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My six-year-old son asks, “Dad, why do you have to write this book?”

“I don’t *have* to,” I explain. “I *want* to.”

“But *why*?”

“Because it gives me pleasure to write it.”

“But *how*?”

“Because this book is everything that I am. And in a hundred years, I’ll be long gone, but this book will still be here and your children’s grandchildren can read it and be with me.”

“I don’t understand.”

I pause; rethink my strategy. “Okay, let me explain it another way. How do you feel when you’re skateboarding?”

“Happy,” he replies, the corners of his mouth turning upwards.

“Well, that’s how I feel when I’m writing this book.”

Silence, contemplation. His eyes widen and he stares deeply into my soul. “Dad, are you writing a book about *skateboards*?”



“Life is short and death is long.”

Fritz Shoulder

The Countdown

Everyone knows that life is short – it’s the most over-preached truth on earth. But how short is it, *exactly*?

Planet Earth is four-and-a-half *billion* years old. The species you and I belong to, *Homo sapiens*, did not emerge until some 200,000 years ago. The oldest known fossils of modern humans are only 160,000 years old, discovered in Herto, Ethiopia. So out of the four-and-a-half *billion* years that this planet has been floating through the nothingness of space, we’ve been around some .0044% of that time. Put another way, if our planet was exactly one year old, then modern humans would have only been around for the last 23 *minutes*. Measured on the same scale, if our planet was a year old, then your entire life would amount to *half a second*.

In planet-time, that’s all you have: half a second.

We don’t appreciate this as kids. Time seems unlimited

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and goes by ever so slowly. We're impatient to grow up, become adults, and enter the real world. We imagine all the freedom we'll have, all the things we'll get to do. But when adulthood finally arrives, we discover that we'll be spending the vast majority of our "freedom" at work, paying bills, surviving, often in jobs we don't like or don't care about. Life is not how we imagined it and disillusionment sets in. We spend our half second doing everything except what we really want, dreaming of the future, of some distant, faraway day when life will be different, better, when we can finally do the things we want. But as we grow older, time begins moving faster and faster, and our long-awaited day never seems to come.

The tragedy of life isn't that we only have half a second. *The tragedy is that we waste it.* In my travels across continents, countries, and cultures, first as a serial immigrant and later as a businessman, I met people from every walk of life imaginable. And throughout all these journeys in different parts of the globe, I became obsessed by a single question:

What would you do if you only had one year to live?

I'm not sure where the question came from, what prompted it or why, but it quickly became my favourite topic of conversation. And the more I asked the question – to people of varying backgrounds, skin colour, religion, and education – the more obsessed I became. *Why?* Because I always received the same answer. With

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only a year to live, most people would quit work, spend time with family, see the world, and do everything they always dreamed of doing *before it's too late*. Their answers would be thick with emotion – not sadness or regret, but enthusiasm, eagerness. I felt they were about to set sail on some journey they often fantasized about but never actually took. With heat and fervour, eyes flashing, gleeing almost, they spoke of the many things they would do before death claimed them. And after the hundredth question and hundredth answer, I finally thought, *Good God! Can we only live when we're dying?*

My impression of the world is that we spend life doing what we “have to” rather than what we “want to”. This comes across in many psychology and happiness studies, especially those related to work. Harvard studies show that worker happiness is at an all-time low,¹ with 74% of employees wanting to find a new line of work.² At heart, *we would rather be doing something else*. A number of prominent psychologists have proclaimed that every industrialized nation is experiencing an epidemic of depression,³ all the way from university students – where a study of 13,500 students found that 94% felt overwhelmed by

1 Riggio, R., “Why Happiness at Work is Declining”, *Psychology Today*, 25 October 2010

2 Hall, A., “I’m Outta Here! Why 2 Million Americans Quit Every Month”, *Forbes*, 3 March 2013

3 Lambert, C., “The Science of Happiness”, *Harvard Magazine*, February 2007

everything they had to do and 45% were too depressed to function properly⁴ – to the general population, where only 28% of people out of a massive sample of 520,000 were classified as “emotionally well off” as defined by positive and negative daily emotions, as well as a clinical diagnosis of depression.⁵ What can we make of all these studies and statistics?

One thing: *we would rather be doing something else.*

And that, right there, is the great tragedy of human existence. While this planet has been spinning and forming and cooling for *billions* of years, nature has been busy making *you*. From scraps of living matter – from bacteria, microbes, fermenting cells fighting for the right to exist, squirming and striving, growing in complexity through millions of generations, learning to breathe, mutating, spawning life on land and sea and air against the backdrop of centuries and millennia passing – the first genus *Homo* emerged. Somehow – only God knows how – he rose from the mess of biology and creation, covered in slime, ignorant and animalistic, and learned to stand, walk, stare at the sky, marvelling at the dark voids and cosmic dust above. And then he embarked upon the journey of all journeys, the hundred-thousand-generation

4 Kadison, R., “Getting an Edge – Use of Stimulants and Antidepressants in College”, *New England Journal of Medicine*, September 2005

5 Rheault, M., McGeeney, K., “Emotional Health Higher Among Older Americans”, *Gallup Wellbeing*, 12 August 2011

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epic of survival, of hunting and being hunted, overcoming frost, famine, struggling with tools made of wood and stone, discovering fire, migrating tens of thousands of miles to colonize the world, living by the law of fist and club, coping with violence, rape, conquest, disease without cures, starvation – enduring unthinkable pain and suffering so that the species could survive – living with the sole intent to mate, procreate, pass genes on to the next generation of survivors, over and over, thousands and thousands and thousands of times, until finally, at the very end of that endless ladder, one sperm out of 300 million attached itself to an egg, creating *you*, only *you*.

