

HOW TO TRANSFORM YOUR DIFFICULTIES
INTO LIFE CHANGING OPPORTUNITIES

LET THERE BE DARKNESS

A photograph of a man with short dark hair, wearing a black t-shirt, standing in a dark room. He is looking upwards and to the right with a contemplative expression. The background is dark and indistinct, with some light reflecting off surfaces.

ERIC KWASI AGYEMAN

FORWARD BY SAM CAWTHORN

LET THERE BE
DARKNESS

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HOW TO TRANSFORM YOUR DIFFICULTIES INTO LIFE
CHANGING OPPORTUNITIES

ERIC KWASI AGYEMAN

**Let There Be Darkness: How To Transform Your Difficulties Into
Life Changing Opportunities**

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To the Carpenter Family, Peter, Esther and the kids, Sandy and I love you all very much and are grateful for your friendship, I can't wait for our next visit to your house, I'm heading straight for the fridge!

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To my mentors thank you for your generosity and time over the years to pour into my life, I am a better person because of your input in my life.

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FORWARDS

I have known Eric for over 5 years and in those years I have had the privilege to see the growth of a young man fuelled by passion to make a difference in his generation. Eric's resilience in the face of obstacles, hunger and passion and the desire to always learn new things to better himself as an individual to serve others is both remarkable and commendable. He is confident, charismatic and competent. Having come from a small remote village in Ghana, Eric's story is a powerful story that will touch and move hearts. He is a leading voice to the younger generation in Australia and in this book, you will be inspired, challenged and most importantly have the courage to turn your difficulties into life changing opportunities.

*Sam Cawthorn,
Former Australian of The Year, Mentor*

I have had the privilege of knowing Eric Agyeman for a number of years now. My first memory is of his beautiful wife telling me about a special friend she had and the wisdom he was speaking into her life. I remember thinking at the time that this person was someone special. Once married to Sandy, I got to know Eric as a dear friend. I have seen firsthand what a man of character and integrity he truly is. He is an exciting person to be around and

one can't help but begin to dream bigger about their own life in conversation with him.

A natural at giving encouragement to others and a champion of humanity, Eric found his way into the hearts of my four sons as well. It is a mother's dream to have such a role model and mentor inspiring my teenagers. They often have conversations with their friends about the different areas Eric is operating in and they love the PVBS clothing line. One of my sons will openly say that his plan is to work for Eric when he finishes school! I have watched as Eric's passion for the youth generation has led him to speak into the lives of many teenagers with a message of hope and positivity. His own journey in life is his strongest tool in uplifting those who need a new perspective and inspiration. We are thankful that Eric lets no obstacle stop his pursuit of making a change for good in our world.

Ange Smith,

It has been my honour to encourage, empower and informally mentor Eric Agyeman for the past five years or so. During that time I have been consistently blessed and inspired by his energetic disposition, tenacious drive to challenge the status quo, relentless creativity, and belief in the power of every individual to make a difference in their world. He has stood as a beacon of hope and future dreams in this generation plagued by anxiety, instability and fear. He is loyal, daring, faithful, and creative; he loves passionately, gives generously and perseveres doggedly through every one of life's adversities. Eric's story is remarkable, enlightening and important in this world crying out for direction and meaning. I share in Eric's belief that every individual can achieve the impossible, challenge mediocrity and process effectively through failures and setbacks; as you plunge in to this

book let him take you on a journey of discovery and reflection and please be open to transformation, growth and change. You will never be the same again

Mark Goode, Lighthouse Christian College

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Why This Book? Why My Story?

I am not the first or the last person to live with suicidal thoughts. In fact, right now, in Australia, suicide is the biggest killer for young people between the ages of twelve and twenty-five. Now, years after my experience, having spoken to thousands of young people at my motivational workshops and heard about the challenges they go through, I have been inspired to share the darkest time of my life and my struggle to overcome it. I hope that my story will encourage people (both young and the young at heart) to know and embrace their true identity, to dream and to believe, without a doubt, that life is worth living and their presence on Earth is needed.

My purpose for writing this book and being so openly vulnerable is twofold. First, I believe that the current youth statistics can change for the better. And second, I have a dream to see a generation live with purpose and become everything they were created for!

At the darkest time of my life, I did not have the motivation, knowledge or role model to convince me that I could become somebody one day. BUT, I can do that for someone else (even YOU). I can share my knowledge, experiences, failures and struggles to encourage people who are on the same journey I was

on some years ago. This is the reason why I am still here: to reach as many young people as I can and deliver a message of hope and inspiration that will change their world!

***This book has already helped change lives,
will you be next?***

Before and during the writing of this book, I knew that I wanted to write something that young people would actually read, something that is simple to understand with content that is rich. This book is full of some powerful and funny stories as well as some challenging but encouraging messages that I truly believe will change your life and even shape your future.

Don't underestimate the simplicity of some of the ideas and thoughts in these pages, more times than not, it's the simple things that change our world. Simple ideas, when understood and practised consistently, will unlock the door to our potential and the life we were born to live.

So get ready, get a notebook and be encouraged and inspired.

INTRODUCTION

‘Ezy-E, the Gangsta.’

‘Troublemaker!’

‘You’re the kid who is always up to mischief.’

‘The only place you’re going to end up in life is PRISON!’

In high school, I heard these words, over and over again. It was part of the reason why, as a young teenager in Australia, I wanted to give up and drop out of school. There was no encouraging voice in my life; no one talked about my positive attributes, but many people wanted to discuss my negatives. As a result, I hated school, and I had no hope for the future. If no one believed in me, why should I believe in myself?

No matter how I behaved, I always felt like a disappointment to my teachers, my friends and even my parents. I walked around with my head down, feeling hopeless, without a sense of purpose. But my behaviour wasn’t the only ‘problem’; for a couple of years, I was the only coloured boy in my neighbourhood. As such, I endured constant racial abuse. Trying to navigate my way through these first years of high school was a difficult undertaking. And then, my situation got worse.

Late in the year 2000, when I was fourteen years old, my dad booked a one-way flight to Ghana for me. It was meant to be a 3-week holiday break, a time for me to visit my mother and stepsiblings; little did I know that, the moment I stepped onto that plane, I would be beginning a **seven-year** ordeal. I was forced to finish high school in a different country, surrounded by strangers. In Ghana, I reached a very dark low—I even wanted to take my

own life. Somehow, however, in the midst of those seven years, I discovered my faith, identity, inspirations and purpose. It was an adventure I will never forget.

PART 1

ANDREWS STORY

CHAPTER 1

DARK TIMES

I have met people who have been through very tragic circumstances in life, people whose lives have never been the same again, because of an unthinkable injustice, an accident or a situation where they themselves have wronged someone else. Survivors are all around us: survivors of cancer, survivors of car accidents (that should have claimed their lives) and survivors of abuse, be it domestic, racial and/or verbal. These people are all around. One of them could even be you.

Meet Andrew (my brother-in-law)

Speaking of survivors, consider my little brother-in-law. Andrew recently turned fourteen years of age, and he is one of the cheekiest kids you'll ever meet. To give you a classic example, my wife walked over to his house one morning and saw him packing his school bag with soft drink cans. The following conversation ensued.

She asked, 'What are you doing?'

He looked up at her and replied, 'Packing drinks.'

She then asked, 'Andrew, you know you're not allowed more than one soft drink; so why are you taking so many?'

He responded, 'I'm going to sell them to my friends.'

'How do you know they will buy them?' she asked.

Andrew explained, 'I already took their orders yesterday, and then I made sure they paid me in advance. I wouldn't pack this many drink cans if I didn't have buyers already!'

Watch out, business world: there is a new wave of Richard Branson's waiting to be unleashed. This fourteen-year-old is already doing business and doing it well, by having people place pre-orders for his goods—not bad at all. Andrews's wit, charisma, cheekiness and passion for life hadn't always been so noticeable. Something tragic happened that caused him to want to live every day with purpose and intention, as if it were his last day.

ANDREW'S BREAKING POINT — *Cancer at the age of eleven*

At the tender age of eleven, Andrew's life changed, but not by choice. A lump had been growing under his armpit. At first, everyone thought it was nothing but a small lump—maybe just a bad reaction to an insect bite or product. But what started as a very small lump began to grow, and it didn't stop growing. He visited numerous doctors. They all came back with the same conclusion: there was nothing wrong with him; he must have had a reaction to something insignificant. Andrew started to lose weight. He became weaker, and he tired quickly when running and playing sports at school. His mum took matters into her own hands. She knew that something wasn't right, so she took him to a specialist. Then they heard the news that every person dreads hearing: 'Andrew has cancer'.

The news was bad enough to make your heart drop! I remember being in that room when the announcement was made and being absolutely confused. Part of me didn't believe it and didn't want to believe the doctor's report; I wanted to stay in a

state of denial. The other part of me thought, ‘We have faith; we can pray this cancer away’.

Andrew was only eleven years old! No one that young should have to go through this. No one at any age should have to go through it. Our family had hit a brief low. Our mood and emotions had taken a dip south. Frustration, anger and uncertainty flooded us in that moment.

***Bad news may come first,
but good news will always follow***

After the doctor told us the bad news, he paused for a moment that felt like a lifetime. When he continued to speak, all I heard was mumbling—we were all still in shock, trying to process the devastating news he had just given us.

Finally, I heard him say, ‘But there is good news, and the good news is that we caught the cancer at an early stage, and therefore, we can treat it before it has any chance of spreading’. In that moment, it didn’t sound like good news to me. Why? Because my brother-in-law just found out he had cancer! How can anything good be realised through having cancer? Now, if I’d stopped, paused and thought about the situation, I would have realised that the doctor was right: there was good news in the midst of despair. I just missed it because of my grief and shock at the news.

Sometimes, we can miss out on the good news. We simply focus so much energy on the bad news that we become overwhelmed by it, and it leaves us deaf to anything else. I didn’t expect any further news from the doctor after he confirmed that Andrew had cancer. To me, the significant news had been announced; there was nothing of importance that he could possibly say to me. But I was wrong. The bad news was that Andrew had cancer, but the

good news was that it was treatable, it was in its early stages and it hadn't spread. In other words, though it was bad right then, it was going to get better.

It seems as if life will always hand you the bad news first. But if you are patient enough and resilient enough to hang around and not throw in the towel, life will announce the good news in the midst of bad news, the opportunity in the midst of difficulty, the light in the midst of darkness. Let me rephrase: though the situation is bad right now, it will get better! Though YOUR situation that you're going through right now is BAD, it will get BETTER. There is something good in every bad circumstance. There is a light in every tunnel.

Tough times don't last, but tough people (YOU) do!

~ Gregory Peck, American actor

Life may be full of bad news—turn to the news every night and you will understand. Our lives are filled with disappointments, news of break-ups, relationship issues, family break-downs, divorces, stagnating jobs, rejections and so forth. As long as you have breath in your lungs, you will hear bad news—if not daily, then weekly. These challenges and difficult times either define or refine us. The breaking points determine whether we break through or break down.

Life's Not Fair—The Process

As an eleven-year-old, Andrew had already discovered a truth about life: it's not fair. We will all hit a breaking point at some stage of life. He just hit his at a much younger age than most.

While Andrew's siblings were hugging him and comforting one another after the news, I took a long look at him. He was definitely shaken, yet calm. His face said it all: he was ready to go through the process necessary to beat this cancer. He had the eyes of someone ready to fight and break through.

As I previously mentioned, at every breaking point, you can break down or break through. If you do nothing, you are guaranteed to break down. If you don't do anything, then nothing will change. Andrew's doctor explained the process of chemotherapy to him. It would be an uncomfortable process that would involve many trips to the hospital, weakness due to a low immune system, medications, injections and even hair loss. Even though it sounded like a long and difficult process, after a few tears, Andrew agreed to it. His action led him on the path to breaking through.

Sometimes, the very reason why we quit and give up is because the road ahead just looks too hard, too long and too uncomfortable. In Andrew's case, it was also an embarrassing path to take, as during the initial process, he would lose more weight, his hair would fall out and the colour of his skin would change. I don't know too many people who can go through such a process at such a young age as a champion, like my brother-in-law did!

Process First — Results Second

The results we love come from the processes we hate.

~ Author Unknown

When Andrew answered *yes* to the chemo, he was actually answering *yes* to wanting to beat the cancer. **You can never say**

no to a process, yet expect the result of the process. Let me say that again, because that was really good: you cannot expect the results from the process you refused!

Too many people want the results, but they want to skip the process; in particular, our generation wants everything immediately. We want the results and we want them now! We want to get the VCE ATAR score of 90+, but we don't want to put in the work. We want our first car to be the latest model, but we don't want to save up for it, so we go to the bank and get a loan instead (If you are like me, you will most likely smash it and have it written off in three months).

When Andrew said *yes* to the chemo process, he was really saying, 'Yes, I want to beat the cancer, so let's go through this'. Andrew had entered into a boxing ring; he was going to be engaged in a fight, a fight in his mind, body and soul. Had he said *no*, he would have been running away. My brother-in-law is smart. In addition, he's a fighter, which is why I admire him. I was not the least bit surprised when he said *YES*.

Today, if you will say *yes* to the process ahead of you, you will, in turn, be saying *YES* to your destiny, *YES* to a better and brighter future, *YES* to opportunities and *YES* to those positive results.

You become what you overcome.

- Author Unknown

Don't Run Away In Fear

When I was a little younger than Andrew, I had to decide whether to fight or to flee. Unfortunately for me, I decided to flee. What a mistake! In 1994, I was living in Dunedin, New Zealand, with my dad. I had gone to my best friend's house after school a few previous times, and on every visit, his dog had been outside in the backyard. But on one particular day, I opened the gate to my friend's house, and to my surprise, the dog came running at me! It was one of those moments when your life flashes before your eyes. I was scared to death! My only encounters with dogs had been as a toddler in Ghana, seeing the security dogs from a distance. I'd never seen them as pets.

Honestly, I'd love to say that I stood there and looked at the dog with a *come at me, bro* attitude, but not a chance. I took off—well, I tried. I didn't get very far before it got to me. Luckily, it didn't do any harm to me, physically (a small bite). Emotional trauma, though? Yes!

My friend heard my very manly scream and rushed outside to grab his dog, while I bolted into his house! After I could think rationally again, I realised that my so-called friend, his sister and his mother thought my near-death experience was funny. I sure wasn't laughing, though. My friend's mother sat me down in the living room and told me, 'You should never run away from a dog; it's the worst thing to do'. Well, two decades later, I'm still afraid of dogs, big and small. But I have never run away from one again!

To escape fear, you have to go through it, not around.

~ Richie Norton, author

Moral of the story? Running away from things—because of fear—can sometimes lead to very bad outcomes. Many times, without even realising it, we run away from things and try to avoid our fears. I have learnt that trying to avoid a situation or a fear by running away from it only compounds the problem. Running away from something will never solve it. No matter how far you try to distance yourself from the issue, you have to come back and face it—or it will come after you. When I think about it, this story amplifies my brother-in-law Andrew’s boldness to want to face cancer head-on by saying *yes* to chemo.

Hello Fear

Fear is powerful—there’s no doubt about that. Straightaway, you may think that the only power fear has is negative; after all, we tend to associate only negative things with fear. But fear has some positive power, as well. I think fear is an indication that something great is about to happen: it’s a precursor to possibilities. Jack Canfield says, ‘Everything you want is on the other side of fear’. I think one of the greatest tragedies is allowing fear to cause us to live small, live poor, live depressed and not realize that life is to be lived to the fullest. We should fear living small and not making a difference. We should fear playing it safe and not chasing our dreams. Fear can be a great motivator.

Marriane Williamson shares what we’re really afraid of:

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There’s

nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give others permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.

Our deepest fear is, indeed, that we are powerful beyond measure. Andrew's actions and attitude throughout his chemotherapy displayed this truth, the truth of how, at eleven years young, he was strong, he was a fighter and he was powerful beyond measure. What is staring at you right now and causing you to fear? Is it your finances? Is it the uncertainty of the future? Is it your career? Is it a sickness? Is it a dream you've been wanting to realize? Whatever that fear is, tell that fear that you are powerful beyond measure. Tell that fear that it doesn't scare you. In fact, from this day onwards, you will let it excite you. Tell that fear that you are brilliant, gorgeous and talented! Tell that fear that you are a child of God and you will shine, no matter the darkness!

That day when I chose to run away from the dog, I chose one of two meanings of fear. You see, fear has two meanings. The first meaning is 'Forget Everything and Run'. This option represents difficulty, and it is a bad kind of fear. The good kind of fear that will transform your difficulty into opportunity is the second meaning, one that means 'Face Everything and Rise!' That's exactly what I didn't do, and I got bitten by the dog. And that's exactly what my brother-in-law Andrew did to get through his chemo. You have to face and fight your fears—turn them from stumbling blocks to stepping stones!

Fight Your Fears

You may be thinking, Eric, you have no idea what is before me or what is chasing me. I have no courage, let alone the ability to fight!

I hear you.

In 2002, I was living in Ghana and thinking about giving up on my life (I'll talk more about that in Chapter 4). I was really afraid of living another day in rejection and hopelessness. In an attempt to run away from that fear, I wanted to give up. Running away from situations and fears is easy—anyone can do that. But to stand in the face of opposition or your greatest fear takes the courage of a resilient spirit and individual.

In later years, I decided to take the fight option, even when I was tempted to give up and run away.

Why?

- 1) Fight because anything that is not confronted either stays the same or gets worse.
- 2) *Fight* means *growth*; it means you're learning more, even if you're making mistakes.
- 3) *Fight* because every step you take in the direction of your fears is a step closer to your dreams. Every time I ran away from life's challenges, I was really running further away from my dreams and purpose.
- 4) Fight because it is proof that you are alive. The cemetery is the only place where you can't fight. In life, fight because you can.

Andrew Is Now Stronger Than Ever Before

Today, my brother is cancer free. He has finished his chemo and regained his strength. His hair has grown back, and to top it off,

his wit and charisma have returned to him. When you speak to Andrew today, it's almost as if he has a new vocabulary. He is one of the most positive and optimistic fourteen-year-olds you will ever meet. Why? Because he fought one of the toughest sicknesses known to man at a very young age. And he survived.

