disaster.

Standards are guides and roadmaps that show us the direction to take to attain what we truly want to achieve. Standards are the inherent substance or 'stuff' that make up the principles that we need to live by and mold our characters to accept. And instead of making excuses to whine about the standard, we should forever try to mold our lives to fit the standard...as best we can.

We've made so many wrong assessments about standards that it is often so confusing to our minds; especially amidst the many particular standards that await discovery by us. Much of our confusion with standards is due to our culture. And even more is due to our upbringing, our own immaturity, and even silliness on our part. For example, we've somehow confused equality with fairness – as well as a lot of other things – when we view standards. Yet, it's only when we deprogram the many points of confusion in our minds that we'll be able to move forward. We all need to stop trying to fit the standard into our lives – in silly and obscure ways – and start

reshaping our lives to fit the standard. We need to admit that we often have a lot of things ass-backwards in our lives.

As far as equality and fairness: there is no equality in what appears to be fair; just as there is no inequality in most of our assessments about fairness. Try your best to realize that all things are not created equal in the way we've been misled to believe by the present day misapplication of the term 'equality'. Yes, the American Constitution claims that 'all men are created equal'; and that is sound reasoning and straightforward common sense. Likewise, the Gospel message – in all its passages – clearly claim that each of us is a child of God, equal in His eyes, and equally deserving of His love, forgiveness, and grace...to the extent that we cooperate with Him.

Yet, we need to get over this bizarrely goofy equality-fixation that many of us have before it destroys us. That's because many things are not equal (or fair), when we break them down and compare them against something else similar. Some folks are better looking than others. Some are taller; some have been gifted with a more beautiful mind. And others have been born into families and circumstances that may appear to have given them a distinct advantage in certain aspects of life. So where's the equality...where's the fairness and justice in life? Well, our ability to succeed in any way – whether we deem that we are better off than someone else in some way, or if we feel we have been somehow shortchanged or slighted – has very little to do with our circumstances, and everything to do with how we approach and respond to the many standards that present themselves to us. In other words, it's how we get over ourselves and move forward....despite the apparent hurdles that present themselves to us.

You can be pretty and poor, or pretty and rich. You can be tall and generous, or tall and greedy. You can be happy or sad, kind or nasty, skinny or fat...and it doesn't matter how tall, or fat, or rich you are. You are not entitled to my money (even though I like to share) just because you are down on your luck or because you like to watch soap operas all day. There is nothing stamped on our hearts and minds that pigeon-holes us into a life of misery and depravation except the responses that we make – consciously or unconsciously – to the standards that are fixed. The sooner we realize this...the sooner our lives will improve. And this has absolutely nothing to do with a silly and uncharitable mindset that claims that everyone can simply 'pull themselves up by their bootstraps'. The liberals and conservatives love to confuse us here.

But when we attempt to constantly contrive shortcuts to standards, we screw up our lives and make life more difficult. Generosity, kindness, charity, goodness, selflessness, and all the other precious virtues that form a principled-centered character – and good living – support the standards that call out to each of us for a response...the proper response. Standards of good behavior, of good relationships, of good business practices – anything – are fixed. It's up to us to maturely greet them on their terms as best we can; instead of always trying to shortcut the journey with excuses and weak attempts.

Standards are maps that guide us. When we have good maps, formulated in our minds, we're able to establish the good habits (Secret #3) that form our character and direct our lives. Just as you wouldn't find an office building in downtown Manhattan while looking at a map of San Francisco, you shouldn't expect to get things right in your life – and find your proper way – if the maps in your mind are all messed up. And many of us have a lot of stupid, and silly, and nonsensical maps perverting our mindsets; it's a wonder how many of us are properly functioning. In fact, a lot of us (including me) are totally confused a lot of the time.

The way we view anything, and then apply these views – which creates our attitudes – formulates the maps in our minds...that so often screw us up. Our poorly formed attitudes – and subsequent behavior – about so many things, often feeds our misconceptions and skews our assumptions in ways that make us blind to real solutions in our lives. We could work on our behavior, or our attitude, or our intensity of mopping the floors of the neighborhood pawn shop all day long, but that would not be the map to follow that I would need to ensure my future financial security. Similarly, I could hit 3 buckets of golf balls for 2 hours before each round of golf, and still 'hack' up the golf course, if my approach to the game and my swing is not corrected. We need to change our milky lenses and the way we view things in order to get our attitudes and behavior in line with the standard.

Yet, it is deeper than that...much deeper. Our false assumptions and the milky lenses which we use to form and direct so many pivotal areas in our lives, often has us painfully searching for ways to make things right. We may not be able to relate to our spouse properly, because we may have an ingrained response mechanism; based on how we witnessed our own parents interact. We may have an unconsciously deep-seeded aversion to making money because we've somehow misinterpreted the real possibility that money can be the root of all evil. And we may always remain overweight because our portion-sized meals are obscenely large because someone once told us that we need to have some extra meat on our bones. In any case, our maps are off base. And we can never get to our true destination – or properly respond to the standard at hand – when we're dealing with the wrong maps in our heads.

Recognizing outside influences and the role they play in our ability to properly deal with standards is also vital for our success. There is nothing more frustrating than knowing *what* you want, *why* you want it, *how* you want to get it, and then repeatedly falling victim to outside influences that stunt our progress.

Don't fool yourself; these outside influences are many, seductive, and often unrevealing unless you step back and unmask them for what they truly are. You could be striving for physical fitness, yet have a sweet tooth and live next to a bakery. You could be trying to repair your marriage after years of your drunken abuse, yet you work in a bar. The list is endless. Outside influences – in all of their forms – can thwart our attempt to make the proper grade. Recognizing

them is one of the most important steps to being able to properly respond to the standards we often run away from most. It takes a little bit of humility, mixed in with total honesty. And it takes an awful lot of introspection and soul-searching without the TV on.

True Progress in anything involves striving for results that are better; and that our mother would be proud to witness. It always involves changing ourselves (or something around us) for the better. We have this mixed up today...more than ever before. We should always be working to change ourselves to be better, and kinder, and more compassionate. The proper standard is fixed. We need to stop trying to change the standard by often settling for sub-standard behavior (which often means we're settling on our present inadequacies) by attempting to offer countless excuses to somehow explain away our deficiencies.

The corruption of things is the fuel for cynicism and the accompanying denial that thwarts true progress. Together – the corruption of things and our cynical denial of the corruption – often mold a mindset of complacency that stymies us and creates a permanent lack of desire to progress in any REAL way. Actually, the corruption of things is the only excuse *not* to be conservative. That's because, when left unattended, the standard – or the excellent nature of anything – will be corrupted if it is not protected and improved upon.

Think about it, a beautiful new home will be worn-out if not cleaned and maintained properly. An athletic body will grow fat if not fed well and exercised regularly. A child will grow ugly if not nurtured – both in mind and body – on a continuous basis. If we wish to progress, we need to forever grasp that the standard is there for a reason. And to take our eye off of it or say it doesn't really matter is a total cop-out...and a fundamental error on our part.

We've so often heard of being 'stuck in a rut' by folks who feel stale or exhausted. We've also heard lots of folks asking us to chill out, and take it easy, and relax; when we remark about something important or work really hard to achieve something. Similarly, our entertainers, media, and celebrities – in a very biased and selective way – often ridicule others as being too outdated, or too conservative, or too uptight...when they see someone working tirelessly to achieve something. Quite often, their biased ridicule is based on a newly adopted mindset of corrupted social norms(or even a simple difference of opinion) and because the action or comment appears loyal to a proven standard.

Truth be told, it's easier to tell ourselves that we are OK being 50 pounds overweight, or not hurting anyone by drinking heavily, or 'just chilling' by doing apparent devious acts...even though standards (and other people) are not considered. It's OK to be deviant, or corrupt, or mediocre. It's harder to be hard-working, and honest, and truthful. Yet, progress – in any respect – involves effort, and sacrifice, and determined action toward something better. True progress means that we are always trying to build upon great things...to make them greater.