The point of it all, since the planet cooled and nature first put her hand to work, was to produce *you* – the finest specimen of an eternity of mutation and adaptation, surviving the evolutionary climb of all evolutionary climbs, through miracle and chance, beating all odds, winning a trillion-to-one-wager, winning the sperm race to be born, to be *you*. And today, sitting comfortably, reading this book, safe, warm, fed, the beneficiary of millions of years of unimaginable suffering and billions of years of incalculable good luck, there *you* are, with just half a second to enjoy the result, the marvel of existing, the miracle of *being*. And what do you do with that half second? *Something other than what you want!*

It's the tragedy of all tragedies – it makes Shakespearian blank verse seem comic by comparison. Our lives

are so cluttered doing what we “have to” that there’s no room for what we “want to”, even though we only have half a second to do it. Perhaps that’s why there’s so much unhappiness in the world! Perhaps that’s why Americans spend \$57 *billion* on lottery tickets each year⁶ – not to win wealth, but to win freedom and finally do the things they *want to*.

But what are we waiting for?

If we only had one year to live, our desire to start living – to use what’s left of our half second to the fullest – would become unstoppable and we would finally, finally, take action. *But is that what it takes?* Must we be confronted with death to finally do the things we want? *Is that what we’re waiting for?* Sadly, it seems so. Death always seems a long way off, a concept almost, as remote and abstract as the dark side of the moon. We don’t appreciate our mortality or fully comprehend how little time we have, so we defer our desires for another day. It’s not until death becomes more tangible, inevitable, that we realize our time is measured and we spring into action.

We’re relaxed and laid back about the time we have left because we measure our age in “years lived”. We know that 50 is older than 40, and 40 is older than 30, but so what? What does that really tell us? Not much. It’s like knowing how many litres a car has used without knowing

6 Krasny, J., Lubin, G., Sprung, S., “12 Ways Americans Throw Away Money”, *Business Insider*, 1 October 2012

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how many litres are left. The most important information is missing. So what would happen if we measured our age in “days left” rather than “years lived”? I bet we wouldn’t be as relaxed and laid back. I bet that death would become less abstract. Let’s try it.

The average life expectancy of the global population in 2011 is 70 years,⁷ ranging from 80+ years in countries such as Japan, Australia, and France, to less than 60 years in South Africa, Laos, and Kenya.⁸ Let’s assume you live in one of the sixteen countries where life expectancy is more than 80 years, or that you’ll beat the odds and live to be 80. In either case, subtract your current age from 80 and multiply the result by 365. This is the number of “days left” you have – assuming all goes well and you don’t find yourself on the wrong end of “average”. I’m currently 37 years old, so $80 - 37 = 43$, and $43 \times 365 = 15,695$ days. So that’s it. That’s all I have left: *15,695 days*. And there’s something more meaningful about “15,695 days left” than “37 years old”. I feel a sense of urgency, haste. *There’s a countdown on my life.*

Perhaps that’s why people accuse me of being in a hurry. I don’t need to be. But I am. *Why?* Because it took a billion years for me to get here, and now that I’m here, I’ve only got half a second to make the most of it. So yes, I admit it, I’m in a hurry! *I’m in a hurry to live.* The world is right there,

7 World Health Organization, 2012

8 www.WorldLifeExpectancy.com

outside my window, in the blueness of the sky, over the horizon, begging to be discovered, touched, appreciated. It's all there waiting for me – *so what am I waiting for?*

“I'm here to live, man, live!” I remind myself each morning.

I want to lie in the grass, underneath the burning sun and swirling clouds, wind blowing, seasons changing, with the raw earth under my fingernails. From the largeness of the cosmos to the smallness of my little toe, I love life. And knowing that everything is ephemeral, fleeting, here one moment and gone the next, I'm not saving anything for later. *There might not be a “later”.* Like the great motivators that preach from stadiums and pulpits, I want to *live full and die empty*. I've skydived, explored the great pyramids, sat next to the Moai on Easter Island, bungee jumped, owned Ferraris, driven at 300 km/h, rock climbed above Machu Picchu, sailed the Mediterranean, scuba dived on wrecks in the Caribbean, photographed the Nazca Lines from a light plane, touched the giant tortoises on the Galapagos Islands, met the Pope, worked with Lech Walesa, and dined with Arnold Schwarzenegger – I'm not waiting for anything. Each morning I tell my wife and kids how much I love them, as if I'll never see them again – each year I'm living like it's my last, bucket list and all.