The good news did not end with the fact that his cancer was removed. Now, the good news is the person Andrew has become today because of his experience. He is stronger, wiser and more grateful for life than he ever was. I'm amazed by the things we don't want to face and confront, because we don't believe in ourselves. I'm also equally amazed by the things we find ourselves achieving when we DO face the tough times in life!

Here's a thought for you: you are stronger than you really think, you are more capable than you really know, you are more amazing than you can possibly imagine and you are powerful beyond belief! I know this to be true. How? Why? Because if an eleven-year-old can fight through cancer and come out stronger on the other side, then you can do anything. Nothing is impossible for you if you believe!

Reflections

What is the bad situation I am facing right now?

What good can be found in the bad situation?

What process can I say yes to?

Thoughts from this chapter

- 1) *The results we love comes from the processes we hate.*
- 2) *When I say yes to the process, I am saying YES to my destiny and to a better, brighter future.*
- 3) *I will become what I overcome!*
- 4) *Tough times don't last; tough people do!*

PART 2

MY STORY

CHAPTER 2

MY BEGINNING: LIL ERIC KWASI

I was born in Ghana, West Africa, in 1986. I was one of six kids from my mum's side; I had five step-siblings from three different fathers and one of three kids on my dad's side; I had two step-siblings from two different mothers. Complicated, I know!

My mother fell pregnant with me while she and my father were dating; they were broken up by the time I was born. She had suffered several complications leading up to my birth; at one point, she was advised to abort me. Despite the negative circumstances surrounding my birth, I made it out of my mother's womb—it was a miracle that I did. For the first few years of my life, I was raised by my mum, while my dad was overseas in London. As a single mother raising six children, she did everything she possibly could for us; she sold everything of value, just so we could have food on the table. Usually, I would go through an entire week with just one or two changes of clothes from Monday to Saturday. Then, for church on Sunday, I would wear my favourite and very special double denim outfit my dad had sent me from London. We had next to nothing, but my mother gave us all the love in the world.

I Had No Choice

I had no choice about my family that I was born into or my situation that I was born into. If I did have a choice, I definitely wouldn't have chosen to be born in a small remote village. We all have family stories or situations that make us think *If only I had had a choice or a say in that*. I think it's interesting how we start out in life having choices made for us by our parents; whether good or bad, we have to live with those choices until we're mature enough to make our own. It took me awhile to understand this concept, and because of my lack of understanding, I soon became a bitter young man. When you become bitter, you shut out the ability to see the opportunity and the positivity in situations. That was me. For example, I hated the fact that in New Zealand I was the only kid in my class who couldn't speak English, rather than appreciating the opportunity of having moved there from Ghana. I was full of questions—negative questions about my family and my Ghanaian roots. I often asked the *why me* questions about my family and my life. I mean, couldn't I have been born into a family that had it all together? Where Mum and Dad were married and all my siblings lived under the same roof? And why did I only get hand-me-down clothes as a kid? No matter how much I complained internally, though, it was only a waste of energy and strength, because there was nothing I could do to change the past. The only thing I could change was the future, and if the future was going to change for me, I would have to stop asking *why me?* and start asking *why not me?*

*We are born looking like our parents,
but we die looking like our decisions.*

- Ps Keion Henderson @ The Potter's House

Recently, I came across the above quote. It made me think about the numerous times and scenarios when my parents made decisions for me based on their values and experiences. Every parent wants the best for his or her child; however, sometimes out of the fear of something bad happening to their children, parents can go to the extreme to protect them and, by being overprotective, bring about other complications and issues. In New Zealand, I joined a soccer club: The Northern Star football club. I was a star player on my team. I averaged four goals per game and won MVP and several other awards every year. My scoring success was a combination of my athletic ability and my position as a striker. I remember the amazing feeling of achievement I experienced after each game. I loved knowing that I made the difference in our team and that I was a pretty good player. At the age of eight, I set my very first goal: to become a professional soccer player one day.

I started taking practice even more seriously, due to my new goal. I would let my dad drive me to our local park and play with me when he wasn't working. That way, I could sharpen my skills and develop my talent. Some of my best memories come from playing with my dad on the oval park near home—just me and my dad.

During one particular game, I got injured. Suddenly, my dreams of being a professional soccer player took a hit because of my injury. I was discouraged from pursuing my dream, all for my own good and safety. This was a scenario where I had a choice made for me—I chose that I didn't agree with. However, today, I get such a kick from watching a game of soccer; deep down, the

dream is still there, although it's dormant, with no possibility of ever happening. I wish I had been old and mature enough to have had a say and to have made that choice. I would have told myself 'Yes! You can do it, Eric'.

I'm not the only person wishing to change something about a childhood event. I know you have some things you wish you could change, too. My football story is only a fraction of what some people have gone through. My issue is small compared to the abuse, isolation and rejection others have experienced. We all have things about our childhood we wish we could change, big and small, sports-related or not, but we can't change them. That's okay, because we have a whole lifetime to change and create a future that we want. We have a future ahead of us and we can choose to do some of the things that perhaps we missed out on as kids. Just recently, I signed up to play indoor soccer. Our team lost our first game: 11-2. Losing the game hurt, but what felt good was the reminder that, twenty years later, I was making choices and decisions for my life that I couldn't have made as a child.

You and I are responsible for our thoughts, feelings and actions, and there is no room for *blaming*. The only person responsible for where you are right now in your life is YOU. The government is not responsible. Your teacher who made you repeat a year or failed you isn't responsible. Your step-mum or dad isn't responsible. Only you are responsible. The moment I begin to take ownership of my life is the moment I begin to take actions and make decisions to create a future that I desire for myself and, ultimately, my wife and future kids.

Here are some examples of my blame game from when I was younger:

1. *If only I was born into a different family and my parents' circumstances were different*
2. *If only I was born in a different country*
3. *If only people liked me and accepted me*



4. *If only I was married*
5. *If only I looked better*
6. *If only I had money*
7. *If only I had a job*

Confronting Past Choices and the People Who Made Them

We may think we left the past behind, but it has a way of catching up to us. Though we want to run away, we are forced to confront our past, and these secrets that are buried must come into the light, and then we are able to move on. We all need to leave the past behind and move on towards the future, and if we are lucky, we will have help getting there.

~ Mary Alice Young

I've experienced firsthand how easy it is to become bitter with people from the past, people who made choices in their best interest, not mine. At the time, they made it seem like they were considering my best interest, but really, they weren't. Sometimes, in order to move forward, we need to have a dialogue with people and clarify some things. This isn't an easy thing to do because the pain can still be so raw. The scars may even still be showing, but we have work through it anyway.

My older brother lives in South Africa, and he is one of the closest people in my life. I remember that, as a child, he tried to practise being a barber. I was his client. Within seconds, there was blood flowing down my forehead. My brother had used a sharp blade (this was 1990 in Africa, so you can imagine how dodgy the blade would have been)! His attempt was a poor one; I ended up with a cut on my head that is still there today! It's something we laugh about now, though. In fact, it's even funnier, because he became a professional barber ten years ago. I still have the scar, but I have forgiven him and made the matter light-hearted. Perhaps your issue isn't light-hearted, though.

Perhaps it's not something you can laugh about. Perhaps it's not even something you can confront the person about without support from other people. Whatever the situation is, you cannot let it continue to rob you of your pride, your identity, your joy and your future. Confront people where you can, when it is safe and wise. Hear their side, share your side and then forgive them and release them. Life becomes more peaceful once you start this process, so peaceful that you will wish you had done it earlier. If you've been taken advantage of or abused in your childhood and you are still dealing with trauma and the aftereffects, go see a professional counsellor. Seek help. You will find that opening up to the right people will actually lift the load off you, at least in part. Sharing your pain will help you release some of the frustration and hurt you've been bottling up inside of you. It is the beginning of your healing process. Why speak to someone else about it you ask? Because sometimes, it takes a little more than just encouraging words to get over our childhood issues, and that's okay. Just do whatever you have to do, so your future can be brighter, so your children never have to go through what you went through. Whether it's counselling you need or any other form of healing, go for it. Do everything you can to break the cycle of hurt and pain in your life.

Oprah Winfrey

Life isn't fair. In fact, 'fair is a place with carnival rides and cotton candy; it has nothing to do with life' (unknown author). Some of the people who have achieved the greatest feats in the world are also the same people who have gone through and endured the worst and most traumatic experiences in the world, like Oprah Winfrey. She was molested and raped before she turned ten, circumstances she had no choice in nor say about. In her interview with David

Letterman, she opened up about her ordeal and revealed that what she went through was very difficult, but she stated, ‘My story just helped define and shape me, as does everybody’s story’. Her decisions and her response to these horrific events changed her life forever for the better, and now, she’s also helping to change the lives of millions of people all around the world with her powerful message of triumph in the midst of adversity.

I recently had the opportunity to go see her, live in Melbourne. I was in a stadium full of women, and as she gracefully and strategically paced herself during a two-hour speech, I couldn’t help but look around me and see people nodding, in tears. There was no doubt that her message was inspiring thousands that night, including myself. And that was just one night! I wonder how many people her talk show and magazines have influenced. Oprah is proof to all of us that a person’s past can be traumatic, yet he or she can become influential and help millions of people. She turned her difficulties into life-changing opportunities! As a result, for several years, she has been listed as one of the most influential women of the 21st century.

Some of the world’s greatest people are people who have been through the greatest pain.

~ Eric Agyeman

There are many others in the world today who have, like Oprah, experienced hardship but are now living fulfilled lives. They could have easily played the blame card, but then, their names wouldn’t have been written in history. In fact, if you look around, you might know some of them at your school, at your workplace

or at your sporting club. There are people all around us who have chosen to leave the past behind and live to the fullest—you can, too! As young as you are, you can make a decision to turn your difficult times into life changing opportunities. Who says you have to be 40 years old before you confronting your issues? It doesn't make sense to live any day as a victim when you can live as the victor. Maturity isn't measured by our age; rather, maturity is the acceptance of responsibility. Today is the day when we need to stop blaming people and circumstances for where we are right now in life. The moment we stop playing the blame game is the moment we begin advancing, It's the moment we stop living as victims and live as victors!

Years ago I had to man up even as a teenager, I had to look at myself in the mirror and say 'yesterday is the last day I, Eric Agyeman will blame someone else for who I have become, of who I am and of who I shall become!' that day I took control, that day I was going to live like a victor!

Taking Responsibility

When you blame others, you give up your power to change.

- Robert Anthony

Blame is victimhood. Blame means giving your free will and responsibility away to someone or something else. The blame game is so common in today's society, whether in the courthouse or at home; it seems that we constantly struggle to take responsibility for our actions. Katharine Hepburn put it this way: 'We are taught you must blame your father, your sisters,

the school, the teachers— but never blame yourself. It's never your fault.' She then continues with the cold, hard truth: 'But it's always your fault, because if you wanted to change, you're the one who has got to change!'

Taking responsibility is not easy. It means that every single success or failure is a result of your own action or inaction. This is often the very reason why some people find it easier to accept and live with a 'victim' mentality. Victims' failures are never their fault. Someone else is always at fault, which allows victims to feel safe behind a wall that, ultimately, limits them in life. Even when we don't get the opportunity to choose what happens to us, we are still responsible for the way we respond. Charles R. Swindoll states, 'Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you react to it'.

I Brought Me Here

Right now, in your life, you are responsible for where you are. John Burroughs once said, 'A man can fail many times, but he isn't a failure until he begins to blame someone else'. You are responsible for everything about your life. You are responsible for the relationship you are in. You are responsible for the job you hold and the position you have. You are responsible for where you live. You can't blame a boss, a spouse, a partner, a sibling or a parent. You brought yourself to this place in your life. Own it, because once you start to own it, you will begin to take control and have authority over your life. Is there any area of your life that you're not happy about? Guess what? You are responsible. You can change that, whether it is a person or a situation. You can change it. Why? Because you are responsible for your life—no one else but you.



I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul.

~ William Ernest Henley, "Invictus"

Thoughts from this chapter

- 1) *I will stop playing the blame game*
- 2) *I will confront my past, so that I can move forward in my future*
- 3) *No one can make me feel inferior without my consent*
- 4) *I was not born to fit in. I am different to make a difference*

CHAPTER 3

GHANA > NEW ZEALAND > AUSTRALIA

Finding Myself

At the age of six, I found out that my visa to New Zealand was approved and that I would be packing my bags to join my dad, his wife and his daughter. I was beginning a new life and leaving my family and other siblings behind. I was sad to be leaving my mother's side of the family, but adventure was calling. Greener pastures and abundant opportunities were awaiting me in New Zealand. What I did not know was that I was about to go through a challenging, eight-year journey towards the discovery of self, of Eric.

First Day at Primary School

Wikipedia defines *identity* as 'the conception, qualities, beliefs, and expressions that make a person (self-identity) or group (such as national identity and cultural identity) different from others'. My first day at school in New Zealand was something I will never

forget. Having had no proper education in Ghana, I neither spoke nor understood English. In fact, I didn't even understand the meaning of the word *hello*. I've been told that I had a blank face on the first day of school and that I nodded my head to everything. I had very low self-esteem in 1992, simply because there were many times when the kids would huddle around me and talk amongst themselves. All I would hear afterwards was their laughter. Whether they were making fun of me or just enjoying their conversation, I will never know.

I didn't fit in

Right from primary school, I was the odd one out; although my school was somewhat diverse, I was still the dark skinned kid. I went from being like everyone else in Ghana to experiencing a cultural shock that a six-year-old could never mentally and emotionally prepare for. I began to start feeling like I was always, the misfit, the darker kid, the kid who couldn't speak or understand English. By the time I reached the age of eleven, I was fluent in English. That's when my family decided to move to Melbourne, Australia. As if one cultural shock wasn't enough, I was about to face another one! Unlike New Zealand, where I couldn't understand what others said about me, when we arrived in Melbourne and I started going to school, I was fluent in English—I could understand everything.

If You Don't Know Who You Are, Others Will Tell You

The early days of my primary school years were exciting, because I loved the breaks. I would be running around, either by myself or

with other people. I just loved being outdoors playing sports! This was all about to change, though. Because I could now hear and understand what people said about me in the playgrounds at break and lunchtimes, I would take notice of everything, I absorbed it all. But I couldn't distinguish between what was acceptable and what was not. I did not know the difference between a joke and an insult, for instance. As a result, people took advantage of me and even bullied me and I was also racially abused. I took. Waking up to go to school was now no longer fun, it became difficult. It became a challenge, and as a result, I began to hate school. I was left feeling alone and ashamed of who I was and where I had come from.

Racial Abuse Lead Me To An Identity Journey

My biggest fear in Grade 6 became a classmate who constantly bullied me because of my skin colour. This Polish guy made me believe that because I was darker, I was inferior. I believed it. I became a depressed kid because of the things he kept saying to me. I even wanted to change schools at one point, so I could avoid seeing him.

One day, I went home from school, feeling extremely down; I was in tears when I got home. My dad noticed that something was wrong. He sat me down, and I finally told him what had been happening at school. I opened up to him about how much I hated school, how much I felt like I didn't belong. My dad gave me an encouraging pep talk. He told me a bit about my roots, my African culture, black history, and the African identity. My Dad asked me a series of questions, and each answer was a person of African descent. For instance, he asked me, 'Who is the heavyweight boxing champion of the world?' At the time, it was Mike Tyson. 'Who is the fastest man in the world?' At the time, it was Donovan

Bailey. He went on and on, and I soon discovered the thread, the common denominator: all of the people, these world champions, were of African descent. In that moment, my mindset shifted. I came to an astounding conclusion: *Wow! My race is really special!* My Polish friend was as wrong as wrong could be. The one thing I got from everything my dad said was that I was not what the bully had called me at school; I learnt from my dad that I was not inferior. I was not stupid! The truth is that, when you know who you are, no one can tell you otherwise. This would be the beginning of my understanding of the concept of Identity. I had now learnt a thing or two about African heritage and our genes, however that wouldn't be enough to become my form my Identity. I quickly realized how easy it is to hide behind culture and copy what I saw was being done by other people within it. And I think it's still similar today we can easily fall into the trap of hiding behind our culture and even to the extreme and use it to justify things like 'well in my culture, men are just angry so it's normal for me to be angry' no, that's not who you are. My wife who is middle eastern has told me stories upon stories of how men in her culture treat men, and the expectations of a wife. Let's just say part of her reason for steering away from marrying within her culture was because she had seen firsthand the way men treat women. Whether we come from African cultures or Islanders or even Aussies, at some point we need to come out of hiding behind our cultures and find our individual self. For me I didn't want to hide behind my heritage and culture even though I had the chance, we all have to the chance to, but I wanted to dig deeper to discover my own identity. The week of having the pep talk with my Dad, he made time and He came to my school to report the bully for me (yes, I was a daddy's boy). From that time onwards, I began to think that perhaps being different did not mean I was inferior. Perhaps my skin colour did not define me, and other people could

not define me. Slowly I started to stop believing the lying hurtful racial words I was being told.

You Are Not

My school had put some things in place to ensure that I would not be bullied by the Polish boy again; in fact, I didn't see him often at all. Unfortunately, although I stopped seeing him, his words had become a stronghold in my mind. I remembered his negative talk: 'you are a loser' and 'you are not like us; we don't like you'. These words didn't go away as quickly as he did. Some words are so powerful, they can mess people up long after the words have been spoken, leaving them with a confused sense of identity. Perhaps people have said some negative things to you, like they did to me. Perhaps it wasn't even a person who said it to you; maybe you experienced a negative situation, like failing an exam.

You Are Not a Failure

For a number of years as a teenager, I saw myself as a complete failure. My own feeling of inferiority was probably one of the hardest challenges I faced. What I failed to realise was that the root cause of my negative outlook was the fact that I failed a maths exam at school. (Life's funny: in Tafe, I actually studied accounting!) In high school, I got discouraged from doing maths, and therefore, I put in no effort. As a result, I got low grades and failed the subject. I know that we all have something we're not so good at. Whether it be a sport or a subject, there are those things we wish never existed, so we wouldn't have to face them. Well, for me, it was maths. I used to hate the subject so much that, on the days I had it, I would try as much as possible to wag it. In my

mind, I had already given up on myself; I had already thrown in the towel and labelled myself a failure.

