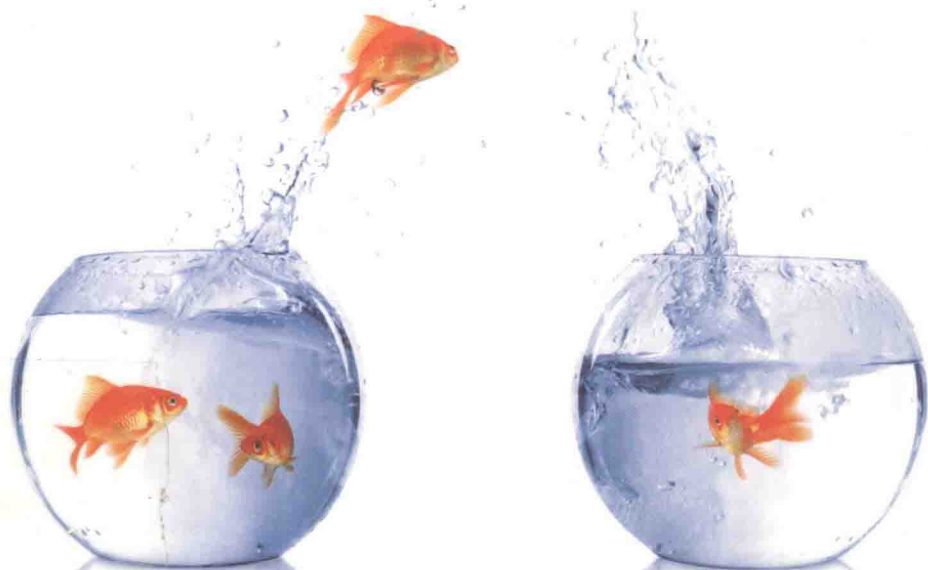


MAXIMIZING ME

30 Lessons on the Journey to
Self-Empowerment

Hart Cunningham



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Maximizing Me

With awe and deepest gratitude, I most humbly dedicate this, my first book, to...

Dr. Peter Drucker

The Father of Modern Management

During my Masters studies at Claremont Graduate School, Dr. Drucker inspired me and my peers to create a new kind of community within our entrepreneurial efforts—a community of close relationships, shared ideals and personal values. His concept of community is ideal, not only for business, but for life itself.

Dr. Drucker challenged limits and liberated minds. One cannot overestimate the profound impact of his entrepreneurial inspiration. Organizations adhering to his organic management models demonstrate remarkably high stability and flexibility, and typically produce astounding growth rates.

Dr. Drucker was much more than a national treasure, he was a global visionary—one of our great Wise Men.

*“The individual is the central, rarest,
most precious capital resource of our society.”*
—Dr Peter Ferdinand Drucker
1909-2005

Acknowledgments

My desire to write this book was inspired by one great advantage that I have enjoyed from birth. It is an advantage that I've never taken for granted, one that has sped me rapidly on my still-young quest through life to this point.

That advantage is my family.

I want to thank my father, Jere, who challenged me, and my mother, Madelyn, who nurtured me, and both of my audacious entrepreneur grandfathers, Chester and Jere Sr., who inspired me. And I give deepest loving thanks to my valiant grandmothers, Eugenia and Helen, who are the soul of all of us and have always centered the family. Combined, their powerful influences supercharged me. Every day, I realize how fortunate I am to have been born to such creative, hard-working, and true-hearted people.

My family exposed me to every conceivable intellectual and athletic challenge. They strived always, often by means mysterious to me, to build my sense of adventure and reward and possibility. Their ethical standard was simple: know yourself and to yourself be true, and value loyalty even above talent.

They taught me, by example, that without self-honesty, loyalty means nothing. They demonstrated that loyalty is the very bedrock of a successful life, successful family, successful business and successful civilization.

Positive reinforcement was our family norm. I was taught to climb the ladder of consistent goal-setting. If I slipped, there was no belittling reproach, only pride that I had tried and full support for my next attempt.

Our family lives by the faith that the greatest risk is taking no risk at all. In all things, they aim absurdly high, knowing that attaining goals is as much imagination as desire. From earliest childhood, they encouraged me. Win or lose, they gave me confidence supported with unconditional affection.

My family taught me that there is no shame in failure, only in not trying, of cowardice by avoidance, which sins against the sacred gift of life itself.

For these reasons and so many more, I praise the family that created me, nurtured me, inspired me, educated me, and then sent me out like a warrior of ancient times, to battle the real world of competitive life ...

and

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Preface

Writing this book has been a daunting undertaking, an audacious and time-consuming attempt to translate my vision of successful living into words. It's a subject of great personal importance to me. Anything less would not have been worth the effort.