Do you have a bucket list? No? Then make one and do it *now*, while you still can, while there's still life and strength in your veins. If you only had one year to live,

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you'd do it now. Nothing would stop you. No amount of commitments, obligations, or responsibilities. But because you measure time in “years lived” rather than “days left”, the future seems unlimited, so you defer and wait. You do everything you “have to” and very little of what you “want to”. But what are you waiting for? *When you're old and frail? When your desire has evaporated? When your loved ones are gone?*

The tragedy of life is *waiting* and *deferring*. I see people doing it every day, everywhere I go, in airports, restaurants, factories, offices, classrooms – waiting and deferring. I see it on their faces, in their eyes. They believe they've got all the time in the world, so they wait and defer, putting off the things they “want to” for another time, for “later”. And when later comes, they often feel it's too late – that they've waited and deferred for too long. But why continue to wait and defer because you're older today than you were yesterday? What sense does that make? You won't have any more “days left” tomorrow than you do today. What's left is what's left, and you must make the most of it.

Harlan David Sanders certainly made the most of his “days left”. After a colourful life that included farming, piloting steamboats, and selling insurance, he founded Kentucky Fried Chicken at the age of 65, immortalizing his eleven herbs and spices and becoming a multi-millionaire in the process.⁹ Ray Kroc did the same,

9 Rosofsky, I., “Adventures in Old Age”, *Psychology Today*, 10 February, 2010

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beginning his legendary transformation of McDonald's into a global colossus while he was in his 50s. Frank Lloyd Wright began designing the iconic Guggenheim Museum at the age of 76, and Francisco Goya – the last of the old masters – created his best and most powerful work during his late 70s.

There are thousands of similar stories, as evidenced by entrepreneurial statistics. Consider that the “over 55” category is responsible for starting 28% of all new businesses in the United States each year.¹⁰ The truth is that it's only “too late” when you're dead. That's the only time when it's truly “too late”. Any time before that, the dice are still in play, the dealer still has cards to deal, you still have time.

It's not over till it's over.

But you don't have any time to waste, nobody does. If you want more from life than the daily grind of work, routine, retirement, and death, you've only got half a second to do it. To achieve success and turn your dreams into reality, *the only time you'll ever have is now*. And that's where this book comes in. Based on scientific research and thousands of real-world studies, *Life in Half a Second* is your master key to success. Free from gimmicks, mind tricks, fairy tales, and wishing upon stars, it will help you achieve success before it's too late, *before you're dead*.

¹⁰ US Small Business Administration, 2010

The Countdown

I have organized *Life in Half a Second* into five “doors of success”, which represent the five scientifically proven factors that drive success across every discipline – from athletics and show business, through to entrepreneurship and corporate careers. Each door explains a specific factor, why it works, and most importantly, how you can apply it in your business, career, or personal life.* After reading *Life in Half a Second* you’ll realise that every motivational book ever written, every gravity-defying success story ever uttered – whether it’s climbing Mount Everest, becoming a billionaire, setting a world record, or making a scientific breakthrough – is based on these five doors. There is nothing more. If you want something in life, these five doors are the only way to get it. And whether you are my son or a stranger, I will give you the same advice: read this book, do what it says. *Success will follow.*

I don’t know who you are, where you live, or anything about your values or background. But I do know one thing: *you’ve only got half a second.* And you might be content to use that half second waiting and deferring, waiting and deferring – never quite knowing why or what for. *But not me.* I want to close my eyes knowing I made the most of life – knowing I never waited and

* The “how” is the most important part of this book, because without proper implementation you won’t achieve any results. To help you get the most out of *Life in Half a Second*, I have created a series of free online videos that provide advice and guidance on how to apply the five doors of success. Please sign up: www.LifeinHalfaSecond.com/challenge

Life in Half a Second

I never deferred. If I had more time, I would have done more. But with the time I had, I did all I could. That's why I'm in a hurry; that's why I don't have a moment to lose. *There's a countdown on my life.*

And guess what ... *there's a countdown on yours as well.*



www.LifeinHalfaSecond.com/count-down

*“It’s not a disgrace to not reach the stars, but it’s
a disgrace to have no stars to reach for.”*

Benjamin Mayes

The First Door

A South African boy died tragically while looking for water in a cave. With so many deaths and tragedies in the world, chances are you didn’t hear about it. But you should. The story is quite amazing and his remains were just recently found.

In the dead of night, with the moon hiding its face behind a shroud of heavy clouds, a brutal thirst roused the boy from sleep. He tried swallowing the hard lump in his throat, but couldn’t – he had nothing to swallow with. Each breath hurt, burning and scorching its way through his lungs. Next to him, at the entrance of the cave, slept his mother. He knew there was water inside the cave, dewdrops that had rolled off the walls and collected in dark pools at the bottom. All he had to do was go inside and get them.

But it was dangerous.