Failure is an event, never a person!

- William D Brown

As a result, I never really put any effort into studying the subject, and so I got even worse at it, so really, it was my fault. After a few more really low marks in maths and a few other subjects, I started to get the feeling that maybe school wasn't for me. I wanted to give up altogether. I wanted to drop out, not only because I had failed in certain subjects, but because I considered myself a failure. I had taken my feelings about myself and transferred them into grades on a sheet of paper. I had literally labelled myself a failure.

Have you ever failed at something and thought to yourself, *Well, I guess that makes me a failure?* I have. Have you ever made a mistake and thought to yourself, *Maybe I keep making mistakes because I am a mistake?* I was guilty of those thoughts, too. No matter people's background or even how good they are in general, everyone fails at some point in their lives. What separates the winners from the rest is the fact that the winners will get back up and keep going—they refuse to stay down.

Maybe you're feeling down and out at the moment. Maybe you're feeling really low because, like I did, you have become too attached to a bad life experience, outcome or test and you've labelled yourself according to that one event. You have become too attached to the result. If things don't go the way you expected and dreamt that they'd go, then you blame yourself and associate the

poor results with you as a person, making it personal and putting yourself down in the process. That was me exactly! Perhaps right now you are down and you have decided to stay there, because it's not the first time you've tried—unsuccessfully—to make something work, so you're losing hope and confidence. I'll let you in on something: I've been there, too. I've been at the low place in life, where I just didn't want to get back up, because getting back up involves work, hard work. It involves the risk of failing again, of dealing with the perceptions of other people and how that plays on your mind. Simply put, it's easier to stay down than to try and get back up. I understand why you want to stay down, but what if I told you that there are others who are counting on you not to quit, who need you to get up and get back in the game? What if I told you that your future family are depending on you to rise up in this moment and continue with your education? What if I told you that you are setting an example and a standard for your younger siblings? Now will you get up? See failure is not falling down – because we all do – it's refusing to get back up. Winston Churchill said, 'Nothing in life defines you. Success is not fatal and failure is not final'. Churchill is one of many heroes from past generations who failed but kept on going. He failed, yet he didn't label himself according to his outcomes. Here are three great people in the history of the world who didn't allow one or two or three or hundreds of failures to define them as a failure.

- 1) ***Steven Spielberg*** dropped out of junior high school. He was persuaded to come back and was placed in a learning-disabled class. He only lasted a month, and then, he dropped out of school forever. Yet Steven picked himself up and went on to become a film director. He is not your average filmmaker, either. He has won three Academy Awards, and he ranks among the most successful filmmakers in history. Most of all, Steven has recognised

as the most financially successful motion picture director of all time.

- 2) **Frank Winfield Woolworth** was the founder of Woollies/Safeway. Mr Woolworth got a job in a dry goods store when he was twenty-one years old. His employer would not let him serve customers, however, because he concluded that Frank 'didn't have enough common sense to serve the customers'. From there, Frank started The Woolworth Company, in 1878. This retail company was one of the original five-and-ten-cent stores. He started with just one store that soon grew to become one of the largest retail chains in the world in the 20th century.
- 3) **Michael Jordan** was just an ordinary person before joining NBA, so ordinary that he was cut from the high school basketball team because he wasn't especially skilled. However, he didn't let that failure label him for the rest of his life. He trained hard and went on to become the greatest basketball player of all time. He was a phenomenal athlete, with a unique combination of grace, speed, power, artistry, improvisational ability and an unquenchable competitive desire. Jordan single-handedly redefined the NBA superstar. He is one of my personal inspirations and is known for his popular quote: 'I've missed more than 9000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. Twenty-six times I've been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.'

Young man, young lady, there is too much at stake for you to stay lying on the ground. Today is your day to get back up! If you need to see someone for help, do it. If you need to reach out to your friend or partner, whoever it is, reach out! People will extend a hand to lift you back up. Your school needs you in the game, your friends need you in the game, and your generation needs you in

the game! Your siblings need you in the game, your parents need you in the game, the world needs you! pause and say these words out loud: ‘I am not a failure! Failure is only an event and not a person; therefore, I am not a failure!!’

You Are Not A Mistake

Just because you made a mistake, doesn't make you one.

~ Eric Agyeman

As a young adult, I struggled to forgive the ‘teenage me’ who made stupid decisions and mistakes again and again. Before hitting my lowest point, my mind just kept playing all the things I had done wrong, all my mistakes and all of the stupid things I had gotten myself into. We all know that it’s in our teenage years that we experiment and try out things; these are the years when we test and push boundaries. In the process, we end up making some stupid mistakes that we cannot easily forgive and forget. For me, forgiveness took about three years. I had received four suspensions in high school and at least one detention a week (so you can imagine). I was doing stupid things every week; you could say I was pretty consistent!

Everyone has a past. Therefore, everyone has made a mistake before. The difference, however, between victims and victors is the fact that the former define themselves as a *mistake*, while the latter understand that they are just human; they are bound to make mistakes, and all they can do is learn from them. No matter what your past may look like, you are not a mistake because of your past mistakes.

Don't allow your past to determine your future. I've made some silly decisions in life; in fact, I continue to do so every day—it's a human thing. But I make it a goal to learn from the mistakes and not to repeat them. I've made countless business mistakes, some simply because I was ignorant and some because I was outright silly. But I have had learn to not beat myself up every time. In fact, I have learnt to be encouraged, because I actually have never studied business or management, so it was normal to make some uninformed decisions that have cost me thousands of dollars. And those mistakes are proof that I'm doing something. John Wooden famously said, 'If you're not making mistakes, then you are not doing anything'. In life, you're either making mistakes or you're making nothing!

I have made bad friendship mistakes, bad relationship mistakes and bad family mistakes. But I refuse to let the poor decisions in my past stop me from dreaming. Some of you reading this need to start dreaming again. Perhaps you've built a monument around your mistakes; let them go, so you, too, can go on. Perhaps you may have made the mistake of trusting the wrong people; they have betrayed your trust, and it hurts. But don't resolve to never trust people again; don't resolve to remain isolated. Consider, perhaps, making your circle smaller—but you can trust people again. I often hear a common phrase among people: 'I don't go to church anymore because I've had a bad experience in the past'. Not wanting to go to church because of one bad experience is like saying *I will never eat at McDonald's again because I had a bad experience at a McDonald's*. Don't miss out on the awesome opportunities life has to offer you and your future because of one past mistake.

*The greatest mistake you can make in life is to be continually
fearing you will make one.*

~ Elbert Hubbard, author of The Note Book (1927)

Don't give up on people because one or two let you down, no matter how close they were to you or how much they meant to you. There are good and trustworthy people out there. Whether it be a mistake in a relationship or a friendship, don't let your past mistakes rob you of future happiness, love and fulfilment.

The only way to make progress in life is to make mistakes. I'll be the first to put my hand up when it comes to this. Having started PVBS from scratch in 2009, with no business degree, I have made a lot of mistakes, and to this day, mistakes are still being made. The good news is that we're progressing. What started out as an online retail store now has another arm. Class of Change is the division that makes custom jackets for Year 12 students. For every jacket, we fund life-changing education for children in need. We have provided access to quality education for thousands of children because, even when I make a mistake or our team makes a mistake, we simply learn from it and keep moving.

Have I made mistakes in the past? Heck, yes! Will I continue to make mistakes in the future? Heck, yes! Do my mistakes define me? Heck, no! You and I are not mistakes.

Making a different mistake every day is not only acceptable, it is the definition of progress.

- Robert Brault, Author

YOU Are Not People's Opinions

Let me ask you a question I was faced with and still have to answer every now and then: How would your life be different if YOU stopped allowing other people to determine and dictate your life? I mean, seriously, what would your life look like if you stopped allowing your friends' opinions to determine your emotions, your day and your mood? The answer to this question is important. Why? Because it will serve as a reminder that other people's perceptions and opinions of you **do not have to become your reality**. You are not what they say you are. Why? Because they don't really know the true you. You will meet people in life who claim to think they know who you are. How that is even possible, I don't know. For me personally, a lot of people can't pronounce my surname; I've even gotten 'A-gay-man' before (I know, huh? [Insert laughing emoji face here.]). So, when people claim to know who I am, I just smile and move on. Don't be consumed by people's opinions about you—at best, they're wrong and not true. It's when you believe them and agree with them that those opinions actually have a chance of coming true.

Young man, young lady, *don't be so distracted by other people's opinions of us that you allow others to define who you are*. You've been pushed around for far too long. You've allowed other people's opinions to matter too much. It's time to reject their mean opinions and thoughts of you, it's time you know you are

amazing and created for so much more! Oh and in case I left anyone hanging, my surname actually doesn't have a click in it, meaning it's pretty simple, it's spelt Agyeman, but pronounced 'R – GEE – MIN' so next time you see me, holla the right pronunciation J

No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.

~ Eleanor Roosevelt

There are so many things you are not, I couldn't fit them all in the book even if I tried, but here's a few more for you to keep in mind.

You are not a product of chance.

You are not an angry person.

You are not inferior.

You are not defined by the colour of my skin.

You are not what others say I am.

You are not defined by your parent's mistakes and wrongdoings.

You are not stupid.

You are not ugly.

You are not fat.

I Am...

In the book *The Power of I Am*, Joel Osteen shares a powerful truth: 'Whatever follows "I am" will eventually find you'. In other words, if you speak the words *I am angry*, then you open the door for anger to come looking for you. If you say, 'I am poor', you open the door for poverty to come looking for you. Whatever

follows your *I am* will eventually follow you. Thus, you should begin to speak the following words about yourself every morning:

I am blessed.

I am strong.

I am prosperous.

I am healed!

I am a conqueror!

I am smart!

I am made for greatness!

I am an overcomer!

When you begin to speak these assertions about your life, your words will align with who are you and how you go about every day. Before long, this will form part of who you are! Start replacing *who you are not* with *who you are* through your words and your mindset.

Thoughts from this chapter

- 1) *Failure is only an event, never a person.*
- 2) *Just because I make mistakes does not make me a mistake.*
- 3) *I can't let the fear of making mistakes stop me from trying new things.*
- 4) *Everything I want is on the other side of fear.*

CHAPTER 4

SO WHO ARE YOU?

Identity is one of the most powerful and crucial elements to get right in life, and finding it is one of the biggest challenges anyone will face during the transition between childhood and adulthood. An understanding of our identity helps guide and navigate us through the choices and decisions of life. The wrong identity can lead us to very regrettable situations down the track. On the other hand, the right sense of identity leads to purpose, focus and fulfilment. Identity helps with everything from choosing friendships to starting our careers.

Identity is who we really are at our core. This is shaped by certain factors:

- 1) Upbringing and environment
- 2) Parents
- 3) Friends
- 4) Sporting clubs
- 5) Faith and spirituality

These factors will, in some way, contribute to our identity and help us to become the people we grow up to be. I should also mention the biggest new additions to the list in the last five years. These additions weren't around during my teen years.

- 6) Idolisation of Hollywood celebrities
- 7) Social media

These new elements have infiltrated our societies. They now play a big part in our identity formation and the discovery of who we are. So now more than ever, our younger generation are faced with a battle that has become even more difficult. Ralph Waldo Emerson writes, 'To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment'. In a world where we all want to be accepted and loved, at times it can feel like there has to be a compromise: you can either be 'you' or be accepted. I choose to be me any day.

A Young Boy with Rap Aspirations

In year 8, I became fanatic about rap music; I was exposed to and soon addicted to rappers like Tupac Shakur and Notorious BIG. Actually, *addiction* is an understatement; rap was the only music I would listen to. I was so involved with the lyrics that I started rapping. Before long, I wanted to be like these rap stars. I remember taking one exam in high school and having no clue about the answer, so I ended up writing a rhyme on the paper. My dream at that age was to be a rapper; I dressed like them, walked like them and talked like them. You could tell without even knowing me that I was into my gangsta rap. I loved my rap music, because it provided me an escape from the crowds at school. I didn't fit in, but rap music made me feel like I was accepted again, perhaps because rappers were African-American and the same colour as me. I also rapped about some of the struggles I went through. Whatever the reason, I was hooked on rap like a drug. My dad, on the other hand, hated it. More accurately, he hated the negative influence he saw it have on me, like my constant cussing.

I got my first job, delivering newspapers, at the age of eleven. I took the job so I could feed my addiction. I needed to buy more gangsta rap albums (Gee, if only I had thought of Spotify or even Pandora back then). I used to save up my pennies to invest in CDs that would only end up being found in my room and destroyed by my dad. The stickers on the CDs served as a warning: *this CD contains explicit content*. But the warning wasn't enough to convince this eleven-year-old that he was too young to be listening to that kind of music. My dad was always there to remind me, though!

At the very beginning, I loved gangsta rap and hip hop for the beat. Then, the more I listened, I loved it for the lyrics. Then it was the clothing, and finally, it became a lifestyle that I approved of and wanted to follow. It started shaping my world view. Under Tupac's influence, I started to change:

- 1) I thought swearing and cussing was normal, so swearing became part of my vocabulary. I would swear at everyone and anyone, except for my parents (FYI, you do NOT swear at African parents!). I thought it was cool—if my idol did it, then so would I.
- 2) I began to label everything as *racism* and people as *racists* if I felt slightly left out. My behaviour was influenced by one of my favourite songs from Tupac back then, called 'Changes'. It was a song about segregation and discrimination and how he (Tupac) wanted things to change so everyone would be treated the same. One of the lines in the song goes like this: 'I see no changes. All I see is racist faces'. I could rap this song from start to finish; in fact, I did that so many times, I began to believe the lyrics, that everyone was racist. Then I started relating it to my life, and so I became filled with bitterness and hatred towards people. I thought everyone was being racist towards me.

- 3) I disrespected people, and I became very arrogant and prideful.
- 4) My perspective on dating was messed up. I thought it was perfectly fine to date a girl and then leave her for the next girl, once I got bored. This happened on a fortnightly or monthly basis. At that stage of my life, I didn't believe in marriage at all.

Music was one of the events that shaped my life and my identity in Melbourne when I was eleven and twelve years old. The influence of bad music and negative role models and icons led me to believe in something flawed and to become someone I was not born to be. Rap music led me astray, away from who I really was.

You were never born to fit in; you were born to stand out!

- Dr Seuss

I Let My Friends Win

High school was challenging for me; I had a lot of decisions to make, one of them being the friendships groups I would hang around with. I wanted to be in the popular group because I felt that it would help my self-esteem and make people respect and value me as I tried to find my feet and find my fit. There was always a sense of being neither here nor there at the time. I really struggled to fit in, but even on my best day, I still felt different from everyone else. I didn't really feel like a part of anything, which resulted in my getting involved with a bad gang.

As you're reading this, you're probably thinking the same thing I did: *Why don't I don't fit in?* In your attempt to force yourself to fit in at school, you do everything to please people and get their validation. For me, I started smoking; I was then selling cigarettes, just to gain my group's validation. My sense of identity was lost. Because I was trying to fit in, I found myself doing things I had promised I'd never do, like stealing and smoking. But I was never born to fit in and neither were you; we were born to stand out. This will change your world if you just believe it. It means that you don't have to smoke just because your friends smoke, you don't have to get drunk at parties because all of your mates do and you don't have to go clubbing to gain the approval of others.

You were born to be *different and to make a difference!* No matter how much you go out of your way to try and please others, you will still end up feeling empty, because their approval brings you no long-term fulfilment; it only takes you further away from your identity. I would rather be a unique individual with my own sense of identity than succumb to societal and peer pressure and be like everyone else, wouldn't you?

People laughed at me because I was different; I laughed back at them because they were all the same.

- Kurt Cobain

I Let Them Win Because I Gave in to Peer Pressure

With time, I became more rebellious; I began smoking and pushing other kids around, and I got involved in a gang. There was one thing that kept me from being expelled, and that was my

athletic ability. *The fastest kid in the whole school* and *Eric the Red* were the undefeatable titles I held. However, my behaviour got worse. At one point, it looked like the only future for me would be in jail—if I didn't get stabbed on the streets first. I was what you might describe as 'off the rails'. I had four suspensions to my name, the school principals were having countless meetings about me and sometimes my dad had to come to the school (in these instances, he wasn't going there to report a racist kid; he was going there to hear how bad I had become) to attempt to find a way to keep me in school and stay out of trouble. I had become an angry young man, involved in fights on a weekly basis. I was fed up: fed up with people's negativity, fed up with having no one believe in me and fed up with feeling like a disappointment. No one was counting on me to do well, so why even bother to try? Everyone was counting on me to do the wrong thing, so I continued doing the wrong things. I continued getting more detentions and suspensions. I continued bullying people. I continued to go off the rails.

The only group of people who I thought cared about me and wanted to see me succeed was my friendship group. I had joined the Ringwood boys, a campus gang that would hang by Ringwood Train Station and Eastland Shopping Centre and cause trouble. These guys, as bad as they were, became my cheer squad, encouraging me to do all the wrong things. Perhaps I was craving acceptance, perhaps I was craving encouragement so bad that, even if it was encouragement to do the wrong thing, I would do it.

A true friend knows your weaknesses but shows you your strengths; feels your fears but fortifies your faith; sees your anxieties but frees your spirit; recognises your disability but emphasises your POSSIBILITIES.

~ William Arthur Ward

Friendships

Throughout high school, I always wanted to be seen as a popular kid. But, in order to be seen as one, I had to hang around with the popular kids. I went through all of high school thinking that the more friends I had, the more popular I was. Back then, the only real social media we had was msn. I think Myspace had just been introduced. Today, I realise that the issue of being popular and most liked is very common with high schoolers, especially with the introduction of more social networking sites, such as Instagram, Facebook and Twitter, among others. People will put up all sorts of photos and statuses, simply for attention and ‘likes’. In fact, nowadays, ‘likes’ have become the measuring bar to show one’s popularity. By allowing myself to be surrounded by toxic friends, by not spending time to discover myself and live my own life and by letting other people’s opinions become my reality simply because I heard it too many times, I let them win. Who? Everyone around me—everyone but me. I ended up being what they said I would be, because I gave up. This does not have to be your story, too. You can win. In fact, I want you to win so much that I wrote this book for you. You can win and you will win!

