

Introduction

The world belongs to the energetic.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Do you want to be happier? Do you want to experience more joy in your life? Do you want to build a strong foundation for yourself so when life doesn't go as planned you can remain peaceful and strong?

If you answered yes, come along with me. I am going to share with you a number of ideas, practices, laws, or habits (call them what you want), but I guarantee if you are consistent and committed, these habits will change your life as they changed mine.

This book is for people who want to make an investment in themselves. This is NOT an overnight magic pill, a fad, or a quick fix. The habits I will outline in this book take time and discipline. Yet if applied, they will strengthen what I call your core—the depths of your very being. The actual definition of the word “core” is “the central most important part of something.”¹ For the purposes of this book, your core is your mental, spiritual, emotional, and physical health—the core of who you are deep within.

I have read countless books over the years with similar messages. Why then should you spend your time reading this one? Herein lies your first challenge. When you read a section of this book and you find yourself saying to yourself, “been there, done that, read the book,” that is fine. The next question I want you to ask yourself is, “am I using it?” Just because you know something doesn't mean you use it. For example, smoking causes cancer, and seat belts save lives. If you eat a healthy diet and move around a few times a week, you'll be healthier. While most people wouldn't argue with me on those points, most people don't apply what they know to their lives. The goal of this book is to get you to look

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at your current habits and start, slowly at first, to build new, better, more powerful habits. I am living proof that it can be done.

The biggest excuse people make to me is that they don't have the time. There are 8,766 hours in a year. I would like to assume that you can carve out some time for yourself, yet over and over again people tell me they don't have time. What I have learned is you don't ever find the time to do many of the things I suggest, but you make the time. You have to ask yourself: why can't you seem to find a few hours for you? In my opinion the quest to improve yourself is worth every ounce of effort.

What are the benefits of a strong core? They are numerous and varied. Suffice it to say that a strong core will improve your overall performance and productivity, improve your health, and give you more energy and happiness. With a strong core you will have the confidence, tools, and strength to get through the tough times in your life. Like a tree with deep roots, or a person with unyielding faith, you will weather the storms of your life. When there are no storms and life is calm, you will soar and glide through your days, finding success, laughter, love, and fulfillment at every turn. It will look to others as if you glide effortlessly and things come easy to you, but you will know the secret. You have taken the time to strengthen your core, build your confidence, and grow your mind. Like an athlete, you have worked hard, put in long hours of your own time for your personal development, and built your spiritual, mental, and physical muscles. And when your core is strong, everyone around you will benefit.

The danger of not having a strong core will result in imbalances: physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. Many people know too well the effects of a weak core. Physically, they suffer with high blood pressure, fatigue, stress, and migraines. Emotionally they experience feelings of depression and feel disconnected from the people in their lives. They live in fear and feel as if they have lost control. Mentally they are drained and suffer from hurried sickness. They display obsessive behavior and entertain ruminating thoughts. Last, they are spiritually broken and disconnected from their own intuition and source.

My goal for you is that you read this book and look for things that resonate with you. That you tune into your own body and intuition. At your core you already have all the answers. My task is simply to lead you back and stoke the flame that burns deep within you. I will take you on a journey back to your true self.

In our current world of achievement and gain, we often move too

fast. As a result we lose the essence of who we are. We measure our worth on our output and the opinion of others. We disconnect from our core self in an effort to fulfill the unspoken pressures of society. We give into workaholism and the accumulation of material things. We compromise our own best interests in order to make other people happy. We respond at all hours of the day and night to emails, even while on vacation. We jump when we are told and we never take a “real” day off. When we live our lives this way on a consistent basis, we weaken our core, we become empty and unfulfilled, and this creates more fear and insecurity. Our insecurity and fear of failing leads us to constantly try to prove ourselves, which leads to more hours at work. It becomes a vicious cycle.

On the other hand, if you take the time to strengthen your core, you will find the courage and the strength to speak your mind, ask for what you need, and say no when you have to. You will operate from a place of sincerity, truth, and wisdom. In a world of delete or be deleted, you have to ask yourself what your priorities are and what the cost of living tweet by tweet means to your core self. Just because something is popular does not mean it is worthwhile. We live in a world of distractions that literally “dumb us down”; television and the Internet are filled with mindless, time-consuming addictions. Millions of people waste millions of hours busying themselves with popular mindless distractions. By picking up this book, you have chosen to take the road less traveled; this road may be uncomfortable, challenging at times, and often unpopular. When you take the road less traveled, you may find yourself alone. Your friends may not like the new you and tempt you to take up your old ways, but this is where your strength really counts. Do you go along with the masses, follow the crowd, and go down the same toxic road as them? Or do you choose a different road? I promise you if you stay on this path, new people, new experiences, and new adventures await you.