Greeting Standards is a Process for each of us. And it's not an easy process. We just can't flick a switch and hope that we'll start to act perfectly, in all aspects of our lives. It's first and foremost a recognition that standards exist, that they are fixed and waiting for us, and that we possess the ability to work with them...and towards them. The process cannot be shortchanged. There are no shortcuts.

If we want to make more money, we need to focus our efforts at creating good maps in our minds, and diligently work to change our behavior to meet the standard. Yet, the recognition stage – like knowing that you can't sit on a sofa eating cookies all day and expect to be thin – is often so different for each of us. It's a daily dose of humility and a continuous battle of self-mastery. It's the hardest kind of battle; often demanding that we control our passions in a specific and balanced way. And we need to be conscious of it in order to build upon it.

And while the initial recognition aspect of the process may seem natural and easy, many of us never truly progress in certain areas of our lives because we fail to respect the standard...and give it its due place in our lives. Recognition – and acceptance – of any standard is a prerequisite to success. If you want to be thin, you need to accept the standards of good diet and good exercise. If you want to be rich, you need to accept the standard of proven business practices and apply your focus to the standard instead of trying daily shortcuts.

After recognition, the adoption part of the process – from knowing to doing – kicks in. Again, this presents itself with limitless challenges to each of us. We are not perfect creatures. We often find ourselves doing things that we shouldn't do...even working tirelessly towards goals we have often have no way of explaining how they ever became part of our daily lives in the first place. And that's Ok. Every person on earth has the same challenge. The solution is to move from recognizing the standard, to doing, to HABIT...in a measured and conscious way. We each need to start keeping score.

If you recognize that being thin and healthy is a standard you need to start adhering to, then get on the scale every day...it doesn't lie. If you want to make more money, then begin to Work a PLAN (Secret #4) each day, and keep a log. If you want to make your relationships better, then count the things you do great each day, do more of them, and then focus continuously on doing specific things and acting in specific ways to make your relationships better.

There are no easy solutions...there are only simple ones. This phrase has been coined and repeated over the last few decades by various people, and yet it makes perfect sense regarding STANDARDS. Try your best to understand that the many challenges that you face, and especially the ones that appear most difficult for you to overcome in life – whatever they may be – are found in the STANDARD. The solutions are simple...they are not easy.

I work at a desk. I do not do physical labor for my livelihood. I recently asked my friend who the fat guy was in a photo on his iPhone. He responded, "that's you, Paulie". I knew it was me;

I just didn't want to accept it or believe it. Subsequently, I've started a new healthy life. I've been eating better; I have a salad every day, I go to the produce store twice a week to buy fruits and vegetables, and I've removed a lot of needless sugar and junk from my diet. I'm also walking (many times 2 ½ hours a day), or riding a stationary bike for at least 2 hours each day. I've also started doing manual work with my hands whenever I get a chance. And guess what, it isn't easy. But I've lost over 30 pounds in 2 ½ months. It's a simple applied approach to the standard. (I've done this before...I'm sticking to it this time).

As you approach the world of standards, remember the '5 Times More Rule'. This is my own personal favorite RULE...and you'll read about it more with Secret #6: DECIDE what you WANT. In a nutshell, the rule applies to most anything in life. And that is: Whatever standard you are pursuing, or contemplating, or wondering about; your actual results are most likely 5 times what you think they are or can be. For example, if you are making \$25,000 a year and you are convinced that you are maxed-out for your income, you should actually be making \$125,000. If you think you can only walk or exercise for 30 minutes a day, you can probably do 2 ½ hours. If you feel like you can only achieve X with any specific challenging goal in front of you, you can probably achieve X times 5. The only thing stopping you is your distorted and limited thinking that you presently have about the issue at hand. Greet the standard...on its terms.

#2 - CHANGE your THOUGHTS

Thoughts are things. At first glance, it may appear silly or peculiar to refer to thoughts as things. But whether you know it or not, thoughts – your thoughts – are the driving force behind your ability to succeed at anything in life. In America, we do an outstanding job of emphasizing many good things like practicing good diet and exercise, ensuring due process under the law, and practicing good citizenship. But like the rest of the world, we do a horrendous job of educating and working with our people to understand and value the need to formulate good thoughts.

Put simply, a mind fixated on good and loving thoughts; will produce good and loving results. A person focused on negative thoughts will produce negative results. Notwithstanding the tragedies and crosses that each of us endures in life (and some more than others), it's a simple rule of life. We become what we continuously think about...good or bad.

We need to mold our thoughts the same way we would mold or craft a presentation to speak to a million people, or prepare ourselves for an audience with the President; very carefully and properly. Think about it...in a very bottom-line, in-your-face kind of way. We ultimately become what we think about. And like the honesty of a confessional booth dictates, only we can either come clean and admit this to ourselves, or laugh it off as some sort of bar-room babbling.

Take it a step further. Where do you think 3 different people will apply their time and effort, if all day long they are each exclusively thinking about 1 of 3 distinct different things; let's say (1) pornography, or (2) doing missionary charity work, or (3) devising illegal schemes to make millions? If each person focused on – or continuously thought about – 1 of the 3 items

mentioned, it would stand to reason that they would gravitate (and direct their actions) towards the things they were constantly thinking about, right?

Our Lord promises us (John: Chapter 14 – verse 14): ‘If you ask anything in my name, that I will do’. And this profound promise is intimately tied to His next statement in verse 15: “If you love me, keep my commandments”. So, as we see, if we are to attain anything in life, we need to keep our thoughts (and hearts and actions) in the proper place.

While this may sound 100% correct; we may still have our doubts...and that’s normal. We are imperfect creatures...and we often don’t get things right, especially when it comes to formulating good thoughts. But the harsh reality is, that we will only become what we want to become when we fashion and direct our thoughts in that way...the right way. Can you begin to see how important your thoughts are? If not, perhaps you should grab a cup of coffee or juice and quickly scribble down (in less than 1 minute for each item) what you think about: relationships, money, health, religion, and more. It would surprise you...but be honest.

Again, Our Lord’s words are also constant reminders to us in this regard. He pleads with us to be always on our guard, to realize that we reap what we sow, and to direct our thoughts to higher things. Our minds (and thoughts) are like fertile farm land; it doesn’t care what we plant...it will yield what we plant in it. If we plant tomatoes and onions on the land, that’s what we’ll reap. If we plant confusion, doubt, anxiety and fear in our minds...that’s what we’ll produce in our lives.

Confusion of thought is the #1 hindrance to success. Specifically, immanence is the main culprit for the confusion. Very briefly, immanence simply means that we create, or formulate, or make-up, the thoughts and truths in our minds regarding anything...*just because we say so*. It’s 3rd grade reasoning at its worst. We Americans claim to be so very open minded and accepting of so many things. The truth is that we are terribly educated and confused about so many vital aspects of life; and we need to be mature enough to admit it.

We may know little ‘tid-bits’ about lots of stuff, and we may be subject to thousands of times the number of marketing jingles that our ancestors ever dealt with. Yet, we are nowhere near the thinkers, and writers, and doers that are ancestors were. I fearlessly claim that my Grandmother Lloyd, who only attended school to the 3rd grade, was infinitely wiser and more knowledgeable of substantive things than 99% of today’s college grads.

And it’s because our basis for feeding our thoughts is ass-backwards. Whereas previous generations weighed issues as to whether they were right or wrong for their minds to pursue (even if their reasoning was a bit off) and then tried to direct their lives, accordingly – today’s folks tend to revel in their own confusion and falsehoods...*just because they say so*. Again, referring to our thoughts as fertile farmland, it will grow whatever we plant there.

When we think that greed is good because we heard it in some silly Wall Street movie, we tend to deposit dangerous thoughts in our minds...and go about our business in the wrong way.

When we think that the economy is dead, we exude no confidence, and work less intensely. And when we deem that's its acceptable and normal to scream at anyone we please, we live a life of estrangement and resentment towards those we should love and cherish the most.