Zone 1 and 2 Friends

I used to live in the eastern suburbs, where I was a regular user of public transport. I would normally get on at either Mooroolbark Station or Ringwood Station. I had to buy a Zone 1 and Zone 2 from either of those stations whenever I made trips into the city. For the purpose of the illustration, I will use *city* and *destination* interchangeably, to make a point. Throughout the journey, at different stations along the way, people would get off the train. Zone 1 ticket holders would all get off before the train entered Zone 2 (well, most did, anyway), and you ALSO always have your ticket evaders—the ones who sneak on board without a ticket, meaning but were never supposed to be there in the first place. By the time I got to the city—my destination—the carriage, which had been quite full at the start, had become quite empty.

Moral of the story: Not every friend stays with you from the beginning of your life to the end. Some friends are only meant to be in your life for a season. Some people only have a Zone 1 ticket, and any small issue or argument will make them exit your carriage. That's okay. Their season is over, and they were never really a friend. Without realising it, in high school, most of my 'friends' were not really my friends; they were Zone 1 friends. However, out of a desire to belong to a group and be considered cool, I convinced myself that my negative friends—the ones who were peer-pressuring me into smoking, stealing and playing pranks on teachers (which landed me in detentions)—were Zone 2 friends., out of my desperation to fit in, I became controlled, a puppet; I would do as I was told or as I was dared to do, all in the name of acceptance. I was on board with Zone 1 friends.

Try keeping food in your pantry past its expiry date, and it's going to give off a really bad smell. Ultimately, it will end up ruining the smell in your entire pantry. Friends are like that, too: keep holding on to friends who have no purpose and add no value

to you—those who are past their ‘season date’ in your life—and soon, your life will stink. Don’t try to stretch a season friend into becoming a lifetime friend. Know when to let go of certain people throughout your journey and move on.

*If you're in the wrong circle of friends,
your life will go round in circles.*

~ Author Unknown

One Direction

Direction in life matters. The last thing you want to do is invest yourself, your emotions and your finances into things and people that go nowhere and end up setting you back. There are two possible directions in which your life is moving at any given time: forwards or backwards. More often than not, especially as a young person, your friends and the company you keep will determine your bearings. Forward is the direction we all desire to move in—well, most of us, anyway. It’s by moving forward that we reach our dreams, achieve our goals, tick off our bucket lists and so on. With this in mind, let’s talk about friends and how they influence us to arrive at our goals or, in some cases, help us to go backwards. To say that my high school years were backwards years for me is pretty darn accurate. I was in the wrong, and so, there was no way I was heading anywhere near my goals—well, in fact, I had no goals, once again, because of the company I kept. It’s impossible to meet a goal or a target when there are no goals, and it is also impossible to arrive at your goals if you’re travelling in the wrong direction. I discovered that there are really two main groups of friends. The ones who believe in you and are willing to

invest in your future, I call *Dream Friends*; I call the other group *Past Friends*.

Past Friends

These are the people from your past (or maybe in your case, your current friends): the ones you used to smoke with, the ones you would go out partying with and the ones you'd end up in fights with. They are the friends you used to get in trouble with. I had such friends. We have all had them. Three of my four suspensions in high school were influenced by past friends. I was nearly expelled, due in part to their influence. Clearly, I was in the wrong group.

There's nothing wrong with keeping friends from your past, but there is everything wrong with hanging on to such friends if all they do is influence you to return to your old lifestyle. If they're still calling you up to go clubbing every Friday night, inviting you over for drinking games and asking you to go drifting with them, it's time to say goodbye. They are simply not adding any value to your future and the direction you're moving in. It's never that easy to disconnect from such friends; we have great childhood memories with some of them. Others have, at one point, helped us greatly. But this decision is not about our feelings, so much as our future.

There comes a point in your life when you realize who matters, who never did, who won't anymore, and who always will. So don't worry about people from your past, there's a reason they didn't make it to your future.

- Anonymous

Be prepared for some hurt feelings. Trust me: once you take steps to distance yourself, you will cop some insult from this group of friends. From personal experience, I have learnt that, if you have set goals and a commitment and passion to reach them, some of your friends will mock you and try to make fun of you. They will say things like, 'Who do you think you are?' or 'What, you think you're better than us?' It's normal. Some 'friends' will try to make you feel guilty and tell you you're a bad person, but really, you're not. Don't let their words keep you in a friendship group that is leading you nowhere. we were all once kids, we all had our fair share of stupidity and silliness— some of us were more stupid than others—but as life goes on, there comes a point when we must wake up, take responsibility and GROW UP. No matter how hard we try, some people aren't meant to fit in our lives.

Past friends are friends who are still living a destructive lifestyle and refuse to grow up or change. To them, getting wasted and going out every night clubbing is still cool. Sometimes, it can be a win-win situation with this group of friends. When they become inspired by your change and your positive life, they, too, will desire to change and make something of their lives. Count yourself as the leader; they're watching your example, so set a positive and firm one.

If they can't GROW with you, they can't GO with you.

- Author Unknown

Recently, my Facebook account reached 1800. Throughout my live feeds, I saw updates from friends I'd known years and even decades ago. It got to the point where I decided to cancel my account and start a new one, simply because I wanted to disconnect from certain friends and exes from my past. I did the same with my phone. Before you finish this chapter, that's something you might have to do, too.

My challenge to you:

- 1) Understand that life isn't about the number of friend's people think you have. Rather, it's about the number of REAL friends you have.
- 2) Realise that friendships are about quality, not quantity.
- 3) Know that if they can't GROW with you, they can't GO with you.
- 4) Have a look through your Facebook friend list and mobile phones, and delete the people whom you no longer have ties with.

Dream Friends

*Surround yourself with only people who are
going to lift you higher.*

~ Oprah Winfrey

Dream friends are my favourite kind of friends. These are the ones who are like-minded; they, too, have goals and aspirations to be people of influence and change. These are the friends who help lift you up when you're down; you can always call on them for encouragement or even advice. They can even be your mentors. I have the privilege of being blessed with some amazing dream friends on my journey, people who believe in me and my talents and genuinely want to help me succeed. I have several mentors whom I catch up with on a regular basis, who really inspire me to dream bigger. I have even been blessed with friends who have been generous financially to help me reach some of my dreams. These are all people I am indebted to; I probably wouldn't be here without them. You can't reach your dreams without a good bunch of dream friends around you.

At times, the journey will get difficult. There will be times when you want to give up and moments when you need some sound advice and direction from someone older. If you don't have such friends, I highly recommend you look closely at the people around you; try to spend time with these people and develop friendships with them. And remember that it doesn't have to be all work; learn to work hard towards your goals, but don't forget to play hard, too! Lastly, be a dream friend to someone else. I'm sure there are people who look up to you. Reach out and encourage

others and be there for people when they need you, because others were there when you needed someone. Dream friends aren't limited to the people related to your dreams. Anyone who is committed and interested in helping you move forward in life is a dream friend.

Scars From Past Friendships and Relationships

After several short-term relationships in my teens, which, by the way, were all from peer pressure and dares from friends, I started to experience disappointments. These were only the start, though. I've been through a lot of disappointments in life, and every one of them has some sort of connection to my friends. I have been let down by friends, deceived by friends and lied to by friends I thought I could trust. I've even had work colleagues and family members talk trash behind my back, all in my short life span. I know—it's crazy, hey? Every time I went through a friendship low or a breaking point, I probably handled it the wrong way: in anger and out of bitterness. I would lose my temper and lose my cool. And in doing so, I let them win.

As time goes on, and I reflect on the past, I begin to see that life teaches us lessons for growth, knowledge and wisdom. Unfortunately, we usually completely ignore those lessons because, in the moment, we are feeling so hurt. Being hurt is something you can't stop from happening, but staying miserable is always your choice. Losing or winning is really up to you.

Dealing With Rejection

As humans, we were created to love and to be loved. The opposite of that, I believe, is rejection. Sometimes in life, we do get

downright rejected, but other times, we just misinterpret people's actions. This is what happened to me while in Ghana. The truth is that I was a little mad at my dad for tricking me into believing I would only be in Ghana for a three-week holiday, especially when it became seven years of challenges for me. In that moment, I definitely felt rejected by him. I felt isolated and unloved. This was my interpretation of the situation. However, the truth was that my dad loved me; he did what he did because he feared that if I stayed in Melbourne, I would end up expelled from school or even locked up. To him, it was an act of love; to me, at the time, it was an act of rejection.

Every single day, we experience rejection of some sort. Think of the young guy who works at Hungry Jacks. You put in your order at the drive through, and he asks if you want to upsize it to a large for an extra fifty cents. You decline the offer. Actually, you have rejected his offer. But have you rejected him as a person? No. However, the young boy's interpretation could be a whole other story.

From time to time, we question our worth and value because of a rejection. I've lost count of the number of job interviews in which I've been rejected. The honest truth? It's hurtful.

Don't be bitter about someone or something in your past; get excited about what's to come in the future.

- Eric Agyeman

I remember applying to one particular top-four financial institutions. I applied several times, in fact. I got rejected three times, then got called in on the fourth time. That day happened to be my birthday, too. At first, I was undecided about whether

or not to go to the interview. I had already concluded in my head that I was going to be rejected again. I also knew that they would give me their decision by the close of business that same day. The suspense, hey? No one wants to hear bad news on their birthday. I told the recruitment manager that I would think about going to the interview and call her back. Twenty minutes later, I decided to go to the interview. I walked into that interview room and gave it my all, even though I knew that my chances were non-existent. Later that day, at around 4:30 p.m., the phone rang. I knew exactly who it was, but I was so nervous that I let it ring for a while before mustering the courage to answer. When I did, this time, to my surprise, the answer was *YES!*

Hearing that *yes* was the best birthday present that year, because it made me believe in myself again. Then I realised how personally I had been taking the rejections. You might have been told *no* at a recent job interview, but don't take it personally. There is nothing wrong with you; there is just something else out there that's better for you. On her blog, Christine Hassler puts things into perspective: 'Sometimes we are not a match for a certain person or job. People are on different timelines, looking for different things, and there are a million other variables that play into why we don't always get what we want'. Keep applying. Don't be discouraged. Keep pushing, and don't give up. Go to those interviews, keep asking and keep knocking, because those who ask eventually get the desired answer. And the door eventually opens for those who keep knocking!

We all go through rejection every single day, and 99% of it is not personal, so don't take it personally.

~ Eric Agyeman

Is It Really a Rejection?

Before you allow your emotions and feelings to be upset, bitter and angry, assess the situation for what it really is. You might be surprised to learn that you may have misinterpreted the situation and circumstance.

After every rejection, assess the following:

- 1) What are the reasons behind the rejection?
- 2) What are my alternatives after this rejection?
- 3) What are the lessons I can learn from this rejection?
- 4) Were my ideas rejected? Why?
- 5) How can I avoid the negative effects of rejection?

My Wife's Thoughts on Rejection

Recently, I had a chat with my wife about this topic. I wanted to pick her brain and gain a different perspective on rejection. Since she only rejected me about seven times over an eight-month period before finally agreeing to date me, I thought she would be filled with wise information. Here are some nuggets of wisdom I learnt from her experiences about the topic of rejection.

‘Growing up, you can be rejected in one area. It’s not the situation itself that haunts you, but rather the feeling of rejection that comes with it. You then make the mistake of applying this same feeling in other areas of your life. It becomes a pattern and, soon, a negative thought that controls your actions, sometimes even without you realising it.’ In other words, the root cause of why you lose all confidence and belief in yourself when it comes to job interviews may be because you’ve been rejected before. The root cause of your inability to make friends may be because of a rejection of some sort not too long ago.

I think that you have to believe in your destiny; that you will succeed, you will meet a lot of rejection and it is not always a straight path, there will be detours—so enjoy the view.

~ Michael York

She continued:

‘People that have been rejected before tend to apply the worst possible result in their heads about different situations they face, which then becomes their reality. Does this sound like you? Not very optimistic, always fearing the worst?’

‘If an opportunity arises, you automatically reject yourself and count yourself out. You think of yourself as unworthy and believe the lies in your head from your past experiences: “No one wants to hire me” or “No one likes me”. It’s a form of protection, so you do not experience the pain and disappointment again.’

‘If you are somebody that thinks like this, remember that rejection isn’t always your fault; it’s not that you’re not good enough or worthy. Consider this: not being with the person you desire in the moment, not getting the job you want right now or not having the situation you think will make you happy is a necessary part of the journey towards the person, job or situation that is most in alignment with what is best for you.’ Wise words, indeed, from my wife. Thank you, Sandy.

When you get rejected, focus on the positive. Understand that something better somewhere else is awaiting you. Keep improving and developing your skills, talents and personality the best you possibly can while you’re waiting. Rejection: **it is part of EVERYONE’s human experience**. Rejection is never personal. It just means that something’s not right for me at that

time. It also is a form of protection from what may hurt me in the long run

Get Your Power Back

No matter how many people I was hanging around with in high school, deep down, I felt alone. Deep down, I hated myself and who I had become. One time, my step-mum caught me smoking when I arrived home after school. That night was a tough night. She broke into tears because she was surprised at the person I had become, someone she didn't even know. I recall walking to various shops in our earlier days in Melbourne; whenever I saw someone smoking, I would always be disgusted and complain of the terrible smell. She would often look at me, almost with a smile, knowing that I would never do that. Fast forward, and there I was, doing the very thing I had hated and said I would never do. The truth is that I didn't know the person I had become, either. My self-disappointment soon turned into self-hatred. I stopped caring about myself, and finally began to see myself as my own enemy (inner me). I was the very opposite of best friends with myself; I was far from loving or even liking Eric.

I started getting myself into a dark place, because I kept letting them win; I kept giving control to my friends. That's why I was doing bad things and that's why I started doing things I'd said I would never do. Perhaps due to your quiet nature, you've found yourself at a place where you now realize that people have been telling you what to do for all these years. Maybe you've arrived at a set of circumstances that you actually have no say in. And why? Because others took advantage of your quiet nature to manipulate and control you. There is some good news for you, though: starting today, you can get your power back, you can get your control back and you can get your life back! Today, refuse to

let others tell you how to dress and how to talk. This is your life. Get up and own it!

Be Your Own Best Friend

The personal journey of discovery means that you will be alone a lot. Yes, alone. But don't worry—it doesn't mean that you are a loner. The kind of *alone* I'm referring to is solitude. Wikipedia describes solitude like this: a state of seclusion or isolation, i.e., lack of contact with people. It may stem from deliberate choice (Wikipedia contributors).

So there I was, surrounded by noisy people, yet still, I was lonely; deep down, I felt like a loner. Phil McGraw, better known as Dr Phil, has said, '*The most important relationship you will ever have is with yourself. You've got to be your own best friend first. He was right! At this stage of my life*, I had no sense of relationship with myself, and by that, I don't mean the kind of self-love that Kanye West has with himself (shout out to all the social media memes; I love Fridays like Kanye likes Kanye). I was lonely because the first authentic relationship I needed to have was with myself. That relationship had to take place before I could form one with anyone else. I went from hating myself to actually liking myself. Have you ever met someone you think you don't like, but after you meet them, you get along really well and became besties? That's how my journey to self-turned out to be. Once I took control of my life and started making my own decisions to spend time with myself, I began to like me! As the journalist Sydney J. Harris once said, 'If you're not comfortable with yourself, you can't be comfortable with others'.

*If you're searching for that one person who will change your life,
take a look in the mirror.*

- Author Unknown

Solitude is often valued as a time when one may work, think or rest without being disturbed. Practising solitude is a discipline that will help you for years to come; you will need it in high school, in the workplace and in a relationship. You will even need it every now and then to keep sane and be in control of your crazy world. Solitude is something that you should incorporate into your monthly schedules and calendars. Every new season in life will demand that you take time out and both reflect and dream, learn from your mistakes and plan how not to repeat them again. It's in these moments that you will often find and hear the voice within you whispering words of peace and comfort, vision and direction. It's in these moments that we begin to see life's challenges and difficulties for what they really are: stepping stones, building blocks and tests of character. Many people wait until they crash and burn before taking some time out; I'm guilty of this, but there are some who, because they prioritise it, have fewer burnouts and tend to see challenges ahead and prepare for them even before they come face to face with them.

*They say it's all about who you know. But I say it doesn't matter
who you know if you don't know yourself.*

- Eric Agyeman

Our generation can spend more time on a celebrity's timeline than we do in our own lives. We know more about other people and their lives than we know about ourselves. Solitude means no distractions, no social media, no instagramming to find out about other people's lives—no. This is your time. It's a true game-changer—it has been for me, and it can be for you. Try waking up thirty minutes earlier to reflect and meditate, or do it before you go to bed every night. The more you practise this, the more time you spend by yourself, just like you would spend time with your best friends, you will find out more about yourself. With time, you will become your own best friend. When we don't know ourselves, we are at the mercy of all kinds of treatment from different people. We have to know ourselves to know what we will and will not tolerate.

*If you can't make yourself happy,
don't give someone else that job.*

~ Author Unknown

The Good In Goodbye

Think of some of your worst experiences. Now, think about the lesson you learnt in the end. In some way, that dark experience made you stronger, better and wiser. But there's more: I believe things happen for a reason and sometimes circumstances happen to allow people to be removed from our lives for our own protection and safety. Sometimes, a door has to close so that a bigger and better door can open! Sometimes, we're let down and left all alone so we can journey and discover who we really are—minus the distraction of everyone else. Curtis Mayne once said, 'No relationship is

ever a waste of time. If it didn't bring you what you want, it taught you what you DON'T want'. I want to encourage you to see the *good* in goodbye, the opportunity in someone leaving your life. In fact, they're doing you a favour by saving you pain down the track. Personally, I think that when people want to leave our lives, at times, we have to just let them go and not chase after them. Your destiny is never tied to a man or a woman. Your dreams are never tied to one person, so if they leave, understand that they're not taking your dream or your destiny away. When we have an understanding of our identity and self-worth, then perhaps we won't tolerate rude people who are out for their own interests and only want to use us.