When you read this book, if something in you stirs and your heart beats a little faster, that excitement is all you need to validate that you are on the right path. Whether our lives are similar or different, I know you have a dream in your heart. I know you have a calling for something you may not be able to name yet. I know there are things about your life you wish were different, or things you may want to improve or change. I know you have areas in your life that you are confident in and areas in your life where you have no confidence at all, or maybe just need improvement. I want to share my journey with you so that you gain belief in yourself and

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gain the motivation you've been looking for. I want you to look at what I have done and say to yourself, "Me too. If she can do it, so can I." I want you to grow, bloom, and develop the strength to find whatever it is you desire for yourself. I want you to succeed, and I know that together we can get there.

I believe that this book has made it to your hands for a reason. That you know deep inside you can be more and do more. I want you to listen to your own insights and then to take action. I want you to believe in your own dreams, thoughts, and ideas, and remind yourself that within you is everything you need. I want you to know that you always have a choice.

I adopted a saying over ten years ago: MAKE it a great day. I must have heard someone say it and I loved it. The difference between "Have" a great day and "MAKE" it a great day is that it puts the responsibility into your own hands. You decide whether or not to MAKE it a great day. You always have a choice.

1

“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.”

—Aristotle

Your Life Is Run by Your Habits

It all comes down to your habits. The experts tell us that over 40 percent of what you do every day is based on habits.¹ I would venture to guess that it is a lot higher than that. Your habits are the things you do on automatic pilot: how you respond to events, like drive a car or the way you talk to your spouse. It is your unconscious way of behaving in the world. The gift or the curse of habits is that they require no conscious energy.² You perform them without even thinking about it. Some habits feed you and make you stronger, such as a nightly flossing habit, and other habits spiral you in the wrong direction, such as smoking or eating fast food. You can increase the number of positive and healthy habits you have and decrease the ones that don't nourish you.

The experts say that it takes 21 days to form a habit;³ that if you consciously practice something for 21 days, it will eventually become something you do unconsciously. For the purpose of making a point I'll be kind and give you 90 days. If you take just one suggestion from this book and apply it consistently to your life for 90 days, it will become a habit. Remember: habits require no conscious energy. Once you have your first habit down, you may move on.

On the ninety-first day you add one new habit, not two habits, and practice that for 90 days. At the end of six months you will have two positive new habits. If all you did was add a new habit every 90 days, in five years you would have accumulated 20 new, positive, life-inspiring habits that you wouldn't have had if you walked away and did nothing. How

fabulous would it be to have your life running on autopilot in the direction of your goals and dreams?

This is not about deprivation, but growth. It is not about taking habits away, but about adding habits that strengthen your core. If you've always wanted to quit smoking, that may be too big of a challenge to start with. Instead start by adding apples to your diet. You know the saying, "An apple a day keeps the doctor away." There is something to that, and apples are very nutritious for you. Promise yourself to eat apples every day. Simple. Once that becomes a habit, work on adding a daily walk around the block. After 90 days of walking, you may find that you'd like to take up running. Before you know it, you will have accumulated so many healthy habits that smoking will seem ludicrous to you, and you will find the strength to quit. The more positive habits you add to your life, the more you will find the unhealthy habits miraculously fall away. It is about taking small steps every day that support your goals, so that one day you wake up and find you have been transformed.

Mark Twain once said, "Habit is habit and not to be flung out the window by any man, but to be coaxed down-stairs one step at a time."⁴ It is my hope that through small consistent actions you will produce big results. It is a commonly held belief that if you consistently take good actions it will translate into good outcomes.

I am not a doctor, a nutritionist, or a physical fitness trainer. I am a regular person. Notice I didn't say "normal." I have a weakness for salty foods, I talk too much sometimes, and I have been known to have a bad temper. However, I have taken the advice I have accumulated over the years and I have learned that I can be healthier and happier, and mentally and spiritually fit by using the habits I am outlining in this book. I have been extremely fortunate in that I've spent most of my life educating myself for my work. I have read, studied, and applied the lessons from hundreds of books, articles, and seminars. I am a living test woman. I have pushed my body through physical exercise, challenged my mind to grow, and meditated on my faith. All of this has made me realize what works and what doesn't. What doesn't work are cosmetic fixes, fads, and miracle cures. What does work is steady perseverance and building yourself from the inside out. While not all of us have been given the same opportunities and privileges in life and experiences, we all have the same access to happiness. It is in our hands.

Our society would have you believe that it is the other way around.

The advertisers want you to think that if you buy their product your life will get better. If you only had longer eyelashes, a faster car, or a new nose, you would be happy. We are bombarded from the media with unattainable images of what beauty is. I know for myself that beauty and strength come from confidence. Confidence in knowing who I am at my core, and that I don't have to compete with the images I see. Happiness is not a competition. I am here to run my own race and so are you.