The first step towards a successful life – in any area of our lives – is a healthy reflection of how we think about the issue at hand. If we can't get along with our Dad, perhaps we need to think more respectfully about him, regardless of his actions towards us. If we're not making enough money, perhaps we need to reassess and change the way we are looking at key aspects of our approach to earn a living...in order to prosper. And if we're struggling with our weight, or alcohol, or drugs, perhaps we need to plant some new compelling thoughts to replace the old ones that aren't working right for us.

Thoughts are either our best friend...or our worst enemy. The sooner we maturely realize this, the sooner we are poised to make the necessary changes to our thoughts in order to enjoy a successful life. Think for a moment of your best friend as well as someone who you really don't like too much. Your best friend generally makes you feel better, encourages you, and motivates you to do good things. Conversely, the not-so-favorite person in your life tends to drag you down, discourages you, and generally makes you feel bad...taking the wind out of your sails. Well, that's exactly how our thoughts work.

When we plant good thoughts, we reap good results. When we confidently and courageously approach ANYTHING in life, adhering to the world of a principled-centered character with our eyes fixed on the standard; we mold our lives and determine our future. When we worry and cower with each passing moment (thought) we experience the self-fulfilling prophecy that the little negative guy in the back of our head (enemy) keeps repeating.

Just as our physical bodies reflect and exude the diet and exercise that we put into them; our mental attitudes and approaches to life become the direct result of the thoughts that we feed them. If we say we'll never make money; we'll most likely never make money. If we say we'll never find true love and friendships, we'll most likely be lonely. If we chose to worry and fret about everything, we'll probably forever be a nervous wreck.

It is absolutely vital that we remove the negative conditioning to our thought process...and that we do it NOW. You may not have the time, or the energy, or the resources, or the money TODAY to open that business that you've wanted for 20 years, but you can DECIDE what you WANT (Secret #6), start to DEVELOP the HABITS (Secret #3), and begin to WORK a PLAN (Secret #4) to get there. You don't need to build Rome in a day. You do need to tear down the walls of worry, and indecision, and doubt once and for all...and throw those negative thoughts in the garbage can. You need to change the radio station dial in your head.

We all listen to the same radio station: WIFM (What's In It For Me). It's on 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. It plays constantly in our heads. And it never stops. What am I going to wear today? What am I going to eat? How am I going to do at work or school today? This is natural.

We are creatures...and our minds are always open. We're thinking even as we're dreaming in our sleep. It's also natural to be aware of what we need to eat, and wear, and experience. But when the static and volume of thoughts are driving us to delirium, we need to turn the radio dial off, reset our minds, and sing a different tune.

If nothing else, we need to allow ourselves time to think clearly. Because if the radio is belting out confusion 24/7, the iphone is glued to our hands, and the TV is spewing its sordid view of the world, how do our good thoughts stand a chance? How can we deal with each other kindly and compassionately? How can we find the time to get in shape, or make a cup of coffee for our mom, or read a good book? How can we visit the sick or the imprisoned when we are forever focused on what's in it for ME (WIFM)? It's like a junkie; looking for the next little pleasurable encounter – the next fix – and we're all guilty of this to varying degrees.

When you change the way that you look at things, the things you look at... begin to change. I got this from watching Dr. Wayne Dyer while he was a featured speaker on a PBS special some years past. To be honest, I was impressed when I initially heard it, but I sort of blew it off as a nice-sounding little notion that everyone else needed to apply to their lives. Actually, I need it as much as anyone.

The simple truth is that until you change the way that you look at things, the things you look at (and experience) will never change. If you don't change the (negative) way you look at white people, or Arab people, or black people; you will forever look negatively upon them...and you will act towards them, accordingly. If you don't change the way you look at your fat body, you're going to be fat forever. If you don't change the way you think about making real money, you will be forever poor. This is not just a simple lesson in positive thinking. I'm not suggesting that you look in the mirror when you're 50 pounds overweight and repeat 100 times that you're the perfect weight, with a perfect body. I'm talking about a transformation of thought...and your life. It's a radical prescription change to the eyeglasses of our mindsets.

Coming to terms with your Thoughts is a prerequisite for success. It is a difficult process, because it often demands that we confront and DEVELOP good HABITS (Secret #3). And that's also because it's often so much more difficult to de-program our minds and un-learn something, than it is to think it through properly the first time around. Many of us can relate to this if we've had to overcome a bad golf swing, or quit smoking, or started working out hard every day after a long layoff from exercise. The spirit is often willing...but we tend to change our thoughts and our minds – too often for the worse – because good thoughts tend to demand something from us.

Focusing on developing the constant good thoughts that are necessary for our success is not nearly as hard as living an unsuccessful life. Change your thoughts...change your world.

#3 - DEVELOP good HABITS

Life is nothing but a string of habits (good and bad ones). Health, wealth, love, (and more) is all a result of how we consistently apply our time to the moments of our lives. Likewise; sickness, poverty, loneliness, (and more) is often a result of the poor momentary choices we make each day.

Naturally, we can find times in our lives when circumstances seem to destroy our good habits. We get sick, we lose our money, and our love walks out the door. Habits will never stop the crosses that visit each of us; this is common knowledge and common sense. But, for the overwhelming portion of our lives, good habits play the determining factor in the results we experience each day. The victim-hood and poor-me syndromes that we often adapt to our lives are excuses...and we all know it.

Habits are the result of our thoughts. Good habits are formed by right-thinking. When we greet a standard – let's say physical fitness – and we change our previous thinking to grasp the benefits of a healthy lifestyle; good habits tend to take over and kick in. Hopefully, we can start to see the connection between the *7 Secrets of Success*? Greeting a standard is key. Thinking good thoughts allow us to greet the standard on its terms. And good thoughts dictate the good habits that we need to apply; in order to do the things that we need to succeed.

If we look at any aspect of our lives – positively and negatively – we can see how what we continuously do (the habit) usually plays the lead role in determining the results that we experience. If we're happy and fulfilled in our lives, perhaps we're pinging on all cylinders and habitually doing the right things. If we're not so happy, perhaps there are habits – or consistent action on our part – that is causing our unhappiness? This may seem like an over-simplification of things; but think about it?

If you eat right and workout hard; you're probably healthy and thin. If you eat terribly and never exercise; you're probably fat and unhealthy. If you are wealthy, you most likely apply yourself in ways that make money. If you're poor; your daily work practices are probably not in line with the standards needed to make real money. You get the point.

Nike claims to 'just do it. Likewise, a commonly used phrase today is: 'it is what it is'. And there are countless slogans, and clichés, and motivational lines that compel us to develop the habits to move forward. But, only you can apply good habits to your life...nobody else. So what should we all constantly do?

Rate your habits. Take some time to reflect on the habits that you apply to your life. Get a cup of coffee, sit down, and do some REAL personal development. Grade yourself. Take a look at each area of your life and rate your overall happiness or performance on a scale of 1 to 10.

Now, next to the rating – for relationships, and money, and health, your spiritual life, personal growth, and all the other things you decide to grade yourself on – write down the daily habits that you apply (good and bad) each day...to each area of your life. And be honest.

When it comes to a positive part of your life and the accompanying high rating, it's clear that the habits that you apply are strong, and decisive, and empowering to your life. Conversely, when you see a low rating, the accompanying habits are usually weak, and cloudy, and destructive. The habits speak for themselves, right? But how do you establish good habits?

The next 10 minutes is the pivotal determining factor to establish good habits in your life. It is also the key to attaining self-mastery. The Little Flower, St Theresa, applied this to her life. And she became one of the greatest saints of the Catholic Church, and a magnificent example for each of us, because she chose to continuously focus on the next 10 minutes of her life...to SERVE...and to attain personal sanctity.

Because if we burden ourselves with past failures, worry ourselves about present conditions, or load ourselves with anxiety about tomorrow, we can never truly move forward and establish – in the next 10 minutes – what we need to accomplish...or DO. In reality, the next 10 minutes is all we have to work with anyway.

Think about it. We can greet the standard. We can establish good and clear thoughts. We can decide, and plan, and think about making things right, and habitually focus on giving. But if we don't clear the next 10 minutes – every 'next 10 minutes' that we experience – we won't be able to make this work. So, how does this work?