Allow your self-worth to speak up and say *enough is enough*. Listen to the cry of your heart and the pain of your soul. You deserve the very best; you deserve happiness. And if someone is always robbing you of that, then it's *good* bye to them.

When I first met my wife, she was working in retail. A lot of times, she would experience bad treatment from her bosses. After a while, I got tired of it. Anyone who knows my wife knows that she is the most caring, hardworking and patient person (those very attributes about her made me pursue her for eight months, even when she kept saying *no*). I got tired of some of her managers using Sandy's meekness and humility to their advantage. I had a chat with my wife and told her that someone somewhere else would respect and value her work ethics. I told her that she should resign, which she did. Perhaps you're in a friendship or a relationship where you feel as though you're being taken advantage of. Perhaps it's happening at work and you feel you're not recognized or respected for what you bring to the company. No matter which area of your life this applies to, I want to encourage you to stand up for yourself. Let your self-worth and heart speak up. Don't be afraid to let a person or a place go out of fear that you may never find something else. You will. In fact, you will find something better. Whether it's a relationship or a job, you will find a better one!

There's no reason to be bitter about your last boss, because a much better job is coming your way, a dream job where you're actually valued and recognised for your efforts! Perhaps there's no reason to be bitter about your so-called best friend leaving, because all he or she did was control you and use you. Perhaps there's no reason to still be bitter about your ex. I mean, true love never leaves, so if he or she really loved you . . . you fill in the blanks. Oh, and wouldn't you rather have someone leave now than later, after you're married? No one wants to be another statistic of divorce.

Do you get my drift? Everything happens for a reason, so be thankful for life. Don't cry over who or what is gone in your life. Instead, celebrate what's still left and get excited about what's to come! I've been through a few failed relationships. They left me with scars, and every now and then, the hurt comes back. But I'm glad they all ended. I'm not bitter, because those break-ups had to happen for me to be where I am in life today: married to my dream wife! Remember: you don't choose the past, so let it go. You choose your future, so choose wisely.

Your past is not an excuse; it's an experience.

- Author Unknown

Thoughts from this chapter

- 1) *Happiness depends on an individual: ME.*
- 2) *Happiness is a choice. I will choose it today.*
- 3) *If my friends refuse to grow with me, they can't go on the journey with me.*

CHAPTER 5

THINK POWERFUL THOUGHTS

Thought is the original source of all wealth, all success, all great discoveries and inventions and all achievement.

~ Claude M. Bristol, U.S. Author

I Think; Therefore, I am

Two of the most powerful things known to humanity are not guns, but our thoughts and our words. In fact, it would be safe to say that people only use guns because they have been affected by bad thoughts and (usually) words from people who have caused anger and rage so great that revenge must be sought in a cowardly way, through a gun. Guns do account for a lot of deaths around the world; however, there is something more powerful that accounts for more deaths in our generation: our thought patterns and our words. I've heard it said before: words kill more people than

bullets do. As a young teenager at the receiving end of negativity from teachers, friends and even family, I simply became overwhelmed. Their words become my thoughts, thoughts of how much I had failed people and myself, how much I had been a letdown to so many people, especially my dad, who'd sacrificed to have me move from Ghana as a kid, so I could have better opportunities in life. And there I was, having gone full circle and returned to Ghana. Except I hadn't returned as a little kid; my innocence has been tainted by the many experiences of my teen years, from racial abuse to smoking to joining a gang to being heavily influenced by rap music.

The reality hit me hard. My surroundings hit me hard. I had to walk most mornings just to fetch water to have a shower. I was always looking for a newspaper when I needed to go to the bushes—yes, the bushes, because we had no toilets. My world felt like hell, and I wanted to escape it. Soon, the poisonous thoughts became words that I was speaking over myself, degrading words, dark words, words about giving up, words of death. This continued for a few days and then, finally, the day came when I wanted to end my hell. I wanted an exit, a way out of my circumstances. To me, there was no other option. Well, that was where I was wrong. I wasn't thinking. In truth, there had been other options:

- 1) People I could talk to about my feelings
- 2) Services I could access for help

These options did exist, yet my mind tried to convince me otherwise. That's the power of the mind. I wanted out. I didn't want to wake up to another sunrise to face the reality of going to fetch my own water and spend another day in poverty. Once again, these were the thoughts in my head, working me up. I was convinced that, because my temporary situation looked bleak, the rest of my life would look bleak. My mind tried to convince me that to give up on life would be a temporary solution to an

eternal suffering. But that was a lie; rather, I was about to employ a permanent decision in the midst of a temporary situation.

Believe me when I say that your mind and your thoughts are your two most powerful weapons. I have been down that road.

Our minds are powerful tools for good and bad. In 2002, I used mine for bad. I thought of dark thoughts that did nothing but drag me deeper into my depression, which nearly ended with my giving up on life. Luckily for me, my brother intervened both times. To me, he was an angel in disguise.

A person is limited only by the thoughts that he chooses.

~ James Allen, Author of 'As a Man Thinketh'

The Light in the Darkness

I thought that I had come to the end of a no-through road and that there was nothing else to see or do but end my life. After all, aren't no-through roads a clear sign that there's nothing past that point? Well, in my case, there was something past that no-through road point. There was a light at the end of the road and the tunnel, waiting for me. At this stage, I had mixed thoughts about myself and my previous attempts to give up. Part of me was upset and disappointed whenever it didn't happen. Another part of me had a feeling of guilt. However, the third part of me thought, *Wow! I'm still alive? I wonder why.* Well, I was about to find out.

One Sunday, I decided to go to church with my uncle. As I sat there, distracted, the speaker stopped halfway through his talk and looked over at me. He spoke powerful, positive words about my life. I had never heard such powerful words: 'You are not a

mistake. You're on this Earth for a purpose. You are loved, and you will be very influential and bring hope to many people, so do not give up'. Two weeks before, I'd been thinking that I had arrived at the end of the road, at the end of my life; then, there I was, having someone speak words I had never heard before and implying that my life was only just beginning. Whoa, hold on a minute. That escalated quickly! Life is funny: sometimes what we perceive as the ending is only really a beginning.

To any people who feel that they are at the end of their road, recognize that you have a life. Don't mistake a comma in the story of your life for a full stop. Your life is not over; your life is only beginning! I am proof this.

That day, I decided to read the book from which the man was speaking: The Bible. I knew what I'd experienced that day. I knew the hope and purpose that overwhelmed and encouraged me. I, therefore, wanted to feed myself this positivity that this man had just introduced to me. And when I did open the Bible, lo and behold, there it was: Romans 12:2. 'Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind'.

From that day, I challenged my mind to think differently, to see things in a positive light and to purposefully speak encouraging words to myself. From that moment, my life began to slowly transform, and it shifted in the opposite direction.

As a man thinks in his heart, so he is
Proverbs 23:7

Mind Under Construction

In early 2009, I started to also read a lot of motivational books. Some of my favourites were by John C. Maxwell. In one of his books, the one that inspired me to start focusing on my dreams, he mentioned a popular quotation by Henry Ford (the inventor of Ford, the motor vehicle): *'If you think you can, you're right and if you think you can't, you're right too'*. I read it over and over again. Not long after, I came across another quote, by the famous Napoleon Hill: 'Our only limitations are those we set up in our minds.' Now, you might read that and say, 'That's inspiring!' But for me, it was more than that: it was a light-bulb moment; it was a life-changing moment! Little did I know that stumbling upon these quotes would stir my mind towards stepping out to launch a business.

All of a sudden, I became so motivated about my life, my goals and my dreams! I began to believe beyond any doubt that I could achieve anything if I set my mind to it. This stage of my life was the beginning of a positive mindset or, as some may call it, faith. Can I encourage you right now? Your mind is a powerhouse. Your thoughts are miracles waiting to happen. What you meditate on has the potential and power to go from the realm of the invincible to the realm of the visible! This is the infinite power of our minds. According to author James Allen, we choose our limits by reason of what we think and meditate about. The only place limitation exists right now is in your mind. If you would let the negative thoughts go, you would begin to soar in areas of your life that you never dreamed possible!

Oprah Winfrey once said, *'The greatest discovery of all time is that a person can change his future by merely changing his attitude'*. Where I am right now in life is a direct result of my thoughts. I started PVBS (www.pvbs.co) five years ago, and I am still running it today. In fact, we have now diversified. We

have a retail arm, a corporate arm and a school arm. How is this possible? It started with a mindset and the power of positive thought. Where you are right now is a product of your thoughts. In fact, your current thoughts will determine where you will be in twelve months' time and even in three years.

If you are not happy with where you currently are in life, there is good news: you can change it. In the words of Norman Vincent Peale, 'Change your thoughts and you change your world'. You are only a thought away from a change in your friendships, your relationships and your life! Let it be today. Let it be right now, in this moment. I wish I had learnt the power of positive thinking earlier. I wish I had believed in myself earlier. Whatever you feed your mind, it will show in your life. Start feeding your mind with dreams and goals, start feeding your mind with positivity and optimism, and you will be one step closer to a positive life. I have never seen someone who had a positive mindset also have a negative attitude. It's never too late. In this chapter, I want to share with you some negative and limiting thoughts I learnt to let go of in order to transform my thinking. Hear me when I say that positive thinking transformed my life; without it, I definitely would not be writing this book.

*If you don't like something, change it.
If you can't change it, change your attitude.*

- Maya Angelou

Attitude

The only disability in life is a bad attitude.

~ Scott Hamilton

I woke up every morning in Ghana to the sound of a rooster. We lived on a small block of land with a straight and narrow, standard three-bedroom building. I'm not sure if it actually passed as a house, because it had no showers or toilets. But at least there was a roof over our heads. At the time, I woke up every morning with a bad attitude. Why? Because I hated life there: living in poverty, being surrounded by a dirty environment, having no friends, walking a few hundred metres just to buy water to drink. I hated everything, and because of that, I woke up with a bad attitude, then I went about my day with a bad attitude and I went to bed with a bad attitude.

*When we are no longer able to change a situation,
we are challenged to change ourselves.*

~ Viktor E. Frankl

Most of us want a lot of things to change: work, relationships and so forth. But the reality is that, as much as we want things to change, they probably won't. Sorry to break it to you, but you're not going to be able to fire that one teacher you don't get along with, and you're not in the top seat at work. You don't get to change the things you don't like. Welcome to life. So, you have two options. Leave and find something else, although you'll most likely have something to complain about there, too. Your second option is to change your attitude.

I worked in different careers before starting my own business. My observation has been this: more times than not, when there needs to be a change, we are the ones who require the change. Right now, you might not be enjoying a particular subject at school, but whether you like it or not, you will have to sit an exam for the subject. That's not going to change, so the earlier you change your attitude, the better. There might be a teacher (or a few teachers) you don't get along with, but guess what? If anything's going to change, it has to be your attitude. You may feel that you just need a new job, new friends, a new sports club or a new family. Contrary to those beliefs, what you really need is a new attitude—a positive one.

*Our attitude towards others determines their
attitude towards us.*

- Earl Nightingale

I remember thinking during my high school years that a few teachers were giving me a tough time. But, really, I gave them the tough time. Every time they gave me a detention or a suspension, it was only because they were doing their job. I'm the one who had to change. I had to stop going around playing the victim game, thinking that no one liked me or that everyone else was out to get me. The same may be true for you. No one is out to get you, and not everyone hates you. So check your attitude. The problem is most likely there.

If you're having problems with a teacher, coordinator, friend, sibling, workmate or parent, it might be time for a change in your attitude towards them. Practise kindness. Be more polite, supportive and indispensable. Say *thank you* more, say *please* and

be more reliable. Remember to treat people the way you want to be treated, and you'll make a lot more friends in life, whether it's at school or work or even at home.

Choose To Have an Attitude of Gratitude

One of the reasons why I was never happy in Ghana was because I always focused on what I didn't have, instead of what I did have. Wayne Dyer once said, "If you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change." If we stop for a moment and look around, we will find that life itself is a gift and a blessing—the gift of life, the gift of friends and the gift of family. We tend to take for granted the good that is already present in our lives. Having been born and initially raised in a third-world country and returning to live there between the ages of thirteen and twenty has really helped me put things into perspective here in Melbourne, where I can sometimes take things for granted. I recall hating my legs as a teenager, because they were so skinny; they were what people used to call 'chicken legs.' I became so self-conscious that I would never wear shorts, even in the summer. However, in Ghana, there wasn't a single day that I didn't see someone without legs. Yes, you read that correctly: some people had no legs. I had taken for granted something that others didn't have. I remember having to take showers outside in a brick-and-cement set-up with a bucket of water. I saw how many teenagers have never had the opportunity to go to school, so they cannot read or write. Lack of clean water, power black outs, lack of welfare . . . I could go on, but that's enough to remind you of how we're blessed in the western world.

No matter how good or bad you think life is, wake up each day and be thankful for life. Someone somewhere else is fighting to survive.

~Eric Agyeman

Before you make another complaint, think of the blessings in your life. In fact, write them down and focus on them, instead of focusing on what you don't have.

Blessings:

- 1) Family
- 2) Friends
- 3) Ajob
- 4) Health
- 5) Food

Dr. Emmons, author of the book '*Thanks! How the New Science of Gratitude Can Make You Happier*' has been studying gratitude for almost ten years, and he is considered by many to be the world's leading authority on gratitude. The information in his book is based on research involving thousands of people; it was conducted by a number of different researchers around the world. One of the things these studies show is that practising gratitude can increase happiness levels by around 25%. This is significant, among other reasons, because, just as there's a certain weight that feels natural to your body and which your body strives to maintain, your basic level of happiness is set at a predetermined point. If something bad happens to you during the day, your happiness can drop momentarily, but then it returns to its natural set-point. Likewise, if something positive happens to you, your level of happiness rises, and then it returns once again to your happiness

set-point. A practice of gratitude raises your happiness set-point, so you can remain at a higher level of happiness, regardless of outside circumstances.

In addition, Dr. Emmons' research shows that those who practise gratitude tend to be more creative, bounce back more quickly from adversity, have a stronger immune system and have stronger social relationships than those who don't practise gratitude. He further points out that 'to say we feel grateful is not to say that everything in our lives is necessarily great. It just means that we are aware of our blessings'.

Dr Emmons' research also proved that the best medicine for stress may be an attitude of gratitude.

What's great about gratitude is that even on the worst days there is always something to be thankful for, and usually there is more than one thing.

~ Eric Agyeman

Choose To Be Happy

I mentioned a little earlier that I used to wake up every morning in Ghana with a bad attitude. I had a bad attitude because I wasn't happy, and I wasn't happy because my happiness was tied to comfort, convenience and material possessions. And so, living in poverty caused me to be upset with myself, my parents and, ultimately, life.

Each morning when I open my eyes I say to myself: I, not events, have the power to make me happy or unhappy today. I can choose which it shall be. Yesterday is dead, tomorrow hasn't arrived yet. I have just one day, today, and I'm going to be happy in it.

~ Groucho Marx

One of the biggest lies and deceptions in marketing and advertising is the thought that happiness is attained through material things, such as cars, degrees, a boat, a nice house and so forth. Happiness, however, has nothing to do with anything materialistic. Happiness is not achieved through outward appearance; it's found inwards.

True happiness is not based on diplomas, degrees or PhDs; otherwise, professors, doctors and engineers would be the happiest people in the world. Happiness is not determined by position; otherwise, Barack Obama and other world leaders would be the happiest people on Earth. It isn't based on money, because some of the happiest people I have met during my mission trips live in Cambodia and the Philippines. Achievements, awards and accolades are great, and by all means, you should strive to be an achiever in life. But don't let your happiness be dependent on your achievements or the lack thereof. Ask yourself this question: if I were to be stripped of every achievement, would I still be happy with myself?

Stop giving someone else the job of making you happy.

~ Joyce Meyer

Choose To Make Every Day A Thanks-Giving Day

I love the American idea of celebrating Thanksgiving once every year; if Australia copied their Thanksgiving Day idea, rather than their Halloween idea, I would be in! (Sorry, but I just can't stand the idea of people dressing up in witchcraft and other dark-themed clothing in the name of fun and lolly collecting.) I propose a daily Thanksgiving ritual. Every day, before you go to bed, write down ten things you are thankful for. Here are ten things I am thankful for, compiled from Lifehack.org.

1) **An Ability to Read**

If you're reading this right now, you have a lot to be thankful for.

2) **A Bed to Sleep in**

A bed is one of those things that's easy to take for granted, until you don't have one.

3) **Clean Water**

Many people on Earth lack access to clean water.

4) **Pain**

Without pain, it would be difficult to appreciate life's joys.

5) **Freedom of Speech**

Being able to express your thoughts and feelings freely should never be taken for granted.

6) **Eyesight**

Being able to see allows us to view the world's beauty.

7) **Diversity**

The world would be a boring place without diversity.

8) **Modern Medicine**

Without advances in modern medicine, many of us wouldn't be alive.

9) **Good Friends**

Often, it's the quality of friendships, not the quantity.

10) **Your Parents**

Even if they're dysfunctional, they gave you life.

We are more blessed than we realise. Believe it. You have everything in your life that you need right now. You may not have what you want, but you do have what you need. You may have seen this quote before, somewhere on the Internet; when it comes to putting things into perspective, this quote is right up there.

CHALLENGE:

- 1) Every day, write a list of three to ten things for which you are grateful; you can do this first thing in the morning or before going to bed at night.
- 2) Write a letter of gratitude to a person who has exerted a positive influence in your life, but whom you have not properly thanked. If you want to go the extra mile, set up a meeting with this person and read the letter to them face-to-face. I guarantee that this particular challenge will leave a smile on the person's face and will even take your friendship to a higher level of respect.

If you have food in your fridge, clothes on your back, a roof over your head and a place to sleep, you are richer than 75% of the world.

If you have money in the bank, your wallet, and some spare change, you are among the top 8% of the world's wealthy. If you woke up this morning with more health than illness, you are more blessed than the million people who will not survive this week.

If you have never experienced the danger of battle, the agony of imprisonment or torture or the horrible pangs of starvation, you are luckier than 500 million people alive and suffering. If you can read this message, you are more fortunate than 3 billion people in the world who cannot read it at all.