I have met so many women and men over the years in my seminars that don't have a strong core. From the outside looking in, they look good. They drive a nice car, have a nice appearance, work at a great company, but in their soul they are running on empty. They approach me on breaks or after class to ask for help, advice, and ideas. I have been asked over and over again if I had a book, and I didn't. Well I figured it was about time.

I once read a quote that said something to the gist of "one should never sit down to write until they have stood up and lived." I feel that I am in place now. Life has given me its share of ups and downs, and what has gotten me through and kept me strong are the habits I am going to share with you. These habits are everything from the habit of drinking water and habits about how you think to habits about how you deal with the challenges life presents to you. Having healthy habits results in a strong core.

When your core is strong, you have the confidence to pursue your passions, to connect with your purpose, and you have the power to perform whatever tasks are necessary to achieve your goals. When things do go wrong, you are able to hold things together and get back on track. Positive habits will liberate you and give you the strength to go forward no matter what.

So often I have witnessed people who have something bad happen in one area of their life and they let it overflow into every other area of their life. Dr. Martin Seligman explains in *Authentic Happiness* that even this has something to do with habits. Optimists and pessimists deal with the problems in their lives differently. They literally have different coping habits. He gives an example that goes something like this: Let's pretend that two people who work in the same department lose their jobs on the same day. The optimist is upset that she lost her job, but decides that she will make good use of her time off. She will get to the gym more often and try out some new meals on her family. The pessimist lets the loss of his job affect every other aspect of his life. He spends his time brooding

and not participating in social events. He treats his family poorly, and thus the downward cycle begins and his bad habits spiral him down a negative path.⁵

The good news is that optimism can be learned.⁶ The way you think is a habit, just like everything else. By incorporating one small change at a time you can totally transform yourself. I am going to introduce the many habits that make up my own life and then you choose. Some of the habits overlap and work together, and that is the beauty of them. You can adopt them by themselves, or build one on top of the other. This is about you, not me. I want you to feel more joy, passion, and purpose for yourself. Pick a new habit and try it on for 21–90 days. Don't do this stuff because I say so. Do it because you are ready for a change, and you be the judge. If it works for you, keep it and use it, and if you need to, modify it for yourself, or don't adopt it at all. At the end of the day I want you to feel better. Isn't that why you are reading this book? You want to experience life and you want to be fully alive, happy, and productive. You want your life to mean something. Well if you don't feel good, you won't do good. It is that simple.

The dictionary definition of the word “habit” is a settled or regular tendency or practice.⁷ The cool thing about habits that is worth repeating is that they require NO energy. This is important to understand. Habits are the things you do without any thought or energy. As the old saying goes, “we create our habits and then our habits create us.” If I was to come to your home and watch you get ready for work in the morning, over 50 percent of what you do is habit. You do the same thing every single morning. Yet you never sat down with a pen and a piece of paper and said to yourself, should I let the dog out first or brush my teeth? You just repeatedly did something and over time it became habit—something you do everyday that requires no thought or effort.

How have your current habits shaped you? Are your habits bringing you in the direction you want in life? If you changed nothing about the way you live your life, what would your life look like in five, ten, twenty years? What would the state of your health be? Your finances? Your relationships?

The even better thing about habits is that you create them. Keep the ones that serve you and rid yourself of the ones that don't by creating new and better habits. It also doesn't matter where you are in your life, the important part is which direction you are heading. You can be in a

bad situation right now, but if you are heading in the right direction, going toward the light, and creating positive habits, you will soon come out on top.

We can all learn a lot from professional athletes. Think about how professional athletes prepare for their sport. They spend hours and hours practicing the fundamentals. They run the same drills and plays over and over and over again. A football team will repeat the same plays in practice until they are physically drained, winded, and spent. Each player is pushed to his or her physical and mental limit during practice. The players may want to stop, but the coach will make them run another play. Why do they do that? They do that so it becomes a habit. By practicing the same plays over and over, the team ingrain the plays so much in their brains that on game day—when they are on the field, on the court, and in the game—they are able to play effortlessly. Their brains have run this play, their bodies know they can do it, and their subconscious minds are able to take over.

The difference between athletes and the rest of us is that most of us don't spend the time and effort practicing our own habits—they just evolve without our conscious choice. Athletes spend 90 percent of their time preparing, practicing, and getting ready to be in the game. They only spend approximately 10 percent of their time on the court, on the field, and in the game. Most of us spend 100 percent of our time on execution, at work and at home, and we take little or no time to prepare and train.⁸

Okay, so you're not a professional athlete. Neither am I. The bottom line is that with a little consistent effort you can create positive habits. And the beauty is that once you create them, they are yours and they require no energy. Wouldn't it be great if you had so many positive habits that your life seemed effortless?