His mother had warned him against going in the cave. For a moment, he weighed his mother's words against his thirst. *His thirst was overwhelming.*

"I'll be careful," was how he justified his disobedience. "*Very careful.*"

He rose from the ground and began groping his way along the cold walls. Tired, stiff from sleep, he walked on in utter darkness. The sharp rocks on the ground grew loose and cut into his feet.

"Just a little farther," he whispered to himself.

But before he could take another step, a deep growl tore through the blackness ahead. Startled, afraid, he spun around but lost his balance in the act. The ground gave way underneath and for a moment he was weightless, lighter than air. His stomach touched his throat and a blast of wind rushed through his hair. He was falling, fast, into darkness and terror. He heard a tumble, snap, and then a loud crack. His head had found the bottom of the shaft. That much he knew. And a moment later, he knew nothing more.

Daylight came and went, then came and went many times over the years that followed. Time passed, the landscape changed, grass grew where it had never grown before, until the cave disappeared along with the boy's remains, forgotten.

On a similarly hot day in August 2008, Professor Lee Berger and his son were exploring the rolling hills north

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of Johannesburg. It was still morning when they stumbled upon the mouth of a hidden cave. Concealed by grass, rocks, and time itself, they forced open the entrance and crawled inside. Much eroded, the once deadly shaft was now a gentle slope easily accessible to the pair. The son was ahead of the father when he tripped on something on the ground. As he reached down and grasped a thin, yellowish-grey stick his eyes immediately widened with comprehension.

“Dad, I found a fossil!” he yelled.

Lost and forgotten, the boy was now found by another boy of the same age. The two boys, one dead in the ground, the other very much alive, standing over him, lived two million years apart — *two million years had passed*. Professor Lee Berger and his son also found the boy’s mother, who had gone looking for him, along with the bones of a sabre-toothed cat, whose growl had sparked the chain of events almost two million years ago.¹¹ The first downpours of the rainy season had swept the bodies into a pool of water rich with lime and sand, which cemented them in place, like a time machine. *National Geographic* hailed the discovery as “one of the greatest fossil finds of all time”.¹²

As I said earlier, the story is amazing. Not because the well-preserved bones provide a rare glimpse into

11 “New Hominid Species Discovered in South Africa”, *New York Times*, 9 April 2010

12 National Geographic: <http://natgeotv.com/asia/the-two-million-year-old-boy>

our history, into the making of mankind, but because it makes us realize, in the most painful of ways, that life is a time-tick against the vastness of eternity – *that millions of years will pass after we die*. For the boy and his mother, so many years came and went that the very nature of our species changed a dozen times, until finally a Homo sapien boy made the discovery. With air in our lungs, time isn't in much of a hurry. Minutes and hours stretch themselves into days, weeks, and months. But once the air is gone, time moves a lot faster – like when we're asleep. The years roll forward into millennia, then eras, epochs, eons, and finally, eternity. At some point, so much time will pass that our Sun will stop burning and die.

There's no question that life is but a moment, a snap of the fingers. The real question is: *what are you going to do with that moment?*

What You Want

The shortness of life is sobering, scary. I'm afraid of the future, knowing that at some point consciousness will cease, while loved ones and their loved ones and all the cherished things of life move on, through time, without me.

But the shortness of life also motivates me – it motivates me to do something with it, make the most of it. And the only way I can make the most of my half second is by being absolutely clear about what I want.

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This brings us to the first door of success, *Clarity*.

Successful people get what they want out of life because they *know* what they want. To achieve success, you must know what success looks like. You must define it. I can tell you as fact, as certitude, that you won't wander your way to success. Without clarity, without knowing what you want, your life will be an accident – however pleasant or unpleasant, an accident nonetheless. It wasn't planned or intended, it just happened. And without clarity, the rest of this book is meaningless. If you don't know what you want, how can this book help you? How can *any* book help you? – *help you do what exactly?*

To unlock the Door of Clarity, you must define what success means for *you* – what you want in life – and you must define it as a *goal*. This makes the definition of success easy, simple: *success = goal attainment*. You will achieve success by achieving your goals, whatever they may be. And because we're such a melting pot of cultures, upbringings, values, biases, and more, it's unsurprising that we all have different goals: from scientific research, sporting records, financial independence, a happy marriage, career advancement, building a business, balancing family and work, to helping the poor. But even though our goals are different, the definition of success remains the same: *success = goal attainment*.

I have read many books and heard many speakers claim that you must “think big” to achieve success, or

that “people fail in life not because they aim too high and miss, but because they aim too low and hit”.¹³ I disagree with both these statements. Success is not defined by thinking big or small, or aiming high or low. Success is defined by what you aim for – *by what goals you set*. If you think big, aim high, and set large goals, then your success will be large. If you think small, aim low, and set small goals, then your success will be small. But in either case, it’s still success. People fail in life not because they aim high or low, *but because they don’t aim at all*.

“Success” and “financial success”

Although we can define success in any number of ways through the goals we set, most of us still think of success in terms of money. *Why?* Because money affects every area of our life: from the food we eat and clothes we wear, to the quality of our education and medical care. Money is a central pillar of our modern existence, as real as the next house payment. And because most people don’t earn enough for all their needs and wants, they go without, deprived, always thinking of success in the context of dollars and cents.