- Author Unknown

Thoughts from this chapter

- 1) *There is help available if I need it.*
- 2) *What seems like a dead-end can often be a new beginning*
- 3) *Every morning I wake up, I have a choice to make.*
- 4) *I am the master of my fate and the captain of my soul*

CHAPTER 6

I CAN DO ALL THINGS

I love a good underdog story just like the story of David and Goliath who I write about in my book *‘Take Me to the King’*, a journey of a teenage boy, who killed a giant named Goliath. In the 2015 NBA season, we saw the rise of an underdog player and team. I’m referring to none other than the 2015 MVP, Stephen Curry, and his team, the Golden State. I’m a big fan and follower of the NBA. In the 90s, I was a Michael Jordan fanatic (Let’s be honest—who wasn’t?) After he retired, I became a Los Angeles Lakers and Kobe Brian supporter. I like Michael Jordan and Kobe Brian, simply because they rose to the peak in their chosen fields, which greatly inspires me to work towards my goals. For the latter part of the last decade, the spotlight has been on King James; I’m talking about LeBron James. From the Cleveland Cavaliers to Miami Heat and then back to team Cleveland, LeBron is undoubtedly one of the greatest in our generation of NBA players. However, in the last few years, a very soft-spoken, humble and quiet achiever named Stephen Curry has come out of almost nowhere, and he is now arguably the game’s best all-round player. In the 2012–2013 season, he set a record for the number of three-pointers in a regular season: 272. This record wouldn’t last for long, as he broke it again in the following season and in the same year, leading his team to a championship victory. The last

time the Golden State Warriors won the NBA championships was in 1975, so this was a big deal. Stephen Curry also took out the MVP title to crown off a historic year of basketball for the Golden State Warriors, himself and the NBA.

Recently, I saw a commercial that featured him. In the commercial, he did his own voiceover of a letter he received from a coach back in his college days. What you have to keep in mind is the fact that Stephen Curry is only 6 ft. 0 and weighs 84 kg (Lebron James weighs in at 113 kg). The letter said some horrible things about Stephen Curry, such as 1) he needs to improve considerably as a ball handler, 2) he will have limited success at the next level, and 3) he isn't likely to win a game for the team. Well, let's just hope that whoever wrote that letter is no longer employed by the NBA. I say all this about Stephen Curry because five powerful words are written on the shoes that he wears on the court: 'I can do all things'! This quote is taken from the Bible (Philippians 4:13). People told Curry he couldn't do this or that; they told him he would never make a mark in the NBA, but he proved them all wrong and made history. Stephen Curry is proof that you, too, can do all things!

Believe in Yourself

Instead of giving yourself reasons why you can't, start giving yourself reasons why you can!

There are a lot of people and things in life that will deter you from achieving your greatest potential and living your life to the fullest. People, as well, will do anything, through either negative words or negative actions, to discourage you. With so much set up to discourage us in life, the last thing we need is to be our own stumbling block. Sometimes in life, you have to be your own cheer squad. You have to believe in yourself and in your dreams.

You have to believe in yourself, otherwise you can't do it. If you don't believe in yourself, how do expect anyone else to? Because ultimately, you're the one who has to do it.

- Donny Osmond

When you believe in yourself, you send a message to everything and everyone around you that you are in it to win it. I'm not talking about being arrogant and cocky. Rather, I'm encouraging you to believe that you can be all that you've dreamt you could be and even more! Why write yourself off? Is it because of your background? Remember that Steve Jobs was a refugee from Syria, yet that was never an excuse for him. Is it because of the way you look? What others say about you? The truth is that, if you look hard enough, you will find excuses. But you cannot have excuses and results; you can only choose one. Consider the words of American television journalist Diane Sawyer: 'Whatever you want in life, other people are going to want it, too. Believe in yourself enough to accept the idea that you have an equal right to it'. Too many people rely on others and seek validation from others regarding their dreams and their future. No matter how many believe in you, at the end of the day, it's your destiny. Whether you reach your goals is dependent on your belief in yourself. Mohammed Ali believed in himself and in his gift of boxing before he was ever a world champion.

I am the greatest; I said that even before I knew I was.

- Mohammed Ali

Don't wait until you accomplish a goal or a dream to finally believe in it. Believing in a goal or dream right from the start is what will help you to achieve it! In the words of W. Clement Stone, 'Whatever the mind of a man can conceive and believe, it can achieve'. Just ask anyone who has excelled in their field of art, sports or profession; they all will tell you to believe in yourself. Maybe you're in a tough and challenging season in your life, and everything around you seems contrary to your dreams and goals. But that's the power and brilliance of the mind: it can see beyond your current struggles and envision the future. If you are struggling to visualise it, set up a 'vision board'. Put up images of your dream job, dream car, and anything else you dream of.

Once you have a vision board, you need to believe things will work out for you. Believe that you will get the job. Believe that you will do great in your final exams. Believe that your family will reunite as one again. Believe that you will meet great new friends. Believe in love and that one day you will find your true love. Believe that no matter what happens in your life, it's for a purpose. Believe that everything will align and fall in place for you at the right time. BELIEVE. Start today. Start believing that you're a success. Start believing in your dreams and in your talents and gifts. If you can believe it, you can surely achieve it!

Believe in a Vision for Yourself

What are you passionate about? What is it that you would like to accomplish? What goals are you going to set for yourself? Without a sense of vision, we can easily get lost, tired and weary. We may want to give up. But when you have something that wakes you up every morning, it serves as a drive, as a benchmark for your efforts. Whatever this vision may be for you, believe in it. Even if no one else believes in it at first, believe in it, because you see

what others don't see. That's what makes you a visionary, that's what sets you apart: the ability to see before others do.

The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.

~ Eleanor Roosevelt

Your 'I Can' Is Far Greater Than Your 'IQ'

Academics was never my strong point, but in the education system, we're made to believe that great grades equals to a great paying job, and subsequently, a great life. Because I didn't have the greatest IQ and because I was never the smartest kid, I always doubted my future; I doubted that I could ever be successful. Due to the negativity around me, I simply ended up thinking, *I can't do a lot of things*.

It's amazing how often we say we can't: *I can't win* or *I can't do this*. This is similar to the case of 'I am' that we discussed earlier. You need to believe it for yourself and speak it throughout your life: you have the power to change your own circumstance. In the same way, whenever you say *I can't*, you shut off your 'I can!' and the possibility of something positive happening in your life. If you say, 'I can't lose weight', you shut off the desire and possibility to try to eat healthy and exercise. Instead, you are saying, 'Yes, I accept weight gain; I accept fat'. Remember that your *I CAN!* is greater than your IQ! Too many people are discouraged, because they don't always get the best results in exams. But one exam or test does not determine the rest of your future—your attitude does. I know too many people who were

college dropouts. They were never scholars, yet they had an *I CAN!* attitude. Today, they are some of the most influential people and inventors of our time!

There will always be someone who thinks you can't succeed. Make sure that someone is never you.

- Author Unknown

Believe you CAN pass your exams with flying colours, and you are halfway there. Believe you CAN have amazing friendships, and you will be halfway there. Believe you CAN have a prosperous career in your dream job, and you will be halfway there. Fifty percent of your success in anything stems from the power of your mind and your decision to say *I CAN!* Your IQ is important, education is absolutely important and your grades in school are important, but to be successful, you first need to have an *I CAN!* attitude! Consider it this way: if you have a low IQ, in order to get it up, you need to first believe and have an *I CAN!* attitude! If anything, *I CAN* is shorter than *I CAN'T*, so go on and add it to your vocabulary, along with *LOL* and other shortened phrases.

Your IQ is important, but to be successful, you first need to have an I CAN! attitude!

Write down the *I CAN!* things you need to believe in so that you can be on your way to achieving them.

1. I Can _____
2. I Can _____
3. I Can _____
4. I Can _____

Ever heard of Harry Potter? What about the Apple iPhone? Both were started by people who didn't have the best educational backgrounds. But they definitely had an *I Can* attitude!

J.K. Rowling

J.K. Rowling was born in Gloucestershire, UK. She attended secondary school at Wyedean School and College. She also studied in Paris for a year and then moved to London to work as a secretary for Amnesty International. The idea of the Harry Potter series came to her in 1990, when she was on a delayed train from Manchester to London. She immediately began to write the story. However, soon after, her mother died, and that heavily affected J. K. Rowling. Then she moved to Portugal to teach English. While there, she got married. Within a year, she got separated and moved to Edinburgh, Scotland, with her daughter from the marriage. She was then diagnosed with clinical depression. Rowling was thinking of suicide.

She completed her first novel while living on welfare. The Harry Potter book was rejected by all twelve of the publishing houses she submitted it to. Finally, after a year, she got a publishing deal with a small English publishing house, but she was advised to get a day job. Nobody believed she could make a living by writing books. Of course, her books went on to become one of the greatest and most successful movie franchises in the world! Oh, and Rowling became a multimillionaire in the process. This author started out with absolutely nothing, yet she made something of her life.

Many of the world's greatest achievers all have one thing in common. They didn't all have PhDs from Harvard University, they weren't handed a silver spoon and they weren't second-generation millionaires. I know—huh? You're confused, perhaps, wondering how on Earth they made it. Let me give you another

clue. I will share with you another story of someone you may have heard of. In fact, his invention is probably lying right next to you or in your pocket as you are reading this.

Steve Jobs

Steve Jobs was born in San Francisco, California, and was adopted by Paul and Clara Jobs. In 1961, the family moved to Mountain View, California. This area was becoming a centre for electronics. Steve spent a lot of time working in the garage workshop of a neighbour who worked at Hewlett-Packard, an electronics manufacturer. Jobs also enrolled in the Hewlett-Packard Explorer Club. That was when he saw his first computer; from then on, he was fascinated by them. In 1975, after quitting college and returning from India, where he'd studied eastern religions, he joined a group known as the Homebrew Computer Club. One of the group members was building a small computer, and Steve was very impressed with it. Before long, they formed their own company and called it the Apple Computer Company.

At that time, computers were extremely big and expensive, so Steve decided to focus on building affordable smaller computers for individuals. In the first year, their company made \$2.7 million in sales, and within three years, their sales jumped to \$200 million.

Believe you can, and you're halfway there.

- Theodore Roosevelt

The one thing they all had in common was the fact that they started with nothing, yet made something out of it.

Did you get that? J. K. Rowling started working on her Harry Potter project when she was on welfare. So, what's your excuse? Lack of finances, because you're on Centrelink? Not good enough. Rowling started when she was on what is a Centrelink equivalent. I started PVBS in between jobs; I was unemployed at the time, studying full time. If J. K. Rowling did it and if I did it, then you can do it! Rowling is both influential and very well off, all because she took the first step with an idea. Take your first step today, and who knows where you could be in five to ten years? I dare you to mark today's date and write next to it, 'The day I began working on my dream'.

And Steve Jobs—whoa! He was born out of wedlock and put up for adoption. He dropped out of college, then changed the world! Again, I ask: what's your excuse? There are too many people today who have decided that they cannot have a successful future or they cannot be anything because of their upbringing in an unhealthy home, environment and so forth. Guess what? You're not the first person to think that. I always thought the same thing. I used to doubt myself because of my background and skin colour. Stupid as it sounds, that was me. I had to live in Ghana for seven years. I lived in poverty, in a house with no shower or toilet. I had nothing, yet I made up my mind that, even though I was starting with nothing, I would not keep living my life like that. Having nothing to start with can be discouraging, but let that reality drive you to do more and become more!

You don't have to be great to start, but you have to start in order to be great!

~ Zig Ziglar

Do Not Compare Yourself with Others

In high school, I was the fastest runner. One time, I entered seven events in zone athletics, and I won them all. I was the Usain Bolt of my day! And I was very competitive. On the basketball court, I was all right, too. I was the second shortest player on the team, but I always did the jump ball in the centre. Because I was so good at these sports, I had a lot of pride. I thought, *Yep, I'm the greatest thing since the toaster made bread brown* (no idea where I got that from!). I thought I was better than everyone else. Clearly, my sporting brilliance gave me a big head. However, on the flip side, I used to get jealous of students who did better than me academically. I thought my competitiveness was just a high school thing, but ever since I've been out of high school, I've found that I struggle to not compare myself with others. One of the greatest mistakes we can make is to compare ourselves with others. We compare our grades, careers, cars and looks. I have found all of these comparisons to be a waste of time! No matter how great your life is or how handsome or talented you think you are, there will always be someone else who is better than you, someone else who has achieved more, has gotten better grades, has displayed better fashion and so forth.

Your job is not to compare yourself with others, but rather, to compare yourself with the person you were yesterday! The only

person you should be in competition with is yourself: the person you are and the person you want to become.

Behind The Scenes VS Highlight Show Reel

One of the worst kinds of comparisons is when we compare our behind-the-scenes selves to someone's show reel. We compare all of our flaws, shortcomings, weaknesses and failures to other people's successes, strengths and wins. Everyone has their seasons of ups and downs: everyone has their highs and their lows, and everyone has their time to shine. We all have our share of weaknesses and flaws, but sometimes, we don't see the flaws of others, so we assume that they don't have any. We believe that everything is perfect for them, that they have it all together. Everyone has their share of trouble. There is not one perfect family on Earth, nor a perfect individual. You don't believe me? Go buy a celebrity magazine and read some of the interviews. Be easy on yourself; you're not the only one struggling and dealing with issues, so stop comparing yourself to someone's good season.

Comparison Actually Makes No Sense

Every single one of us is born different, and we all have different purposes and dreams in life. Therefore, there really are no grounds for comparison. In an examination hall, when students from different courses are mixed together, the moment you look over your shoulder to copy someone's paper, you fail. That's how life is. We're all on different journeys, different tests, different dreams and goals. The moment our eyes shift to look at someone else is the moment we begin to lose our focus and identity. Then we begin to compare ourselves with them, and if we find them

better than us, we start battling insecurity. Before we know it, our self-esteem has taken a blow.

No matter how good their shoes look, many people have holes in their socks; you can't see their problems.

~ Tony Gaskins, motivational coach

You are the way you are for a reason. And everything you have is everything you need right now. So be happy in your own skin. Be happy for other people when they do well and succeed, because you will, too, if you focus on yourself, your goals and your dreams! I have come to understand my identity: who I am and who I am not. I'm aware of my weaknesses and my strengths. I know that part of my life mission is encouraging and inspiring people to live their lives to the fullest. These are the areas I focus on. Yes, there will always be better speakers and there will always be more successful apparel brands than PVBS, but at the end of the day, I'm focused on me and becoming the best version of me, rather than a carbon copy of someone else. Remember: Be yourself (unless you can be a pirate—then, be a pirate). Be yourself, because everyone else is taken. Theodore Roosevelt said it best: 'Comparison is the thief of joy.' Stop being robbed, stop looking for validation. Instead, become comfortable with who you are.

Stop looking to others for validation. You're an original. Become comfortable with who you are.

~ Eric Agyeman

Thoughts from this chapter

- 1) *Stop looking for validation from others.*
- 2) *My I CAN! attitude will get me further in life than my IQ.*
- 3) *I can still succeed if other people don't believe in me, but I can never succeed if I don't believe in myself.*
- 4) *Where there is no vision, people are lost, disengaged and more likely to give up.*

PART 3

MARTIN LUTHER KING JNR'S STORY

CHAPTER 7

MARTIN LUTHER KING JNR'S STORY

One of America's Darkest Times

There is no denying that America has gone through dark times; being the most powerful country in the world has certainly come with its challenges. There is also no denying that racial inequality has been one of the most talked-about crises for decades. During the 1960s, a young man decided to stand up and be vocal about segregation and racism in America. His name was Martin Luther King Jnr.

What I love about Dr King is that he allowed a dark season in America's history to form what would ultimately become his life's purpose and, eventually, his legacy. Initially, I saw my seven years in Africa as hell, as the worst time of my life; but later, I realised that everything I am today stemmed from that dark period of my life. Likewise, Dr King's impact would be stronger because he allowed his dark season to give value and purpose to his life.

I Have a Dream

According to Younge, the night before the March on Washington, on 28 August 1963, Martin Luther King Jr asked his aides for advice about his upcoming speech. ‘Don’t use the lines about “I have a dream”’, his adviser, Wyatt Walker, told him. ‘It’s trite; it’s cliché. You’ve used it too many times already.’

King had indeed employed the refrain several times before. It had been featured in an address just a week earlier at a fundraiser in Chicago, and a few months before that at a huge rally in Detroit. As with most of his speeches, both had been well received, but neither had been regarded as momentous.

This speech had to be different. While King had become a national political figure, relatively few outside the black church and the civil rights movement had heard him give a full address. With all three television networks offering live coverage of the march for jobs and freedom, this would be his oratorical introduction to the nation.

After a wide range of conflicting suggestions from his staff, King left the lobby at the Willard hotel in DC to put the final touches to a speech that he hoped would be received, in his words, ‘like the Gettysburg address’. ‘I am now going upstairs to my room to counsel with my Lord’, he told them. ‘I will see you all tomorrow.’

Political marches in Washington are now commonplace, but in 1963, attempting to stage a march of that size in that place was unprecedented. The movement had high hopes for a large turnout and, originally, set a goal of 100,000 people. From the reservations on coaches and trains alone, they guessed that they should be at least close to that figure. But when the morning came, that expectation did little to calm their nerves. Within a couple of hours, thousands were pouring through the stations every five

minutes, while almost two buses per minute rolled into DC from across the country. About 250,000 people showed up that day.

Wearing a black suit, black tie and white shirt, King edged through the melee towards the podium and began to deliver his speech. At first, he stuck to his notes and stood still behind the podium. However, moments later, a lady by the name of Mahalia Jackson (Dr King's favourite gospel singer) cried out, 'Tell 'em about the dream, Martin'. Based on that encouragement, Dr King stepped aside from the pulpit and began to speak from his heart. These were the words that he spoke: 'So even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream'. Within seconds, the man was on fire. His speech had just turned into a Sunday Pentecostal preaching message, with a touch from the Holy Spirit. People began to clap and cheer him on. Dr King knew he was on to something. Ironically, his advisers' comments when the crowd were chanting were 'Aw, sh*t. He's using the dream'.