Be the habit. Walk the talk. Take the pain...it's the right kind to take. If you want to lose weight, put a plan in place, put the time aside in your life, and eat right and exercise. If you want to make money, focus your energies, consistently do the specific things you need to do, and make more money. You get the point. But do yourself a big favor: don't view the habit as a chain that binds you. The habit is the vehicle that gets you to where you want to be. Embrace it. Make friends with it. And realize that your old bad habits will naturally disappear from your life when you install the new good ones. It's just like when you buy a new car and trade in the old one.

And be very careful here. Our natural inclinations as creatures – as imperfect people – often challenge us. We work hard, we persevere, and we often find ourselves spinning our wheels. It's partly because we need to understand that our expectations about so many things is skewed. It's also because we are inclined (and often do) things we shouldn't do; and act in ways that are contrary to the standard...and we then don't do what we actually set out to do. The key to being

able to adhere to and build good habits – and to weave them into our character so that they become automatic – is to understand that we don't always make the grade. And that's ok.

Good habits put you on AUTO-drive to success. And it doesn't matter what area of your life you are talking about. If you consistently do certain things – in certain ways – you're going to get a result that corresponds to the habit that you've practiced. But we have a modern day problem that has permeated our mindset – individually and collectively – that we need to remove before we can ever attempt to put ourselves on auto-pilot to success.

And the modern day problem is a combined false sense of things – a false humility – and an inability to believe (which is cynicism in its worst form) in lots of things. Remember that standards are fixed. What is good for our health, and wealth, and relationships, and spiritual life is not a moving target. In previous days, a man may have been doubtful of his abilities and efforts; which made him work harder. Today, a false sense of humility (which is often just plain old fear and non-belief) tends to make a man doubtful about his aims; which often causes him to perpetually procrastinate or totally stop working altogether.

Our recognition of any standard, is fed by good thoughts, and attained by practicing good habits. Life is nothing but a string of habits. Create good habits in your life.

#4 - WORK your PLAN

Look at the PLAN you already have in your life. Now, take some time to evaluate it and revise it...and make it better. Initially, you may wonder what I'm talking about, when I refer to your present plan. But think about it. We all have one. Whether you've taken the time to actually write it down is one thing...but you have one (actually lots of them)...everybody does. The question is: Is your PLAN *working for you*; or are you working FOR a plan?

If you remotely understand – or are even initially a bit puzzled – what I'm referring to when I ask, 'are you working FOR a PLAN', it may be clear to you that certain things in your life may not be working out as you'd like them to. That's because without a plan, we don't have a clue. And without a plan, we are often in a constant game of catch-up...which thwarts our progress as people. The reason for this is because what should be automatic always seems problematic. What should be set, and working, and moving forward...always seems to be in a state of chaos.

It's like a car that's constantly in the shop and a major cause for me to be late for my many appointments. Or like a worn and deficient wardrobe, forcing me to do daily wash, which has me constantly struggling to match things as I run out for work each day. Or maybe it's the baby sitter's lame excuses each week that cause me countless headaches trying to find additional care for my child. The list is endless. But working FOR a plan is much deeper than having some nagging inconveniences.

Working FOR a plan is hard...and is much different than your plan working for you. And this is not a silly exercise in semantics or word games. When you are working FOR a plan, it is usually because you are poorly planned, it's usually a poor use of time, and most always places you in a state of constant...drama. More often than not, when you are working FOR a plan, you often feel exhausted, and frustrated, and overwhelmed. And 9 times out of 10, when you are working FOR a plan, you're usually working someone else's plan... instead of your own.

A PLAN works for you when you make the plan. A plan works for you when you think it through and agree that the plan makes sense for whatever you're planning. Whether it's your money, or your job, or relationships, or your health, or your overall personal development... your plan works for you when you're the author and proof-reader of the plan. Making definite plans is a sign of gratitude towards our earthly and heavenly parents. And while we always want to honor our father and our mother in all things, we need to be sure that the PLAN which is directing our lives is the one that we've created. That's why is it so important to make it...and continuously revise it for the better.

Match your PLAN with your wants. How many times have we heard folks say that they'd just like to change their life by selling everything, move somewhere else, and start all over again? At one time or another, many of us have had the urge to just leave all the responsibilities and hassles, and start over. This is natural. And a lot of folks have done it – for the right and wrong reasons. It may be easier on us, and everyone in our lives, if we just tried a bit better to match our plans in life with our wants. And sometimes, our wants have to be balanced and reigned-in to fit the plans that we really want to implement.

Bankers and Accountants will tell you that most folks mis-match the funding of their businesses and the various investments that they make. Folks often improperly finance equipment with lines of credit, they often invest too conservatively when real opportunities arise, and they generally tend to hide when you need to talk with them. This is human nature.

But when we consistently mis-match our plans with what we want, it creates a lifetime of frustration and pain. When we want a business of our own and yet we forever procrastinate and make excuses...we feel slighted. When we fail to apologize to someone we have offended, we live the frustration that the separation carries. And when we eat junk food all day long, our plans to be thin for our daughter's wedding gets shattered. It's a classic case of not matching our plans with our wants. And it pertains to any and everything we can – and should – plan.

If my plan is to be debt free and able to retire by age 60, perhaps I shouldn't be buying new homes and new cars if my income dictates otherwise. If I plan on being happy and fulfilled in a relationship; I shouldn't be hanging at a local tavern looking for the next loser to wink at me. And if I plan to run a 5k race in 3 months, I should stay away from eating a lot of cake and ice cream and get on the treadmill each day.

And this common sense approach applies to any plan you can think of...it's the same reasoning.

Steps to develop a plan need to be part of your constant way of thinking. And understanding that you need to constantly re-define and re-direct your plans is vital. Yet, altering your plans is not the same as altering your wants. There's a big difference. When you re-define and re-direct your plan, it should always be based on the improvement you experience and the progress that you make. It should not be a never-ending re-thinking of what plan you may choose to decide to follow in the first place.

Case in point: If you lose 30 pounds, or double your income, or reconcile differences with your cousin, the refinement of your plan takes on new meaning. You have new goals to set, new challenges to conquer, new plans to make. But the new plans should not be a contradiction to what you've decided that you wanted to make in the first place. And the new plans should never be surrender to a sub-plan, simply because you somehow didn't get the results you originally wanted.

In other words, you need a balanced approach to your plans...as you move forward. Making plans is a daily task. We plan to do things every day. And these plans need to be in constant union with what our overall plan is...and what we want to achieve. A plan is never meant to be a dead item...once we achieve a certain result. It is a living and breathing blueprint to help me to direct my energies, and efforts, and my wants.

Removing the major hurdles to your plan is probably the single-most pro-active work you can do to enacting good plans...and being able to work them. How many times have you thought something through and come up with a plan; only to be perpetually side-tracked and re-directed from your plan? Well, there are 2 main reasons and remedies. First, you may need some good old fashioned time-management skills. You may need to hold all calls, turn off the TV, and get your ass to the gym every day. Second, you may believe that it's ok doing what you've always done while trying to get the new and awesome results that you want; but it doesn't work this way. You may need to admit that your approach is a main part of the problem.

If you want your employees to prospect and telephonically call on prospects every other day from 2:00pm to 4:00pm, perhaps you're going to have to come out of your office and prospect with them. If you want your boyfriend to work out with you so that you can spend more time together, perhaps you're going to have to stop by and pick him up. And if you plan to live in a house that's free from incessant fighting and bickering, perhaps you need to change the environment and turn off the TV, put away the iphones, and go out together and serve at the local soup kitchen twice a week.

Doing the same thing, and expecting a different result, is the true definition of insanity. Yet, that's exactly what we do when we attempt to re-shuffle our plans based on whether its sunny or raining outside. A principle-centered character – which bases itself on trying to adhere to goodness and all the virtuous standards that call out to us – inherently recognizes that we almost always need to be 'shaking things up' to make them better.

How to work your plan each day is simple. But it's not easy. Your ability to have your plan work for you is indelibly linked to the honesty and quality of time you put into it, coupled with the intensity that you bring to the day. This is where the proverbial rubber meets the road.