Consider that in Australia, where I live, one in five people would struggle to come up with \$1,000 to deal with an emergency, and one in three people spend every

13 Les Brown and the late Bob Moawad, among many others.

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cent they earn.¹⁴ *Think about that:* 20% of the population would struggle to scrape a thousand bucks together for an unexpected event, and a third of the population is living hand-to-mouth from pay cheque to pay cheque.

In the United States, the statistics are even worse: 30% of workers have less than \$1,000 in savings and investments;¹⁵ almost 50 million Americans are on food stamps, struggling to exist below the breadline;¹⁶ and one in five people are uninsured, without subsidized access to basic health care.¹⁷

And even that pales in comparison to global statistics, where one in seven people go to bed hungry, dreaming of dinner, trying to ignore the gnawing pain in their stomach, while more than 20,000 children die *each day* due to lack of food.¹⁸ For these people, money means bread, shelter, survival. They need to eat to live, and to eat, they need money. The reality of money is impossible to escape, and so it's unsurprising that so many people think of "success" and "financial success" as synonyms.

But irrespective of what success means to you at a personal, individual level – whether it's a million dollars or an Olympic gold medal – you're more likely to achieve

14 "One in Five Aussies Struggle to Find \$1000", *Business Spectator*, 17 February 2013

15 Employee Benefit Research Institute, 2012

16 Food Research and Action Center (FRAC)

17 National Health Interview Survey, 2011

18 World Hunger and Poverty Facts and Statistics, 2012, www.WorldHunger.org

success by having *goals*. More than 80 years of research has consistently shown that we achieve more when we set goals.¹⁹ In fact, the effectiveness of goal-setting has been proven in studies involving more than 40,000 male and female participants in Asia, Europe, and North America, using time spans from one minute to 25 years at the individual, group, and organizational level.²⁰ Recent studies by Professor Dave Kohl at Virginia Tech University found that people with goals *earn nine times as much* over their lifetime as people without goals.

Power of mental focus

There isn't a motivational speaker on the planet who doesn't advocate goal-setting. And it's not just the speakers: read the biographies of the ultra-successful, and you won't get far before stumbling upon their use of goals to achieve success. Whether it's Arnold Schwarzenegger, Jack Welch, Warren Buffet, Richard Branson, Barack Obama, or Bill Gates – they all advocate the use of goals. I'd be hard pressed to point out a single person who achieved success without setting goals. And there's a reason behind the persuasiveness of goals: *they work*. There are many reasons why, but

19 Cecil Alec Mace conducted the first empirical studies in 1935, and is credited as “being the man who discovered goal-setting”. Edwin Locke further refined goal-setting theory in the 1960s, and his article “Toward a Theory of Task Motivation and Incentive” in 1968 established the connection between goals and performance.

20 Locke, E. & Latham, G. *New Directions in Goal-Setting Theory*, Association of Psychological Science, 2006

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one of the most compelling is that goals channel your efforts and behaviours in a particular direction.²¹ Put another way, once you have a clear goal, you begin thinking about it, and by thinking about it, you narrow your attention and efforts to activities related to the goal. *You start moving towards the goal.*

That's why goals are so powerful – *they allow your mind to focus.* On a daily basis, your attention is spread across a million moments. Friends, family, laughing, loving, sitting in traffic, work, working out, stress, chores, hobbies, bills, dreaming – without end, every day. And when you chill in front of the television, when the revolving door pauses for a moment, your brain is overpowered by a media tsunami that scrambles your thoughts. Goals cut through the noise. Goals dim the background. Goals pull focus on what matters. Everything else grows a little less clear, a little less important.

In many psychology books, an interesting exercise is presented about the power of attention and focus. The book asks the reader to stop reading, look around the room, and memorize everything *red*. If you haven't done this exercise before, try it now. To make the task easier, you can list the red items on a piece of paper. When done, close your eyes and try to recall all the *green* items in the room. You will struggle – most people struggle – which is the point of the exercise. It demonstrates how

21 Cummings, T. & Worley, C. *Organizational Development & Change*, South Western Educational Publishing, 2004

your mind's attention and focus works. People can't recall things that were in plain sight just a few moments before, because their mind was focused on something else.

This phenomenon is referred to as “Reticular Activation” – a fancy name for your mind's ability to filter out irrelevant information and concentrate on essentials. Reticular Activation has kept our species alive and away from extinction by allowing us to focus on threats, food sources, and mating opportunities. In modern society, you'll notice this process at work when you buy a new car and immediately see plenty of similar cars on the road when you had never seen any before. That's Reticular Activation in action, focusing your mind – whether it's on the car you just bought, the colour red, or something else. This basic psychological principle is behind much of the power of goals. Instead of having your attention scattered across the daily ongoings of life, you begin moving through each day focused on people and events that are relevant to your goals. You quickly discover new opportunities because you're now looking for them! It's not magic or mysticism, it's just basic mental focus at work.