On that day, Dr King caught the attention of everyone, even President John F. Kennedy, who was watching the whole thing on TV in the White House. Having never heard an entire King speech before, he remarked, 'He's damned good. Damned good'. King also caught the attention of his haters and enemies, so much so that the FBI's assistant director of domestic intelligence recommended, 'We must mark him now, if we have not done so before, as the most dangerous Negro of the future of this nation'.

Dr King's dream was a threat to some, and so, for the next four years, his family were the victims of constant attacks, attempted assassinations and house bombings. King's enemies tried everything, and in the end, they did get him. They killed the dreamer.

A Dream in a Dark Place

Dr King had a dream, even when it was not easy to follow. He had a dream, even when his peers of the same skin colour were losing hope and dying by the day. King had a dream, and he would not be swayed from it. Yes, you might be going through a tough time right now, faced with increasing challenges and on the verge of giving up. I want to encourage you: Keep your dream alive. Don't give up on your dream because of the adverse season you are in.

I will never forget having to walk kilometres everywhere in Ghana as a teenager to make my way around. On those walks, I would think to myself, 'One day, I will be successful. I will bring hope to people. I will write a book and I will run a business to help people'. I had a dream, even though I was in a dark place. But when I looked around at the poverty I was living in, my dream seemed like a fantasy, like a wish that would never happen. Well, this is my third book. I'm living proof that dreams do come true.

I want to reach out to you right now. Wherever you are in your life right now, no matter how dark your world may feel right now, hold on to your dream. Hold on to it with both hands. Hold on to it like your life depends on it, because it does!

At a time of great depression amongst African Americans, one man had a dream and a hope. I believe that, as long as you have a dream, you can come out of any situation for the better. While others were looking at the difficulties, the problems and the issues, Dr King was looking for the opportunity, the solution and the light in the midst of the darkness.

They killed the man, but they couldn't kill the dream.

~ Eric Agyeman

Between your mother's womb and your tomb, what will your dash be?

After several attempts on his life, assassins killed Dr Martin Luther King Jnr on April 4, 1968. He was thirty-nine years of age. His tombstone was engraved with the day that he'd been born and the day that he died, just like all tombstones, it was the dash in the middle of his birth date and death date that tells the story of his life and will forever be remembered for. Between your mother's womb and your tomb, what will your dash be? What will your legacy be? How will you be remembered?

Dr King's dash and his legacy came from America's darkest years. I'm amazed by the impact and direction our future can take when we look for opportunities in difficult times and light in dark places.

My Dash

For me, running PVBS was a result of my seven years in Ghana, where I saw, firsthand, kids as young as five selling biscuits and other food on the roadside. I thought to myself, *How can the cycle of poverty be broken if kids who should be in school are on the streets selling things?* This thought sparked the idea for our school leaver jackets initiative, Class of Change. For every Year 12 jacket or jumper that we sell, we allocate 50% of our profits to fund education projects in Ghana, South Africa and Cambodia. After being in operation for two years with my business called PVBS (Class of Change Arm - started in 2013), we have been able to raise just over \$23,000 through our charity partners, which has impacted more than 1500 children and funded the construction of two new classrooms in Ghana. Our mission, or our dash, is to break the cycle of poverty by providing children in developing countries access to education. Our goal is to help to drastically

reduce the number of primary children—currently, 61 million—who are not in school around the world (Rose).

I also use my story of overcoming suicide to encourage kids in high schools all over Australia. My life is a testimony that, no matter where you came from, what family you were born into or what difficulties life can bring, you can find opportunity in the midst of it all and become everything you were born to be. These 2 things represent my dash in life, what will your dash be.

Thoughts from this chapter

- 1) *How do I want to be remembered?*
- 2) *They killed the man but couldn't kill the dream.*
- 3) *What will my dash be; what legacy am I leaving behind?*
- 4) *People need to hear my story.*

PART 4

A STORY FOR THE DREAMERS

CHAPTER 8

WALK ON WATER

I have a deep passion for helping young people become dreamers and be all that they were born to be, so the following two chapters are devoted to the dreamers. This is for the dreamers, the ones who have a desire, deep down, to make a difference—the ones who sit up at night coming up with world-changing ideas. As I share my entrepreneurial and business journey with you, I hope that you will be inspired to go after those dreams you've shelved and talked yourself out of. I hope my story will instill you with the belief and courage that you can do it!

Don't live the same year 75 times and call it a life

~ Robin Sharma

The fear of failure, the fear of trying new things, the fear of the unknown and the fear of committing to a relationship or friendship: these are just some factors that have hindered so many dreams from being achieved and robbed so many people of their fullest potential. Perhaps our fear of failure and our nature to choose safety over risk is a lesson we all learned as children. Do you remember, as a child, how many times your parents would say no

and don't touch that; it's dangerous? Every parent's priority is for their kids' safety. I remember having my BMX confiscated a few times as a teenager by my dad, because I would use it to try and perform dangerous stunts in our backyard. I copped a few bruises from those adventurous sessions. At the time, I understood why dad would always confiscate something that made me happy: my safety was his priority. But I would always go back to doing stunts on my bike, even after my dad lectured me about why I shouldn't. I guess there was something in me to break the rules, to experiment and test things out for myself, even if it meant being bruised here and there. I'm glad I kept that attitude in my early twenties, when it came to pursuing my dreams. Yes, I still cop bruises, financial bruises. Yes, I do make business mistakes that hurt, but I have resolved not to live a safe boat life.

The Boat Club

Life aboard an anchored boat is an unfulfilled life. It's void of adventure, because safety and the fear of failure are priorities in the person's life. The boat life social club believes in imitation, instead of initiation. They live by routine; anything new and out of the ordinary frustrates them. They enjoy knowing what's going to happen next, because it gives them a sense of control over their life. They hate change; in fact, they believe change is evil and that it originates from the father of evil, the devil. The boat club live by a simple life motto: if it hasn't been done, there's a reason, and it can't be done. You probably have some boat friends, but you haven't even realised it yet. You know the dude who always tells you that 'your dreams are too big' and the girlfriend who asks 'what makes you think you can achieve that?' Yeah, those people. Small-minded people try and limit everyone else around them.

No man ever became great by imitation.

- Samuel Johnson

Too many people are born in a boat and die in a boat. Maybe because they have never seen someone walk on water before, they fear sharks, failure and the unknown. Or maybe they simply are comfortable living the boat life. If you've never seen someone step out and walk on water, let it start with you! Do what has never been done in your family. Do what none of your friends have ever done. The fact that it hasn't been done doesn't make it impossible—it makes it exciting! Harold R McAlindon says it like this '***Don't follow where the path may lead. Go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.***'

When you die, you will be put in a box, but while you're alive, don't allow anyone to put you in a box.

- Author Unknown

The Boat Family

You might have written yourself off from becoming anything great, because no one in your family has graduated from university, so you think you can't, either. Maybe your family members all earn below a certain threshold, and that's become a limitation for you. Perhaps you come from a poor background, and you think success is bad and there's no such thing as reaching for your dreams. I

wrote this book to tell you that all those doubts and fears are lies, big fat lies! You are not defined by your family background or upbringing. In fact, I strongly believe that YOU were called to break the limitations in your family. I strongly believe that you are the generation that will set a new trend of success, influence and positivity! Follow the guidance of Zoe Zantamata: ‘Don’t let your fear of what could happen make nothing happen’.

I’ve met some people whose biggest fear is that they will end up like their parents: divorced, addicted to drugs, hopeless, etc. But who said that you will end up like your parents? You were not born to be their carbon copy; you were not born to be their imitation! I believe we are born to bring a shift and a new standard to our family. So instead of using your bad family circumstance as an excuse to doubt yourself and your future, use it to fuel your future and believe that you are the change they are waiting for! Many of you have younger siblings. Everything you’re doing today for your future is going to affect them, so affect them in a positive way! When you break the limitations and restrictions of your family, you create an atmosphere of hope and life, not just for yourself, but for your younger siblings, who will have a better chance in life, thanks to your choice.

I married the girl of my dreams in 2012; she was the first Arabic lady to marry outside her culture. When we first started dating, she feared we would never end up together, because no one else had married outside their culture. But today, that limitation and fear has been broken, and I’m sure her five younger siblings have one less fear to go through because of their older sister. Nelson Mandela would sum it up like this ‘It always seems impossible until it’s done.’

Whatever you think is impossible, it may very well be because you haven't seen it done. Go on . . . be the first!

~ Eric Agyeman

Follow Your Heart and Do What Makes You Happy

YOLO. Life's too short to not do something scary or go on an adventure. Getting out of the boat is uncomfortable; it's a big risk. When I started PVBS, it was a big risk, financially and timewise. Yet, three years later, I am amazed at the impact we're making overseas. Starting our Class of Change Arm of my business PVBS was another risk. I went through a phase where I thought, *this is going to be amazing; this is going to change lives*. But the next moment, I was fighting negative thoughts: *What if this fails? Is this worth the risk?*

Theodore Roosevelt understood what it meant to be a risk taker. He said:

I choose not to be a common man. Me, it is my right to be uncommon if I can. I'll seek opportunity, not security. I do not wish to be a kept citizen—humbled and dulled by having the state look after me. I want to take the calculated risk, to dream and to build, to fail and to succeed. I'll refuse to live from hand to mouth. I'll prefer the challenges of life to the guaranteed existence. The thrill of fulfilment to the stale calm of Utopia. I will never cower before any master nor bend to any friend. It is my heritage to stand erect, proud,

and unafraid, to think and act for myself and face the world boldly and say, ‘This I have done.’

From experience and observation, I know that life will always offer us the opportunities to move forward in our careers, family and friendships, but in order to move forward, we must encounter an element of risk. Part of that risk involves leaving the known, the familiar, to go to the unknown. This isn’t easy to do at all, perhaps because taking a risk automatically invites the element of failure into the equation. *Failure* is a word that is not compatible in a winning society. It’s a word that no one wants to be faced with, and so we avoid it at all cost. The fear of failure cripples us.

We live in a society where there is a lot of pressure to live up to the status quo and a lot of pressure to keep up with the Joneses, who are both doctors and drive a Maserati and Bentley, respectively—no, wait, I mean a V8 Holden HSV and a Ford FPV. *Stop comparing yourself with others. Stop looking around to see what others are doing and start looking within yourself to discover what you want to do.* Your future shouldn’t be defined by some status quo or by the pressures of keeping up with other people. Rather, your future should be defined by your passions and what makes you happy. Let me tell you this: isn’t everything. I’ve worked at some very financially rewarding jobs, yet I left to pursue speaking and starting my own apparel brand, because that is my strength. Moreover, it’s what I love to do; it is rewarding.

*Hold fast to dreams, for if dreams die, life is a broken-winged
bird that cannot fly.*

~ Langston Hughes, U.S. writer

When I was working in a top-four bank, I was comfortable in my role; the pay was pretty good, too. After deciding that I wanted to move on and start my own business, I still took six months to actually do it. Six months of thinking and worrying about whether I was making the right decision. Logically, I was making the wrong decision: the level of risk was pretty high, with a mortgage, a car payment and every other bill you could think of. But in my heart, I knew I was making the right choice. I ended up following my heart.

Your parents might give you advice; definitely open your ears and listen to them. Your teacher might also offer you some opinions. So will your career advisor at your school, so will your friends and even strangers! Most likely, they won't all tell you the exact same thing, and this can be confusing sometimes. I've been there; I was told by one person to study accounting and by another person to study marketing. Arrrrgh! What to do??! At the end of the day, no one knows you like you do. Only you know what truly makes you happy, what truly makes you come alive. For me, speaking to inspire people makes me come alive. I love to uplift and encourage young people with the power of my words. One of the rewards of speaking is the testimonials I get to hear from the students after each engagement about how my story helped to change their world. Some students come to me to say *thank you*. That *thank you* alone is an amazing internal feeling, but some students go even further, saying, 'What you spoke about today was spot on. That's everything I've been going through

and struggling with. Thank you for your encouragement!’ Others break into tears; at times, I’ve had to hold back tears myself. These are moments that can’t compare, moments I can’t put a monetary value on, moments that I cannot forget. It’s in these moments that I am reminded that I’m living in my purpose!

Don't let someone else create your world, for when they do, they will always create it too small.

~ Edwin Louis Cole

What’s your heart telling you? Whatever it is, take some time out and acknowledge it, because in the end, it’s the things we never did that we regret. Remember the words of Napoleon Hill: ‘No man can succeed in a line of endeavour he does not like’.

I’m challenging you today: leave your boat, abandon your comfort zone and do something you have always wanted to do, whether it’s to travel and work overseas for a year, whether it’s to volunteer for a charity overseas or locally, or whether it’s to start a business. Whatever it is, start on it right away, so that when you’re old, you won’t look back and say, ‘I wish I had done that’. Don’t wait until every question has been answered and every box ticked before you move. Martin Luther King Junior once said, ‘Take the first step in faith. You don’t have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step’. Take the first step today; in 10 years, you will thank yourself for having done so.

Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma - which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of others' opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition.

- Steve Jobs

Thoughts from this chapter

- 1) *Don't be held back by the restrictions of family.*
- 2) *Always follow my heart.*
- 3) *Do one thing every day that scares me.*

CHAPTER 9

DREAMING BIG

All men dream but not equally. Those men that dream at night in the dusty recesses of their minds awaken to find that it was just vanity. But those that dream by day are the dangerous ones, for they dream with their eyes open, to make sure that their dreams come true.

~ T. E. Lawrence

The world in which we live today and all that it contains are the results of people's dreams. To me, this is enough encouragement to realize that dreams can come true! People like you and me, 'ordinary' people, young, old, male, female: they all had one thing in common—a dream. They believed in their dreams and decided to follow through. This world and everything in it is a testament to the dedication of dreamers.

Possibly the most-asked question of little kids is *What do you want to be when you grow up?* It starts in kindergarten as a fun game of imagination, and the kids draw cute pictures. We tend to answer that question with really common answers, like *I want to*

be a fireman or I want to be a doctor. It's fun and cute, hearing how kids answer and seeing their faces light up as they speak about their future. I don't even remember what I said I wanted to be when I was in kindergarten, but that's because I didn't move to New Zealand until I was six, and I never actually had the opportunity to go kindergarten in Ghana.

But by the end of Year 8, the cuteness fades away, and the same question, like a transformer, evolves into a gigantic, fire-breathing monster that haunts you and, more times than not, frustrates you, because you have either no clue or too many options. I went through my whole secondary schooling not knowing what the heck I wanted to do. Trust me: if you're in the same boat, it's normal. I encourage you to start out by finding what makes you happy.



*Everything manmade you see in the world was once just a dream.
Everywhere you look is proof that dreams come true.*

~ Author Unknown



Focus On Your Strengths

As I mentioned, there was point in time when I wanted to be a rapper when I was older. I mean, I could make a rhyme or two, but nothing fancy. I was also a big Michael Jackson fan; I used to moonwalk and hold my pants, shouting, 'awooo!' (those were the days). The funny thing is that, back then and even these days, whenever I go to a party, people just make assumptions. They look at me and ask with a grin, 'You can dance, yeah?' or say, 'You look like you can rap'. They stereotype. I try to look shy

and modest and reply, ‘Nah, not really’. But for some reason, they think I’m lying. This is why I don’t dance much at parties: I don’t want to ruin the false impression that I can dance (Shhhhh. Let’s keep this a secret between you and me).

Don’t let what you can’t do interfere with what you can.

– Unknown

Let me say this right now, especially to all my non-African friends: not every black person can sing or dance!! There! But seriously, I’m glad I never pursued a career in dancing and singing. Don’t get me wrong; I love music and dance. But, truth be told, I really do suck at it—even my wife agrees! My point is that you should be careful about pursuing something that people say you’re great at. Pursue only what you fully believe you’re great at! Only you truly know. What are your strengths? What are your weaknesses? Write them down, and learn to stay away from your weaknesses.

Strengths

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

Weaknesses

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

Your journey begins once you have identified your strengths and your passions.

Sometimes, we waste too much time and energy investing in our weaknesses, instead of using that energy to invest in our strengths. If dancing isn't your strength, don't waste your time and money with dance lessons—seriously. After you identify your strength, begin to invest in it, whether that involves attending seminars, buying books on the subject matter or travelling to a particular place to learn more. Some of you might want to become builders, so start investing and spending your time in this field. Others may want to pursue music, so start attending classes in the particular field of music and keep your eyes and ears open for the next X Factor or Australian Idol audition.

Work It

I don't need an alarm to wake me up; my passion wakes me up.

~ Author Unknown

Once you start investing in your strength, you begin working closer and closer towards your dream. You begin to perfect and hone your craft. You're working towards becoming a leader, a specialist in your field. I watched a video not too long ago of Ne-Yo; it was a short documentary of him behind the scenes. The opening scene of the video is of him in the gym, boxing. He goes on to explain some of his achievements, including writing hit songs for the likes of Beyoncé, Rihanna and Jennifer Hudson, just to name a few. He's released five albums to date and starred in two movies within a year. To summarize his achievements, he says

he is a professional in five different industries. He describes his career as a marathon, not a sprint. Therefore, he must consistently work hard, in order to stay at the top. Ne-Yo is talented, without a doubt. But talent alone doesn't make a person influential or successful. According to Walt Disney, 'All our dreams can come true, if we have the courage to pursue them'.

The fight is won or lost far away from witnesses—behind the lines, in the gym and out there on the road, long before I dance under those lights.

~ Muhammed Ali, American boxer

Will Smith, one of my favourite actors, has this to say on talent and working hard:

Talent you have naturally. Skill is only developed by hours and hours and hours of beating on your craft. I've never really viewed myself as particularly talented; where I excel is ridiculous, sickening work ethic. While the other guy is sleeping, I'm working. While the other guy is eating, I'm working. If you don't dedicate yourself to becoming better every single day, you will never be able to communicate with people the way that you want. The only thing that I see that is distinctly different about me is that I'm not afraid to DIE on a treadmill. You might have more talent than me, you might be smarter than me, but if we get on a treadmill together, there are two things:

- 1) You're getting off first or
- 2) I'm going to DIE. 'It's really that simple' He says.