Because as we all know, it's one thing to make a plan. It's an entirely different story actually following through and doing it. And it doesn't matter if you're planning a birthday party or halftime activities for the Super Bowl. If you are not going to bring some passion, or intensity, or single-mindedness to the table, perhaps you shouldn't plan to do the task in the first place.

So, when making a plan – about anything – be sure that the benefits you'll potentially receive from implementing the plan are what you want. I say this to a lot of people who tell me that they hate their work. And I can surely relate. When you hate your job, and your boss, and the type of work that you do...your life can be pure hell. Conversely, when you love your job and the work that you do; life takes on new meaning. Can you begin to see why making good plans is so important in our lives?

So, planning – whether it's for your afternoon calls or the kick-off of your new company – should have compelling reasons for you. If the plan is not worth it, then don't make it. Also, if you've made the same plan before, and haven't had the success you'd like or didn't actually follow through with doing the plan, perhaps you need to reassess the plan?

More than anything else, when you want to work your plan each day – any plan – you need to learn how to count...out loud. You probably don't remember, but you were great at this when you were a young child. Most plans - especially temporary unpleasant plans like making 50 cold calls or resolving 2 or 3 uncomfortable issues – involve a countdown; like jumping into a pool.

Get to your plan, break it down into workable segments, count to 3, and do the task at hand. Pick up the phone and make 25 calls...then go take a break. Count to 3, call your Dad, and tell him you're sorry for what you said the night before. In order to exercise, count to 3, change your clothes, and go work-out each day. The list is endless.

But endless plans can confuse us. And we all need less confusion – and much more clarity – in our lives, if we are ever to succeed. So, here's a lifelong rule: Start making plans. Write down your plan to become healthy...which includes a healthy diet and exercise. Write down how you plan to develop yourself, with good reading, good entertainment, and good methods of dealing with people. Write out a plan of how you want to give more, how you want to treat your family and friends, and what new challenges you want to undertake. Write down what your plans are for work – not your tasks or someone else's tasks – but your plans. And then condense your plans (according to topic) and carry it around with you on a 3 x 5 card...for the rest of your life.

Planning is part of life; an important part. You need to think plans through before you make them. And you need to bring some intensity to them; and have some compelling reasons for making them in the first place. Let your plans work for you...don't work for a plan.

#5 - **MAKE things RIGHT**

Make things Right in your life or make excuses. It's your choice.

If only life was that easy. Many of us often wonder where the magic wand is when folks try to tell us that happiness, and wealth, and peace of mind...are all a matter of choice. They seem to think it's as if someone afflicted by hardship can simply watch a certain movie or attend a weekend retreat in the mountains...and all of their troubles will just disappear. Most of us tend to think that the Dr Phil's and Tony Robbins' of the world never recognized real hardship, or spent a year with a manic depressant, or understand true pain. If they did, they would surely change their message, right? Not really.

Yes, there are tragedies that cause us pain. Yes, there are diseases, and injuries, and disappointments and betrayals...and lots of bad stuff that happens to a lot of folks. And yes, people suffer real depression – diagnosed by the medical profession as debilitating – and lots of physical suffering takes place in hospitals, and homes, and work places each day. Unfortunately, this life is not paradise.

But when you take apart many individual cases, the vast majority of folks inflict a whole lot more pain on themselves than any disease, or injury, or misfortune ever could. If you've ever struggled with any emotional pain, or hardship, or loss, or depression...you would probably agree. The way we deal with lots of things – the choices we make – often times magnify and prolong the misery in ways too tough to calculate. Let's just say that *we* are often our own worst enemy when it comes to making a lot of choices in our lives.

What would you say a life consumed by worry, and pain, and indecision, and empty promises consists of? If you took all the folks who were struggling in one way or another – and we heard them describe themselves as 'down and out', or 'victims or 'poor' would you find – in each case – a mad stalker, right next to them as they were speaking; with a shotgun pointed at their heads, telling them to choose misery? Of course, not.

I watched a 30 for 30 ESPN special the other day and saw a Pittsburgh man – born with no arms and no legs – swim a 2 mile race in the Allegheny River; and joke when he answered the cameraman if he thought it was easy putting a peanut butter and jelly sandwich into a plastic bad...with no arms. Also, I recently saw a smiling Marine speak into the camera and proudly claim that he re-enlisted for another tour in Afghanistan because he thought it was worth his effort. As he stepped away from the camera, he walked away on his 2 prosthetic legs. These 2

gutsy guys have evidently chosen to live a life without being defined by their apparent hardship. They chose to move forward, despite some real obstacles.

Make Peace in your life; forgiveness is vital. The more I speak with people all over the world, the more I tend to believe that making peace in our lives is much more important than any other thing we can do to move forward and succeed. And making peace begins in your own soul.

But before you look for people to line up to apologize to you, or think of how you're going to muster up the nerve to reconcile with your brother, you need to stop and forgive the one person that you need to forgive the most: YOU. And then, if you believe in God, you need to ask Him to forgive you as well.

This forgiveness step is, by far, one of the most difficult – and exhilarating – experiences that you can ever perform...and it's your choice. Nobody has a gun to your head; but nobody has the ability to bring you peace either...that's up to you. Psychologists will tell you that forgiving yourself is a vital step for your personal development. And they will also state their envy of every Catholic priest's ability to not only listen to all of your troubles, but priests can also assure the penitent that his sins are also forgiven. That's a powerful experience.

There are limitless ways for you to make peace in your life. And most all of them entail the recognition – and acceptance – of the fact that we are not perfect...and we often do a lot of stupid, ignorant, and despicable things. But if our loving God can forgive us for anything, why do we constantly choose to wage war on ourselves by dragging ourselves down and beating ourselves up because we did things that weren't right and we didn't make the grade?

Make peace...and move forward. When your clothes get dirty, you put them in the wash. When your car needs cleaning, you break out the hose and vacuum. When your child or friend lean on you and look for support...you step in and offer them encouragement. Well, the same thing should apply to you. If your thoughts and deeds are stained, you need to clean them up. If you feel beaten and battered, you need to cleanse your emotional soul. And when you need pardoning, you need to look at your transgressions as normal (but unwanted) corruptive aspects of your human nature...that need to be healed...not explained away with excuses.

Peace in life is not defined as a beach front property with a cold beer or margarita in your hand. I know, I own a beach front property. Peace is only experienced when we've understood that we've done the best we possibly can to make things right in our life. And making things right is not an ambiguous or 'make it up as you go along' statement. It involves a basic and honest assessment of how we respond to the world of value – on its terms – and how we effectively respond. And the first step is to forgive yourself, forgive others; and then try to forget and move forward.

Striving to be great is also a pre-condition to establishing peace in our lives. And making things right is what separates a great life from a mediocre one. Because how could we be at peace – in relation to any aspect of our lives – if we are living a mediocre life? Our regrets in life are basically twofold: 1) sorrow about the things that we've done wrong (which is why forgiveness is so vital), and 2.) not having done things... or not doing things.... that we should.

Making things right is not simply a matter of completing a task or bringing certain issues to closure so as to have a happy ending...like in the movies. Making things right is a constant approach to life. It's being the constant peacemaker in your family. It's working diligently and constantly for others. It's constantly trying to accentuate and build upon your good character traits...and ridding yourself of the lousy ones. Making things right involves trying your best to act in ways that would make your mother proud. Making things right involves balancing your wants and maturely saying yes to things that make you a great man or woman. It's striving to be great, by shooting for goodness. Folks often respond, "I'm good". Are they really?

Goodness offers us the clearest target to which we can aim our sights at and pursue, in our quest to experience true joy. Goodness truly is the essence of all value. Goodness, like every other virtue, is a total response of our entire personality; and it is much more than appearing to be 'good-natured'. For there are too many fakes and shallow people trying to pass themselves off as 'good guys' who actually have very little traces of goodness in their character.