Precision

For goals to be effective – for your mind to be able to focus on them – they must be “precise”. *But I know precisely what I want!* I can almost hear you say. *I want to be*

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rich, I want to be happy, I want to be successful. But what does “rich, happy, successful” really mean? No one knows for sure. Such words are concepts, fuzzy as foghorns, *the very opposite of precise.* They’re difficult to grasp unless you express them in numbers – dates, percentages, units, dollars. People understand numbers; they’re not elusive, they’re not fuzzy – they cut through the fog. That’s why mathematics is such a universal language – the only language shared by all human beings, regardless of culture, religion, or gender. And why business plans are always expressed in numbers: *We will achieve X growth by Y date; we will capture X of the market within Y years.*

Can you imagine the management team of a major corporation planning to achieve *good profits and lots of customers?* Shareholders would laugh them out of the room. And yet, most people define their future in such loose, meaningless terms.

It’s like asking me to get some of “that stuff” from the supermarket.

“Come on, you know, that *stuff*,” you say.

“What *stuff*?” I reply.

I don’t have a clue what you’re talking about. I don’t know what to look for or where to look. But if you ask me to buy “vanilla yogurt, the one with the blue and white label at the back of aisle four, top shelf,” then no problem, I can do that. I know what I’m looking for and where to look.

Success cannot be “that stuff”. It must be the “vanilla yogurt”. Instead of wanting to “lose weight”, set a goal of losing five kilograms in two months. One goal is “that stuff”; the other is “vanilla yogurt”. Go further, and make the goal five kilograms *of fat*, as many dieters tend to shed more water and muscle than actual fat. Your goal now has a blue and white label and is sitting on aisle four.

I believe that any goal can be turned into numbers. For example, instead of wanting to spend “more time” with your kids, set a goal of spending two hours of uninterrupted, phone-off, quality time with them each evening. Instead of wanting to become “more healthy”, set a goal of lowering your resting heart rate by 15%, reducing your waistline by 3 inches, and decreasing the time it takes you to walk a mile by 1 minute. Instead of wanting to create “better art”, do a survey of how friends and family rate your work (on a number of dimensions, such as visual appeal, emotional impact, etc.), and set a goal of increasing your score by 20% during the next 12 months.

Be specific, be *precise*.

If you’re a business owner, your goals must be equally precise for your company and its employees. Instead of wanting to become a “market leader”, set a goal of capturing 15% of tier-1 customers and 25% of tier-2 customers in your home market over the next two years. Instead of wanting to “raise capital”, set a goal of raising

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\$2 million from institutional investors during the next 9 months. Instead of wanting to become “more profitable”, set a goal of increasing your profit margin by 25% for the next financial year. Whatever your goal may be, *turn it into numbers.*

One of my favourite stories about precision comes from Jim Carrey, star of *Dumb and Dumber*, *The Mask*, *Ace Ventura*, and numerous other blockbuster movies. Everyone knows about his success, but what few people know is that in 1987, when Jim Carrey was an unknown actor struggling to make ends meet, he wrote a cheque to himself for \$10 million for “acting services rendered” with a future date of 28 November 1995. For years he carried that cheque around in his wallet, keeping his goal firmly in sight, until he was paid \$10 million in 1994 to star in *Dumb and Dumber*.²² It probably took Jim Carrey less than a minute to define his goal on a post-dated cheque. But in the years ahead, that cheque provided his mind with a focal point, a green light towards which he steered his life.

The key to the Door of Clarity is to *set precise goals.*

Visualization

One of the most famous goal-setters of all time is Arnold Schwarzenegger. His girlfriend from the late 60s, Barbara Outland, wrote an endearing book about their early days

22 O., A., The Jim Carrey Show, *Salon*, 8 December, 1999

together.²³ In it, she described Arnold as a “prolific goal-setter”, somebody who sat at his desk on January 1st and wrote goals for the year ahead on index cards. He would write things like “starting a mail order business, winning the Mr Olympia, buying a new car”. On December 31st, he would be back at the same desk, putting the index cards away, one by one, with the word “Done” on top. Year after year, without fail, he precisely defined his goals.

Arnold was also a great proponent of visualizing goals. He would fall asleep with a filmstrip of winning contests, heaving weights, coming to America, and more, burning under his eyelids. And there’s a reason why Arnold and millions of other athletes and businesspeople advocate the use of visualization: *it’s scientifically proven to work*. Brain studies show that visualization impacts many cognitive processes, such as motor control, attention, perception, and memory, preparing your brain for actual performance.²⁴ So when you visualize an act, your brain tells your neurons to “perform” the act, creating a new neural pathway that primes your body to perform in a way consistent with what you imagined.