The dictionary is the only place where success comes before work. Hard work is the price we must pay for success. I think you can accomplish anything if you are willing to pay the price.

- Vince Lombardi

Ne-Yo and Will Smith are just a few of the successful people in the entertainment industry who have worked very hard to reach their dreams and who continue to work hard. There are many others. I am sure you have favourite actors or actresses. Google them and do a little research about their stories, and you will be inspired. One of the reasons that I've been able to write two books is because I love reading, learning, hearing stories of successful people and doing research for my business I spend hours (and sometimes, sleepless nights) to make sure that, every day, I am working and investing towards my dreams and goals. I don't want to be ordinary at what I do; I want to be extraordinary. To be that, I need to put in extra. Your output will never exceed your level of input. So start working towards something you're passionate about today. Start investing and sharpening your skills, because one day, it will cause you to stand out in your field of expertise. You will be more valuable and a greater influence, simply because of your years of hard work.

I hated every minute of training, but I said, 'Don't quit. Suffer now and live the rest of your life as a champion'.

- Muhammed Ali

Never Ever Give Up

Since I started PVBS, there have been many times when I have wanted to give up—just being honest. The truth is that following your heart and creating your- own path aren't always easy; there are tough times along the way. The hardest part for me was the start, trying to get the brand exposure and trying to get Dream Starter into high schools. I was rejected so many times that it felt discouraging. One time, eight schools in a row said *no*. But I kept on going. What's really helped me is the knowledge that things take time before they become big. I don't believe in the term *overnight success*. More likely, three hard years of work results in a success.

Our generation is made to believe that whatever you want, you can have it now. Release yourself from the pressure of having to have everything done within a short time span, plan and have short-term goals. But don't overpromise yourself, because when you do and you under deliver, it can be depressing. Sometimes, it can lead to your feeling like you want to give up. Anything worthwhile requires time to grow. Reaching your goals and your dreams will take time, and that's okay. I would prefer my journey to be a marathon than a sprint. So don't be discouraged by the rejections you'll hear along the way. If you don't give up, you will eventually win!

The word impossible is made up of two words: I'm Possible!

- Author Unknown

Anything's possible; it's only a matter of time. While you're diligently working away, always celebrate the small successes along the way. I remember having the opportunity to meet Hamish and Andy; they wore our apparel on Channel 10. That was a big win that I celebrated for a while. In fact, on days when I have wanted to give up, I have looked at that photo and told myself, 'Anything's possible; it's only a matter of time'. Learn to celebrate your small wins. Frame your win, post it on a wall and make it visible, so it's a constant reminder that anything's possible; it's only a matter of time!

In Chapter 3, I wrote that failure is an event and not a person. Remember that principle in your business and career endeavours, too. There will be some falls along the way, but if you can pick yourself up and keep going, you will reach your goals. Below are some world changers who failed a few times (or many times) in their dreams, but chose not to give up. In the end, they achieved their dreams and goals because they knew what *Arianna Huffington* knew: *'Failure is not the opposite of success; it's part of success'*.

I've failed over and over again in my life and that is why I succeed.

- Michael Jordan

Thomas Edison's teachers said he was 'too stupid to learn anything'. He was fired from his first two jobs for being 'non-productive'. He made 1,000 unsuccessful attempts at inventing the light bulb. A reporter once asked, 'How did it feel to fail 1,000 times?' Edison replied, 'I didn't fail 1,000 times. The light bulb was an invention with 1,000 steps'.

Winston Churchill failed sixth grade. He was subsequently defeated in every election for public office until *he became Prime Minister at the age of 62*. He later wrote, 'Never give in, never give in, never, never, never, never—in nothing, great or small, large or petty—never give in except to convictions of honour and good sense. Never, never, never, never give up'.

Abraham Lincoln went to war as a captain and returned as a private. Later, he failed as a businessman. As a lawyer in Springfield, he was too impractical and temperamental to find success. He turned to politics and was defeated in his first try for the legislature. He was defeated numerous times: in his first attempt to be nominated for Congress, in his application to be commissioner of the General Land Office, in the senatorial election of 1854, in his efforts for the vice-presidency in 1856 and in the senatorial election of 1858. He went on to become the sixteenth president of the United States of America.

Thomas Edison is a great example of someone who proved people wrong and persevered against all odds to make a dream come true. Winston Churchill is a true example of how success takes time. Abraham Lincoln had to try out different fields before finding his fit. When business didn't work for him, he tried to be a lawyer, and when that didn't work for him, he went into politics. You have everything in you to reach your goals. Remember that winners never quit and quitters never win!

Success is going from failure to failure without losing enthusiasm.

- Winston Churchill

Legacy

Our world needs people who will enlarge their vision of life and realise that there's more to life than just them. Now, more than ever, there is a demand for people who dream bigger dreams and step out of the boat. Our world needs more men and women who will specialise in the impossible.

To me, dreamers are givers. Dreamers invest. Dreamers take initiative. Dreamers are problem-solvers. Dreamers are contributors, not consumers. Dreamers provide employment. Dreamers are happy, but never content. Something deep within tells dreamers that there's more: more people, more to achieve, more to learn, more to explore and more to become. Dreamers lead, rather than follow. Dreamers won't settle for *no*; in their spirit, they have the tenacity to keep going until that *no* becomes a *yes*. Dreamers make a way; they don't follow the trail of the path already walked. Instead, they search for new ground, new territories, new adventures, and there, they will set a standard, raise the bar, and ultimately, be an example for many others. Dreamers do not just accept; they create. They don't settle with being copies; they are originals.

Dreamers are all of the above, but most importantly, they are more concerned with making a difference in the world than making a buck. They are concerned more about others than about their next car or holiday. People are at the core of what they do,

even if it's only one person. They want to make the world a better place.

Being born in Africa and spending seven years of my life there, I know what poverty is. I haven't just seen it on a thirty-second World Vision ad; I've lived amongst it. I've seen how much people suffer and how disadvantaged some people are, simply because they are living in a third-world country. I've always had a passion to make a difference overseas and to give people the chance they deserve as humans, even if I only help one person. I first had the idea for PVBS in early 2000. I thought it would be cool to have my own apparel brand, but when my passion for fashion married my hunger for change, the baby was born—and it became a reality. PVBS is my small way of partnering with everyday people globally, so they can choose apparel that will help to change lives. I love charity work and support it myself, but what I really love about PVBS is the fact that an everyday necessity equals a life changed. In February 2012, I had the opportunity to go on a trip with some of the team members from PVBS to Cambodia in order to provide clothing for children; we ended up clothing hundreds of amazing, cute children, who were so grateful—they reacted like they had just been given the world. To say it was one of the most memorable and fulfilling trips I've ever been on is an understatement. My heart was full. I realized how much joy there is in giving, instead of receiving. So little can mean so much to others.

What we do for ourselves dies with us. What we do for others and the world remains and is immortal.

~ Albert Pine

Mother Theresa is one of my favourite inspirations. She was born in 1910 and spent more than half of her life (45 years) attending to poor, sick and orphaned children all around the world. She won the 1979 Nobel Peace Prize, but asked that the \$192,000 prize money be given to the poor in India, stating that earthly rewards were important only if they helped her to help the world's needy. She was voted the most admired person of the 20th century and received an honorary Companion of the Order of Australia award, amongst many others. There is a public holiday in Albania for her on October 19 and even a Mother Theresa Women's University. She was possibly the best example of someone living to make a difference in the lives of the less fortunate in the 20th century. Her achievements have lived on, even after she passed away in 1997. People all around the world today are alive because of her.

I've never seen a monument built for the wealthiest man, but I have seen countless monuments of people whose lives and businesses have made a legacy and an impact around the world. Your goal isn't to aim to have a monument erected in your honour; your goal is to see how many lives you can help change. Then, everything else in your life will be taken care of.

We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.

- Winston Churchill

You and I were created to live beyond ourselves; we were created to serve the lives of the less fortunate. In 2016, I'm really excited for PVBS; we want to make a difference in the education of kids overseas in Asia, South America and my own home country, Ghana. How? PVBS has launched a brand new initiative called

Dream Starters. This is a campaign that will see PVBS partnering with schools to manufacture Year 12 jackets for school leavers. Each jacket will provide six months of education for a child. We want to engage Year 12 students in making a difference through their jackets and to start helping children abroad to fulfil their dreams of education! I believe education is a powerful tool that changes lives and the world!

In writing this book, my hope is that it will help to change your life, as well as the lives of those around you. The legacy you leave will be determined by the personal change and transformation you go through. I never intended for this book to impact only you; my wish is that you will continue to impact others. This is what I believe we are all called for.

I really want to challenge you: whatever you aspire to become, whatever dream you have for your future, let it benefit those in need, either locally or globally!

How do you get involved and make your life count? It's really simple. There's no direct formula, but here are a few ideas:

1. What causes are you most passionate about? Research them and get involved by offering your services and talents.
2. Making a difference doesn't have to look like something huge or a big cheque; it could be a random act of kindness, like buying coffee for the homeless guy on that street you pass by every day on your way to work or school.
3. You don't have to start the next World Vision, but you can partner and support an existing cause!
4. If you could do anything to improve the life of someone less fortunate in the world, what would you do?

Making a difference really does take different forms and shapes. However, it may look, never underestimate the potential you carry to change someone's life. Take the first step today. Have courage, have faith and help to make the world a better place for someone.

*If you find it in your heart to care for somebody else, you will
have succeeded.*

- Maya Angelou

Thoughts from this chapter

- 1) *My dreams are possible.*
- 2) *I have the potential to make the world a better place by
living my dream.*
- 3) *Live for a cause and not for applause.*
- 4) *I am blessed to be a blessing.*

FINAL WORD

I want to congratulate you for not only making it to the end of this book, but also for making it through all of the difficulties life has thrown at you, for proving to tough times that you are tougher. You are now smarter and wiser, because you learnt essential lessons in your difficult seasons. You now know who you are. By spending time by yourself (solitude), you have become your own best friend; therefore, you are not one who is easily pressured by friends. You don't feel the desperate need to fit in or to look the part. Rather, you are selective in your friends; you are after friends who will help you to dream and reach your dreams, those who believe in you and see your worth. You can deal with rejection, face your fears and confront whoever you need to. All of this happened because you chose to see your difficult times through the lens of opportunity.

You wouldn't be here if you didn't have the potential for greatness.

- Unknown

Now, you are ready to help others through their journey, to help them through their difficulties and dark moments. You are a light of hope, a beacon of inspiration and someone whom others can look to. Because you are an overcomer, you can help others to overcome. Because you have conquered your darkest moments, others are inspired by you—your strength, your tenacity. You are an example whom people look up to, a source of inspiration, someone's hero.

If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.

- Quincy Jones

I am so excited for your future. I am excited for what's ahead for you. I may not know your future, but I know it will be better than your past, and I know it will be filled with more moments of joy than tears of the past. I know it will be filled with more faith in the future than fear of the past. I know it will be filled with more answers and clarity about the road ahead than questions and doubts from your past. In short, I am excited for you, because your best is yet to come—in your education, in your family, in your health, in your friendships and relationships, in your business and in your life. **Go and change your world!**

NEED HELP?

If you or someone you know is struggling with depression, mental health issues, self-harming or suicidal thoughts, please reach out for help by contacting the links and services below:

<http://teenmentalhealth.org/>

www.beyondblue.org.au

<http://headspace.org.au/>

www.mindhealthconnect.org.au

www.lifeline.org.au

<http://www.mensline.org.au>

<http://www.kidshelpline.com.au/>

<https://www.sane.org/>

<https://www.mentalhealthonline.org.au/>

http://www.selfgrowth.com/websites/mental_health.html

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/>

<http://www.mentalhealth.gov/>

DID THIS BOOK ENCOURAGE YOU?

If this book encouraged you in any way, there are three things that I would love for you to do:

- 1) *Give a copy of this book to someone who needs its encouragement. You can order it online (www.ericagyeman.com/resources) and specify that it's a gift, and I will write a personal encouraging message to him or her.*
- 2) *Send me an email of your testimonial and how the book has encouraged you. You can send it to hello@ericagyeman.com.*
- 3) *Subscribe to my blog posts for weekly inspiration, videos and content to encourage you. You can subscribe via ericagyeman.com*

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<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/aug/09/martin-luther-king-dream-speech-history>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

After his 4th suspension in high school Eric was given a holiday ticket back to Ghana for 3 weeks as a gift from his father, this so called ‘holiday’ became the toughest and most life changing 7 years of Eric’s life. 7 years of living in poverty, battling suicide thoughts, deep depression and the journey of discovering who he was, was only the surface of what he went through.

This experience ignited his desire to make a difference, given permission to come back to Melbourne in 2007, Eric began an apparel brand that gave back to the community locally and globally, his passion and hunger to change the world and break the cycle of poverty was birthed from his firsthand experience of life in Ghana.

Eric is now the author of 3 inspirational books, an award winning social entrepreneur and a high energy speaker with a delivery that will uplift any room. His work and efforts were recognised and therefore listed as a nominee for both the ‘Pride of Australia 2015 Award’ and the ‘2015 Young Victorian of The Year Award’, as well as running motivational workshops in high schools to encourage kids to dream big, something he missed out on as a young teenager.

Eric’s journey has been one of overcoming fears, challenges and all sorts of obstacles, this has driven Eric’s passion to now help

people to overcome their own challenges and chase their dreams to make a difference in the world today!

In his own words;

“My dream and passion is to help people chase their dreams and make a difference! To help them leave behind a great legacy for the generations that follow.

Between your mother’s womb and your tomb what will your dash be?”

NEED A SPEAKER?

BOOK ERIC FOR YOUR NEXT EVENT

Eric has been speaking for over 10 years in Schools, Churches, Youth Groups, Corporate Events, Keynote at Conferences and also Youth Camps. Eric speaks from the heart with an intention to add value, therefore each keynote and workshop is tailored to suit each event or conference. Some of Eric's popular keynotes are around themes:

'The power of dreams'

'Being the difference'

'Resilience'

'Hope and purpose'.

WHAT OTHERS ARE SAYING ABOUT ERIC'S SPEAKING

“Eric’s delivery and content connects straight to the hearts of his listeners. He is definitely one of my favourite speakers.”

– Paul Magno

“Eric helped me to understand that I don’t need to try so hard to fit in when I was born to be different!

– Ethan James, Student

“Eric can capture the attention of anyone in the room, from his humour to the depth of his message he is the complete package!”

– Mrs Smith, Teacher

To Watch Eric in action, check out his Show Reel Now
-<https://vimeo.com/145648838>

For more information, Bookings or enquiries please get in
touch with us, contact details below:

Eric Agyeman

Email: eric@pvbs.co

Phone: 0433 853 164

Website: www.ericagyeman.com

PVBS



Eric is not only passionate about encouraging people to live out their dreams through the message he shares in his books and on platform, but he is also passionate about breaking the cycle of poverty! Helping change the lives of the disadvantaged and the less fortunate in a practical way!

Eric is a recognised Australian social entrepreneur. His resilient desire to help those living in poverty, birthed a thriving social enterprise called PVBS – short for Proverbs. PVBS has 3 different world changing initiatives:

1) **Premium Custom Year 12 Jackets, also known as ‘Class of Change’**

Each Jacket provides access to quality education for a child in Cambodia and Ghana

2) **Online Retail Store**

State-of-the-art designs with a positive message, each garment funds 4 meals for disadvantaged families and the homeless in Victoria

3) **Corporate Custom Wear**

Premium custom work wear, each item funds 4 meals for disadvantaged families and the homeless in Victoria

To date PVBS has donated over \$30,000 impacting over 4,000 people in Cambodia, Ghana and Australia!

Be a part of the change and have a look at the next 3 pages.

Change Clothes – Change Lives

CUSTOM YEAR 12 APPAREL THAT MAKE A CHANGE

#CLASSOFCHANGE

Your Premium Custom Apparel will provide a child in need access to quality education in Cambodia and Ghana

For an obligation free presentation and sample, contact our team today!



Email: **info@pvbs.co**
Phone: **0432229806**
Website: **www.pvbs.co**



PVBS ONLINE RETAIL STORE

#HUNGRYFORCHANGE

Street wear that feeds the streets. Each product funds 4 meals to disadvantaged families and the homeless in Victoria!

2000+ Meals Funded and Counting!



Change Clothes - Change Lives

Shop with purpose at store.pvbs.co



CUSTOM WORK WEAR

#PVBSCORPORATEWEAR

Get your very own custom work wear for
your colleagues! Each product funds
4 meals to disadvantaged families
and the homeless in Victoria!



Change Clothes - Change Lives

Enquire today for a free quote!

Email: info@pvbs.co

Phone: **0432229806**

Website: www.pvbs.co



A black and white close-up portrait of a young person with light-colored hair, looking slightly to the right with a gentle smile. The person has a few freckles on their face. The background is dark and out of focus, showing parts of other people.

Educating Students

Supporting Disciples

www.lighthouse.vic.edu.au

In May 2000, Eric was given a holiday ticket to Ghana to visit his mother and step siblings. This so called 'holiday' became the toughest and most life changing 7 years of Eric's life. 7 years of living in poverty, battling suicidal thoughts and deep depression to then discovering his identity dreams and purpose. Eric turned what was a dark experience into a truly life changing story.

***IN THIS BOOK, ERIC SHARES HIS JOURNEY IN A WAY
THAT IT WILL HELP YOU...***

- Develop a new and positive perspective on life's difficulties
 - Understand your identity; who you are and who you are not
 - Move past your fears to pursue your dreams
-



Eric is an author, an award winning social entrepreneur and a high energy speaker with a delivery that will uplift any room. He has been recognised and listed as a nominee for both the *'Pride of Australia 2015 Award'* and the *'2015 Young Victorian of the Year Award.'* Eric also runs motivational workshops in high schools to encourage kids to dream big, something he missed out on as a teenager.

***"Between your mother's womb and your tomb
what will your dash be?" – Eric Agyeman***



ERIC K AGYEMAN
DREAM.FAITH.LEGACY

ericagyeman.com