A woman doesn't exude goodness because she decides to forgive or show compassion once a year. She may do a wicked thing and not be vicious, or a good action and not be virtuous. To be virtuous, a woman must perform many acts of virtue. In effect, the virtuous acts (habits) must become part of her personality – like a flowing river compared to a stagnant puddle. In its purest sense, Goodness is both the reflection and manifestation of true love. Goodness is to love...what moisture is to water.

Goodness is the reflection of the World of Values in a person. It is also the essence of the moral life; the target we shoot for when we wish to do and be 'better'. Goodness is the embodiment of all the other values. It is the very breadth of God (love) and the true resting-place of every soul. And it is precisely when our souls are restless – **WHEN WE FAIL TO ADHERE TO GOODNESS** – that we start to create most of the problems in our lives. It's not a moving target...or some ambiguous and cloudy issue; we're the ones who often make it confusing.

Goodness embodies and envelops the entire character of a person. A woman embodies or illuminates Goodness when the **TOTALITY** of her character is covered with truly lovely and truthful things. She is kind in all she does, forgiving to those who offend her, generous beyond her means, selfless in her daily approach, humble in her demeanor, and always interested in being truly just. She is never cold or indifferent.

Strive to be great...by shooting to be good.

Take the pain associated with making things right...it's the right kind to take. And this is rarely discussed and terribly understood by most of us. Because if we could somehow miraculously preview many of the negative results that the countless pleasure and pain decisions that we make produce, we could see the negative pain of making things wrong...and avoid them.

Think about it: If you could actually see the extra fat on your body as a result of eating those brownies and chips late at night; you would probably forego those late night eating binges. If you could somehow see the damage that your ranting does to your family – and the long-term strain it causes to your life-long relationships – perhaps you would try to calmly state your case...and then bite your tongue. And if you could see the problems from betting (and losing) \$1,500 at the casino, you'd choose to walk out the door instead.

When we constantly strive to make things right, we often fail. And this is normal. But the lesson to be learned from any mishap should be reason enough to help us to focus our efforts on forever striving to make things right...by trying to do the right thing. And doing the right thing is not an ambiguous statement...or a moving target.

There is pain and sacrifice when you work to lose weight and live a healthy life. Eating right and exercise can be challenging; especially if you've been accustomed to eating poorly and have grown lazy. But the results of a sickly or healthy life are well documented. There is pain associated with applying proper business practices...yet, more pain as a result of mediocre effort. And there is pain associated with properly and maturely relating to your child or spouse; but the pain of dealing otherwise is much more intense. We need to decide what level of real pain we are willing and able to endure. And we must then try to grasp that – in most all cases – the level of pain associated with making things right is almost always far less than when we choose to make things wrong.

In America, we have such an immense amount of opportunities at our disposal. We have great natural resources, great foundations (i.e. universities, judicial system, communities, etc...) great financial opportunities, and great people. And all of these are at our disposal to help us succeed.

But we can only chose to make things right, and strive for greatness, and find true peace in our lives, when we're ready to take the right kind of pain each day. Take the right kind of pain by striving to do the right thing...it's the right kind of pain to take.

Keep it in front of your face. As mentioned previously with plans, you should carry your plans around on a 3 x 5 card with you at all times. Or, with the technology of today, upload it to your cell phone. But whatever you do, keep it in front of your face. And keep score.

And for explanation purposes, in the case of keeping it in front of your face...less is more. A picture of you overweight as well as one when you were thinner is fine. A plan to bite your tongue when dealing with family is enough. And a business plan of 'no excuses' is enough to support your overall more lengthy plan that you work on and revise regularly.

But why do we need to keep some type of plan – either on a 3 x 5 card or a snapshot on our iphone – on us, and in front of our faces, at all times? It's because we are creatures. And we are inclined to often do what we shouldn't do, and say what we shouldn't say, and act in ways to become what we shouldn't become. As creatures, we often can only covet what we see, yearn for what is in front of us, and strive to become what it is right in front of our faces.

The great cathedrals and porn sites are in our faces; and vie for our attention. The auto makers are relentless with their ads; constantly trying to create a starving crowd. And the local diner showcases cheesecake instead of spinach. They all put things right in front of our faces...for us to respond.

Keep your plan on you at all times. Read it, perfect it, and constantly revise it to make it better. And strive to make things right in your life. Wonderful things will happen when you do.

#6 - DECIDE what you WANT

The Single most important determinant in your life is your ability to make good decisions. Good (or bad) decisions determine the direction of our lives and help us to achieve great things and realize success (or failure). And life offers us a continuous menu of decisions; and – consciously or subconsciously – our decisions determine the choices that we make. Our choices also mold our attitudes and direct our character to act in certain ways to attain certain results. Our decisions determine our destiny.

Some folks think that deciding what you want should perhaps have been the first of the *7 Secrets of Success* presented. And this is surely debatable. But deciding what you want has become such an arbitrary term and has been associated with so many varied (and often selfish) connotations. I waited to place it near the end...at #6.

When you decide what you want in life, it is far more profound than wanting some obscure sense of contentment, or security, or financial gain. Deciding what you want – at its core – is a fundamental decision that sets the framework and foundation of our lives. It allows us to properly decide on the millions of daily decisions that present themselves to us, by developing a

core group of values to build upon – and to form our character – instead of making up the rules as we go along.

In order to decide what you want, you need to step back and determine the central purpose and focal points for your life...and then determine if they are what are good for you. Initially, this may sound restrictive or hampering, but it's one of the most liberating things that you can do.

If we're constantly trying to eat healthy while our kitchen cabinets are filled solely with junk food, our decision between eating cheese cake or cookies will still make us fat. If we decide that we want financial independence, and look at 2 different minimum wage jobs as the answer, perhaps we should be focusing instead on improving our skill-set in order to change our profession? And if we've decided that our relationships and personal development are vital for us, and possibly in need of repair, perhaps a makeover of our core beliefs and our purpose in life is in order? It's easy to see that a cabinet of healthy food, a more focused work life, and an emphasis on promoting good relationships will help. But is often far more difficult to grasp that simply deciding what you want is actually the deciding aspect of ultimately getting what you want.

This is the key determining point as you consider deciding what you want for your life. It's a conscious decision. It's a fundamental approach to our day. That's primarily because so many of us are plagued by the habit of making poor decisions because we've failed to make the correlation between deciding what you want...and then determining if those wants are in union with your core approach to life. It's sort of like an orchestra where lots of musicians (like our many decisions) are playing different songs at the same time; and they often aren't in union with the symphony of life. At the end of the day we're often making bad music.

We all want peace, and joy and success. It's not about wanting to be happy; it's how we go about the process. A bank robber and a business owner of a large store both want money; and they both go about the process in completely different ways. A thin boy and a fat boy both want good physiques; and they both pay different amounts of attention to good diet and exercise. And most folks want quality relationships; yet they often allow the many passions in life to rob them of their ability to make mature decisions about a whole host of issues that present themselves.

We need to leap beyond ourselves. It's a conscious decision. And it's the kind that only successful people make. It has nothing to do with an athletic event where we physically jump over a bar or attempt a long jump into a sandy landing. It's a leap beyond our own immaturity...and a corresponding leap to something better. This leap has so many spurious names, and clichés, and slogans...it could fill volumes. It's often called perseverance, and resourcefulness, and thoughtful contemplation. But it's something much more fundamental. It's a code for success. And it's often about the act of casting out our personal demons.

If you have ever been around a drug addict or alcoholic, you understand this premise. If you've ever struggled with some fundamental challenges or addictions that seem to impede your progress, you get the point. Leaping beyond ourselves is the hardest thing that anyone can ever do. It's a transformation – of thought, of word, and of deed – away from something destructive that grips us...and a simultaneous leap towards something better.

And it's not until we make this leap that we can begin to formulate the foundations of decision to experience success in our lives. When the piano player stops skipping her lessons and sets the bar (and she decides) to become a spectacular pianist, her clarity of purpose kicks in; and she becomes a spectacular pianist. When a man finally decides he doesn't want to be a cog in some sordid financial wheel, he decides to pursue his livelihood in an endeavor that matches his desire. And when a young woman decides that the bar scene is not where she's going to meet her soul mate, her search for love takes on new meaning...and new directions.