The easier your goals are to see, the more attainable they will seem. And research shows that people who visu-

23 Outland, B. *Arnold and Me: In the Shadow of the Austrian Oak*, Authorhouse, 2006

24 Levan, A., “Seeing is Believing: The Power of Visualization”, *Psychology Today*, 3 December 2009

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alize goals are more successful in achieving them.²⁵ When Andre Agassi won Wimbledon, he said it was like *déjà vu* because he had won it in his mind countless times.²⁶ For this reason, make your goals so clear and precise that you can *see* them, *feel* them, and *hear* them. Spend a few minutes each night visualizing your goals. Not “thinking” about them, but actually *seeing* them. From the delicious tightness of an engagement ring, searing sand of distant lands, laughter of children, to your boss’ voice delivering praise and promotion – such goals will move you, pull you.

Design Your Life

As a modern society, we can design almost anything: from advanced medical devices and complex satellites in space, to atomic bombs and nano computers. We can change our environment to suit our needs through the construction of dams, bridges, rivers, lakes, canals, and more. Even at an individual level – at a “me and you” level – we can design our homes, clothes, computers, cars, right down to the speed of the processor and colour of the steering wheel.

Given our mastery in the design of all things big and small, I have often wondered: *why can't we do the same thing*

25 Grohol, J., “Visualize Your Goal in Order to Attain It”, *PsychCentral*, 16 August 2011

26 Afremow, J., “Visualize to Actualize”, *Psychology Today*, 13 September, 2011

with our lives? Why can't we design our lives to be a certain way – careers, hobbies, free time, and all – and then make it happen? What's the difference? We're enormously proactive in designing and configuring the things we buy so that they're exactly the size, shape, color, we want. But when it comes to life, we are far less proactive. We become resigned to things being a certain way, thinking they will always be a certain way, and we let the tide of our daily routine pull us into a future not of our choosing or making.

But it doesn't have to be that way. You *can* have the life you want. You *can* design it, build it, and step into it. Designing your life is no different to sculpting, painting, or writing: day by day, piece by piece, you turn what's in your mind into reality. And by committing your goals to paper, you're taking the first step in that process. By using precise goals to describe what you want in life, you're providing your mind with something to focus on – which is the starting point of achieving success and doing what you “want to” in life.

How to be 1 in 100

Given that goal-setting is quick, costs nothing, and is proven to get you closer to the things you want in life, you'd think everybody would be doing it. And yet, the opposite is true. Consider that out of 100 people in the United States, on average, 80 don't have any goals; 16

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have goals but don't write them down; 3 have goals, write them down, but don't review them; and only one person in a hundred has goals, writes them down, and reviews them.²⁷ With so few people setting goals, you'd think we've reached Utopia as a society. Life must be so grand that goals have become passé. The average person must already have everything they've ever dreamed of, right? With the number of people falling below the poverty line growing *75 times* faster than job growth, this certainly is not the case.²⁸

So what's going on? With 50 million Americans living in poverty, why is only 1% of the population setting goals, writing them down, and reviewing them? Why are the most needy not doing the simplest, most time-tested, proven, and cost-effective (free!) thing to help themselves?²⁹ Explain it to me. I don't understand. *Is it because they enjoy hunger? Because they choose to go without?* It doesn't make sense. If you sat them down and asked, *Would you like to have more financial security? A better job? More time for your kids?* each and every one of them would say *Yes!* and yet, they aren't even taking the first step towards making it happen.

27 Professor Dave Kohl, Virginia Tech University

28 "Food Stamp Growth 75X Greater than Job Creation", *Weekly Standard*, November 2012

29 Even if the top 1% of goals setters were all in poverty and part of the 50 million on food stamps, it still leaves 47 million people in poverty that are not setting, writing, and reviewing goals, as 1% of the US population is just over 3 million people

Taking an index card and writing, *Goal 1: \$2000 financial buffer by year-end*, would increase the probability of this happening by orders of magnitude. The simple act of writing it down, of casting desires into written words, immediately increases the odds of success by focusing your mind on something specific. And yet, most people can't be bothered; even those in the deepest of need. *Why?* Perhaps they don't know about goal-setting? Perhaps they don't believe it will work? As I said earlier, I don't know why. But what I do know is that *you* know about goal-setting. In the *Action Items* section at the end of this chapter, I want you to define your goals, write them down, and review them regularly.³⁰ By doing this, you'll automatically be in the top 1% of goal-setters – you'll be firmly through the Door of Clarity and on your way.

But if you refuse – if you can't commit a single goal to paper – if you can't do something that straightforward, that simple, then do the next best thing: stop reading this book and give it to somebody else. Don't read any more. You won't succeed. Not because you're not capable, not because you're not smart enough or good enough – you won't succeed because you *choose* not to succeed. I'm not asking you to bet your life savings on

³⁰ The purpose of writing down goals and reviewing them on a regular basis is to keep your mind focused as time goes by. Most people are easily distracted and quickly forget their goals unless they're committed to paper and reviewed regularly.