Decisions present themselves to us each and every day. And the main reason why most of us feel like we're not in control of our lives is because we're not in control of our decisions. Who decided that you should work on a farm, or in an office building, or at a steel plant? Who said you need to meet beautiful women at bars, and clubs, and frat parties? Who decided that you eat oatmeal in the morning and salad before dinner? You get the point. The many things we do, and the many decisions that we make, are often due to our own limited thinking and our own immaturity.

Make a decided leap beyond yourself. And make the leap towards something spectacular.

In order to do that, you need to **Rid yourself of Distractions**. And it's much deeper than turning off the TV, turning off the cell phone, and reading a good book. When you rid yourself of distractions, you actually start the process of conquering fear, and doubt, and procrastination; which are often the major stumbling blocks that impede our ability to succeed.

Because ridding ourselves of distractions has very little to do with putting our phone calls on mute, or turning off our ringers, or closing the office door. Ridding yourself of distractions is a fundamental approach to ward off all the negative influences in your life. This is why it is a fundamental flaw of parenting to 'ration' time on garbage video games, or filthy TV shows, or senseless partying.

Ridding yourself of distractions involves a decision to rid yourself of the root causes of your inability to succeed at anything. Most folks think that deciding what you want involves this herculean effort to become perfect. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Forming a mindset and character that is pre-set to success (and greatness) involves a lot less effort than trying to ward off alcohol or weed at a toga party...if I'm inclined to drink heavily or smoke weed. Planning on how to speak compassionately with my kids is a lot less difficult than trying to repair years of abuse. And studying for the attorney bar exam is a lot more constructive than complaining about my paralegal work all day long. The decisions we make – at their root – are the key determining aspects of our lives that shape our destiny. And the sooner we begin to understand this, the less frustrated and more fulfilled we will become.

The distractions we need to rid ourselves most of are our own excuses. This doesn't mean that we need to go to run a marathon next week, or sell all we have and give it to the poor, or move to a monastery half way around the world. It does mean that we need to build a base of core values to build upon...and then begin to do our very best to make our decisions in line with the core foundation of beliefs we've adopted as our guide.

It's a Process....and it's about setting your priorities. Deciding what you want is not nearly as difficult as many of us make it to be. Give yourself the 30 second test. Get a pen and paper, and write down what you want. If you want a bigger and nicer home, write it down under personal wants. If you want a better job and more money, write it down under financial wants. If you want peace in your home or your husband to stop abusing you, write it down under relationships. The hard part is not writing down what you want...or even getting what you ultimately want.

The hard part of the process of determining what you want is to decide exactly what you want, and then consistently making the appropriate corresponding decisions in your life in order to get what you want. Unfortunately, it's the outside influences that always seem to get in our way. And we tend to focus considerable amounts of time on what we don't have, and tell ourselves what we can't do, and focus on what we don't know...at the present moment. And this tends to detract from our decisions...and our ability to see them through. It also often tends to have us scratching our heads wondering what are true aims actually are.

You can't plan a field of corn and reap it 2 days later. You can't run a marathon 2 weeks from today if you haven't exercised in 3 years and you're 75 pounds overweight. And you can't shortcut the process of deciding what you want by going on a shopping binge and hope that a new wardrobe will make you feel all better. The process of determining what you want should always be your overwhelming priority in life. And it can't be shortchanged or shortcut by simply wishing that things were different.

Setting your priorities – or group of core principles – for your life, is a process that makes life worth living. It cuts through the madness, the rhetoric, the interruptions, and the BS. And this process is where the spice of life begins to nurture and develop into a wonderful personality... a

loveable personality; and one that both you and your neighbor (or co-worker, or spouse, or child) can be glad to deal with every day.

Everyone is different. You may want to be a concert violinist, your brother may want to coach the Lakers, and your child may want to cure cancer. And while the process – and road – ultimately takes on different paths with different folks, it is precisely in these different tastes that we form fabulous communities...and great societies. And we rise and fall – as a people – by the level of intensity and focus that we individually and collectively infuse into setting core priorities, in tune with standards, which form principle-centered characters...and great people.

This is precisely why we need to **Choose Greatness over Mediocrity** when we are actually deciding what we want; any other choice is a recipe for disaster. Because no matter who we are or what decisions we actually are involved with each day, a life of great decisions is paramount to living a happy life. If we want to be the best mother we can possibly be, then we will raise children poised for greatness. If we want to stick the kids in front of the TV all day, we'll be part of creating illiterates for society. If we wish to be the best father, or brother, or son; we'll generally strive for greatness (and goodness) and we will produce a character for others to emulate.

This choice is not about reinventing ourselves. This is not about setting a bar so high that we can never reach it. Nor is it about producing dreams that we will never be able to achieve. It's about working to develop a character that is constantly set on doing things...great things. It can be partially understood by listening to Michelangelo's apparent response when someone asked him how he was ever able to sculpt the magnificent statue of David, when he responded that David was in there, and that he just chiseled away the marble around him. Similarly, a mother's undeniable love for her imprisoned son can be best understood when she claims that the act which caused her son's imprisonment was not an accurate reflection of his true character. And she loves him dearly despite his lack of judgment and the improper behavior which landed him in prison.

We need to do the same thing in our lives. Like good mothers, we need to look at the times – regardless of how many or how severe – that we haven't made proper decisions in the past and view them as not being an accurate reflection of our true character. And we need to forgive ourselves, ask God and others for forgiveness, and move forward. Like Michelangelo, we need to chip away at the rough and rocky exterior (i.e. destructive habits, confused attitudes, bad habits, poor behavior, etc...) that may be plaguing us, in order to uncover the treasure beneath for all to see...and for each of us to experience.

And remember the '**5 Times More Rule**' that I briefly mentioned in Secret #1 – Greet the Standard. Again, this is my personal rule, and one of my favorites. As you recall, I said:

Whatever standard you are pursuing, or contemplating, or wondering about; your actual results are most likely 5 times what you think they are or can be. For example, if you are making \$25,000 a year and you are convinced that you are maxed-out for your income, you should actually be making \$125,000. If you think you can only walk or exercise for 30 minutes a day, you can probably do 2 ½ hours. If you feel like you can only achieve X with any specific challenging goal in front of you, you can probably achieve X times 5. The only thing stopping you is your distorted and limited thinking that you presently have about the issue at hand. Greet the standard...on its terms.

But be careful here; you need to build yourself up to a workable volume with whatever you do. You need to grasp that giant leaps demand increased energy and changed habits. And it is often harder to move a mountain than it is to foster the necessary energy (i.e. mental energy, emotional energy, and physical energy, etc...) to make real progress. You could walk for 2 ½ hours today, and then not be able to walk again for another 7 days because you're out of shape and you'll be truly hurting. You could make 125 phone calls today (up from your average of 25 per day); only to be totally confused by the increased activity. And you could reach out and reconnect with all the folks you've neglected and offended in 1/5th the normal time...only to be overwhelmed by the responses that will be too much for you to handle...right now.

The 5 Times More Rule is something you can very quickly work up to – and much quicker than you could ever imagine – but it isn't done in the next 24 hours. The 5 Times More Rule applies to our limited mindsets, our limited ways of thinking, and our limited imagination; and our ability to enact it is different for each person and his/her personal development desires.

Deciding what you want is the single most important determinant in our lives. And yet it doesn't involve the kind of effort that most of us have been lead to believe or imagine. It involves a leap beyond ourselves, ridding ourselves of distractions, a process of setting priorities, choosing greatness (goodness) and avoiding mediocrity, and shedding our limited thinking to do it much faster than previously imagined. Decide what you want...and go get it.

#7 - GIVE more than you TAKE

One of the most **confusing things to the mind** is the seemingly contradictory notion that – in order to be successful – you need to give more than you take. Jesus, as well as many other notable religious figures, makes this claim. And many present day motivational speakers, lots of apparently successful celebrities, and business folks from all industries, will also profess the same message: Give more than you take. Yet, it's still confusing. And that's OK.

It's confusing because, at first glance, it appears to be a contradictory statement. Perhaps it's because we think that if we give more money than we take, we'll be poor. Or if we give more

food that we eat, we'll be hungry? It's also confusing because a lot of questionable folks – who we may not like or may not appear to be truly authentic – make the claim.

In the first case, when we may be concerned about not having enough money or food; we may need to admit that perhaps we're stuck (mentally) on the base material reality that we need things. This is normal. But it is very detrimental to our personal growth to stay forever bound to a mentality that claims that our normal need for material things is all we need to pursue in life. If all we want to do is win the lottery, or retire to play golf 10 times a week, or travel and shop all day long, then our minds and hearts are not interested in giving – and serving. So, it understandably would follow that the notion of giving more than we take would be foreign to us and our way of living. And the radical thought that we should somehow give more than we take would be forever closed to our way of thinking.

Also, when you can think of the most lazy, or self-centered, or disingenuous person that comes to your mind, you can most likely agree that these folks are selfish takers...and somebody you don't wish to emulate...or give anything to. And if you decide to give, the folks like this will surely take. And you'd feel like a sucker. So, the first point of confusion comes from misunderstanding and confusing the normal and fundamental base aspects of life, along with good messages coming from messengers (Good and Bad messengers) who say the same thing. And added to the confusion is the fact that these different messengers often profess other messages and live different lifestyles. But try not to confuse the message with the messenger...that's half the battle here

We're also confused because of our competitive nature. We work hard, and prepare, and sacrifice in our lives in order to move forward and prosper in many different ways. So, this notion of giving more than we take, might cultivate some guilt-ridden sentiments that permeates our thoughts and form unbalanced attitudes about lots of things; keeping us forever confused. We want the best home, the boss' job, the nice car, the good vacation, and the best schools for our children. And that's normal. And when we consider giving more than we take, we tend to sometimes believe that it will somehow take away from what we have and what we work for; or compel us to consider if the things I'm competing for are actually making me more of a taker than a giver.

Truth be told, **we need to give more in order to get more...**in every aspect of our lives. And don't let anyone ever make you feel guilty or stupid when you want to give. Our Lord said, to ask and you will receive. In the parable of the talents, the recipients were rewarded more when they made good use of their talents. It is part of our cause and effect DNA as people: When you give, you will receive. What you sow, you will reap. When you apply yourself diligently in an endeavor, you will (all things considered) set yourself up to experience good results. The things

that you receive, and reap, and experience are all directly related to the amount and the intensity that you decide to give.

Think about it, in any aspect of your life; when you give more, you most always add to that supply of ‘stuff’ that is affected by your giving...and that makes things better. And a lot of the results that you receive are the natural by-products of your giving. When you eat well and exercise hard, you form a healthy body that can accomplish your plans and serve your family. When you give of your time and energy at work, you reap the paycheck and the ability to move forward and succeed.

The greatest teacher of this secret is Jesus. He challenges us throughout the entire Gospel message ... to give. And the fundamental cornerstone of giving is – or should be – the act of serving. This is where the real confusion lies; because true giving involves serving. And a lot of us have adopted a modern day mindset that says it is OK to allow Mother Theresa or the local soup kitchen to serve...but not me. I’ll even give my money, or donate my time by walking at the annual walk-a-thon, or help cut my neighbor’s tree branch once a year, but don’t ask me to be a servant.

When instructing His disciples, Our Lord challenged them when he stated that no servant (you and me) was greater than his master (Him). He was referring to the fact that they needed to follow His example and lay down their lives to serve...like He did. And when He asked the apostle which was the greatest of the laws, Jesus then added... to love your neighbor as yourself. This transformation of thought is the cornerstone of living a great life. It is also the surest way to be happy and fulfilled...and ultimately receive all that you want.

Taking and receiving are completely different things. And we all need to grasp this fundamental difference. We all need to get over the ugly name calling, the finger-pointing, the class warfare, and the silliness. A taker tries to constantly get things without giving. A receiver is someone who receives because she applies herself to an endeavor or is in need. And they are 2 completely different things with 2 completely different approaches to life; but try to be careful here. You can’t measure a taker or receiver by isolated incidents...or even by your limited thinking of a taker.

A taker tends to rarely invest positive time, or energy, or resources into anything other than what gives them the next little pleasurable thrill. And we all know a lot of people who are takers. These are the guys who spend all of their time, and energy, and money chasing the next little goodie...with little or no regard for anyone else. It’s the pain in the ass boss, the know-it-all guy at the end of the bar, and the local leach with 4 pending lawsuits against everybody. And it’s the part of each of us we need to surgically remove from our mindsets if we are ever to truly succeed in life.

Yet, the biggest takers of all are not what we've often made him or her out to be. A young woman receiving food stamps, the local drunk, or our unemployed neighbor smoking weed on his front porch, often have outward stigmas of being takers. But there are countless reasons why folks could be down on their luck or experiencing some present challenges in their lives. As with everything, the greatest thing we can give to others is our charitable compassion, our full understanding, and our encouragement. And encouragement and help are what folks often need more than anything else.

Just as you are not a professional golfer because you occasionally happen to hit a few exceptional golf shots, folks aren't takers simply because some outward appearances prompt us to think that they are. The takers we need to deal with first and foremost are the real takers... running around in our own heads.

So, **what stops us from giving? And who are the greatest takers?** Because in order to change our lives for the better, we should be much more concerned with how we can transform ourselves – and consistently give more – than to continuously point our fingers at those who apparently take. The answer is clear, fundamental, and simple: Our fears, our worries, and our doubts are the most deadly takers in our lives.

Most of us are sick and tired of the constant bickering that we witness from media personalities and politicians. And why is this? It's because they feed off garbage stories, and problems, and other people's dirty laundry. It's because they sell us fear, and despair, and dirt...instead of feeding us with confidence, and hope, and beauty. It's so disgusting; yet it's real. The problem is, that we tend to absorb a lot of the negativity, and fear-mongering, and depression that they are selling. And it's in this absorption – or smothering of negativity – that we allow the takers to rob us of our ability to move forward and achieve great things.

These takers of fear, and worry, and despair are the worst takers of all...and they prevent us from giving our all. They rob us of our ability to move forward, and persevere, and win. They form the perfect union with doubt, and confusion, and anxiety; and these takers should be in jail. Unfortunately, they imprison us with their sordid view of things, and often stunt our ability to give.

Giving more than you take should not be a confusing riddle. It is not rooted in a creed that demands that you need to give back, just because you have apparently been fortunate enough to be the recipient of some apparent good things. Giving more than you take applies to the financially and spiritually poor man as much as it does to the financially and spiritually rich man; despite the apparent outwardly appearances that seem to suggest otherwise.

It is in giving that we prosper. And **the more we give, the more we receive**. It applies to all aspects of our lives – positively and negatively. If we give more time and energy to our work, we receive more favorable results. If we work on our relationships by giving and serving, we receive a great deal of love in return. And when we give of ourselves with an open heart, we receive more bounty than any cash vaults could ever hold.

This precept also pertains to the negative aspects of most things as well. When we give in to all of the takers – in all of their human and related fearful forms – we can become self-absorbed and afraid to do and become most things. But if we are making it our sole aim to give in order to receive; doesn't that just diminish the act of giving...and make us hypocrites?

In the end, it's all about love...and the nature of love.

The nature of love is diffusive. In other words, we need to give love away in order to fully experience it...and receive it. God, who is Love, had no real need for us. Yet, compelled by love, He gave us life and all of creation. He didn't have to make us. He is complete by Himself. The only logical explanation is that He loves us. And He diffused – or gave – us life. And this is our example and guide. We need to give with all the love we can. And we need to treat the real takers of our joy (i.e. fear, worry, anxiety, doubts, etc...) as the true enemy...and try to give of ourselves in all we do.

Give more than you worry. Give more than you fear. Give more than you doubt. Give more than you should. In doing so, your worries, your fears, your doubts, and those around you...will all be conquered by your giving nature...your generosity. Don't let the real takers rob you of your life. Give more than you take – in all you do – and your life will be transformed.