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the roulette wheel. I'm not asking you to spend five years away from home in search of truth and meaning. I'm not asking you to fast for 40 days and 40 nights. All I'm asking is for a couple of sentences on a piece of paper! If that's too much to ask – to define a goal and put it on paper – then what's the point of this book? *What's the point of reading further?*

I'm a person that believes in free will. I believe in *choice*. Every moment of every day, each of us has choice. *You have a choice right now*. You are standing in front of the first door of success – you know where it is, and what's required to get through. You also know that you've only got half a second and there's no time to waste. What happens next is up to you. You can say, *you know, this all sounds like nonsense. I don't care what 80 years of research says – I'm not doing any of it!* You can then close this book, put it away in a safe place, and life will continue just as before. Nothing will be different. You don't *want* it to be different.

Or, you can make another choice. You can say, *you know what, there's something here, something that could improve my life, career, or business. I'll give it a go. What do I have to lose?* In either case, the *choice* is yours. It's your half second.

So what are you going to do?

You still here? Good.

You are *choosing* to be here; you are committing to do what I ask. You are going to define your goals, write

them down, and review them. And then you're going to do something more, something that will give you an edge over the top 1% of goal-setters: you're going to *share* your goals with other people.

Why?

Because it creates commitment. When you tell somebody you'll do something, you're far more likely to do it. Research on goal-setting demonstrates that people who share their goals with others are more likely to succeed over people who just write goals, or worse, just think them.³¹ It's empowering to say, *I will do this, it's my goal, it's my dream.* It sounds powerful, formidable. The more you hear yourself say it, the more you'll commit to it.

Speak!

Telling people your goals, much like writing them down, is simple, quick, and proven – a *must do* – and yet again, few people do it. And it's not just goal-setting – most of us have difficulty in expressing our true feelings on a day-to-day basis. Perhaps we want to avoid awkwardness, embarrassment, or maybe we're shy, modest, introverted. We don't know how others will react to what we say, so we don't say anything, or say something different from what we mean.

But you know what? The world won't stop spinning

31 Matthews, G. Study Backs up Strategy for Achieving Goals, Dominican University of California, 2010

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and your half second won't get any shorter or longer if you share your goals with others. *Try it.* You'll be uplifted, empowered by the act of letting others know you have plans, that you're going places. *So speak.* Hearing yourself say that you're going to do something carries weight, conviction. It's a mega bomb more powerful than just writing it, which in turn is a mega bomb more powerful than just thinking it.

Speak!

Define it, write it, say it – say it out loud! Liberate your unspoken dreams, bring them to life, give them wings. Whatever you believe in, whether you think there's an afterlife or not, whether your soul flies to heaven or dissolves into the dirt, one thing is certain: *you will never be you again.* In this day and age, there will never be another *you.* This is your one and only life – all half second of it – so make the most of it. Get what you want. See, do, feel everything you've dreamed of seeing, doing, feeling. If you've ever had a dream, if you've ever gazed at the stardust flung across the night sky and wondered “how do I get there? – *how do others get there?*” now is the time to change your direction, now is the time to chart a new course for *there.*



www.LifeinHalfaSecond.com/1

Action Items

In the half second we call life, few of us ever sit down and think: *Where am I? How did I get here? Where am I going? Is that where I want to go?* At work, we take time out for “strategy sessions”. We review the business, its performance, customers, position in the marketplace. We consider the future and create all sorts of plans and goals. And yet, when it comes to something infinitely more important than work – *our life* – we don’t have time. There’s too much going on to have a strategy session, to make plans, set goals. We become a passenger and take the road as it comes, speed bumps, potholes, and all.

But now is the time to make time. Now is the time to sit down and ask yourself those questions; now is the time to frame the answers as goals. *Take control of your life. Make it into what you want – millions have done so already, and there’s no reason you can’t as well. Your half second is ticking.*

To walk through the first door of success:

- *Define your goals.* Create a few one-year goals and a giant three-year goal. The one-year goals should be within reach, such as increased savings, promotion, education, more time with loved ones, weight loss. But the three-year goal should be dramatic, something that is not readily within reach, like starting a business, financial independence, pursuing a dream, or making a sea change.

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- *Make your goals precise.* You already have the element of “time” in your goals represented by a number (*one year and three years*), and now add more numbers (percentages, units, kilograms, dollars) and/or concrete events and milestones (university degree, starting your own business, becoming a parent). Even if you have many goals across work, family, health, and hobbies, each goal should be as sharp and unambiguous as a razor’s edge.
- *Visualize your goals.* When you’re falling asleep at night, don’t think about the problems of the day or what you saw on television. Instead, visualize your goals. See them, feel them, touch them. This provides your mind with additional focus and clarity about the goals you’ve set.
- *Share your goals with family and friends.* This may be awkward at first, but it will strengthen your commitment. When friends and family ask what you’re up to, tell them about your goals. *Speak!*
- *Sign up for the Life in Half a Second challenge.* Gain additional advice and guidance on the first door of success in these free online videos: www.LifeinHalfaSecond.com/challenge

Remember that everything is created twice: *first in the mind, then in reality*. The Door of Clarity is about the first creation, in your mind – a sharp, vivid picture of your goals and the kind of life you want to design for yourself. Without clarity, success is impossible, accidental. You won’t achieve success if you don’t know what success is.