The book I planned to write is not the book I have written. I originally intended to chronicle my various business experiences and describe my stumbles and successes. However, I quickly realized that business axioms—mine, at any rate—cannot stand apart from life lessons. As I broadened that initial approach to encompass my entire worldview, the business focus gradually diminished and finally disappeared altogether. Perhaps it will become the subject of a later book.

In childhood, my tendency toward entrepreneurship was so strong as to seem almost genetic. At age nine, I ran a multi-neighborhood car washing business employing local kids. This adventurous enterprise launched a flurry of escalating business concepts that continued through adolescence and into adulthood, engendering the global family of businesses that grows and thrives under my leadership today.

I have learned many hard and often surprising lessons while building these numerous business entities. My worldview embraces corollaries from those experiences, as well as the elemental axioms of my family, the brilliant contributions of my personal hero, Dr. Peter Drucker, and the examples set by other great figures throughout history. I don't often name the sources of my inspiration in the 30 lessons that follow, but their influence abounds.

Every truly successful business is a community, a family, a home for people driven to succeed, to learn and to grow. Individuals within such communities have many roads to be explore. I offer this book in the spirit of personal discovery and the sincere hope that you will find it a valuable road map for your own epic journey.

Introduction

Your First Step

“The policy of being too cautious is the greatest risk of all.”
—Jawaharlal Nehru

Over the years, hundreds of thousands of experiences have combined to make you the person you are. From the hour of your birth, through childhood and adolescence right up to the present moment, experience has shaped your life. A dizzying flood of events has propelled you into the present. If you are wise and determined, you can preserve the positive influences and reject the negative ones. You can become the person you want to be.

Many of your “firsts” will retain their initial impact. Few experiences imprint more deeply than the big events of childhood and young adulthood. You are so molded by these experiences that their effects seem fixed. Like deep cuts, they forever mark you. Nevertheless, you can choose to be free.

Unfortunately, some of us use early experiences as excuses for leading mediocre, unfulfilling, dysfunctional lives. We blame the problems of adulthood on parental indifference, material deprivation, birth order, frequent moves, addiction, family break-ups and the trauma of abuse. The list is long and, in some cases, heart-wrenching. But rarely are the effects of past events insurmountable.

While some people spend years in analysis learning to deal with past events, the overwhelming majority of people, unable to afford the time or expense of therapy, push ahead with the help of friends, family and the force of their own will. To varying degrees they manage to thwart the negative effects of the past.

In this book, I will ask you to strike a compromise. Concentrate on the present and the future, but at the same time acknowledge the events that brought you to this point. Effective teachers introduce new learning topics by starting where the students are at. In mastering your future, you need to do the

same. Start with the person you are today. Understand your talents, strengths, weaknesses, habits and values by recognizing the events that shaped them.

You must take a long, hard look at yourself. You can't begin the path to self-empowerment without going through an X-ray-like process that shows where you are and where your limits are. Like a recovering alcoholic, you have to learn to see yourself as you really are. Development is a voluntary process. You must make a positive decision to take the right steps, and it starts with introspection.

You came naked into this world, and you will leave naked. But you will leave behind a legacy, the one you fashioned yourself, through your own self-invention. With the help of family, friends, learning and work, you have been inventing of yourself for as long as you have been alive, and the effort has produced the person you presently are. If you are completely satisfied with yourself at this moment, put this book down and don't waste further time. However, if you know that you would be happier if you were able to reinvent your appearance, your character, your personality, or your influence on others, then take courage from that knowledge. Make a pact with yourself to fight for maximum fulfillment of your potential.

Think about the pivotal moments in your life—your “firsts” and other significant events. You probably don't remember your first tooth, first step, or first word, but you may recall your first playmate or pet. Most of us remember our first school and teacher, our first romantic crush and first kiss. Recall your first major disappointment and your first experience with death. Remember the sadness, confusion or humiliation. Think about the excitement of graduations, cultural coming-of-age celebrations, your first job and your first experience with adult love.

Make a list of the important moments in your life. Examine each one and try to determine how it colors your outlook, personality and values today. There are no right or wrong conclusions to this exercise. The objective is to know yourself more intimately so that you can embark on the journey ahead with greater self-awareness and assurance.

When you identify qualities in yourself that you don't like (we all have them), realize that they are not necessarily your fault. Many of them were developed through repeated exposure to outside influences. Identify the source of characteristics you'd like to change, but don't dwell on them. The objective is to understand yourself, not wallow in the sea of regret.

The expression, "start with a clean slate," means to begin in a clear state of mind, set upon action. It does not mean rejecting everything about yourself and trying to become fresh as a newborn babe. That is impossible. The past cannot be wiped away. Instead, work hard to find the best in yourself and keep it. List your strengths and good qualities (more about that in the second lesson). They are the elements that make you stronger. List your negative qualities, too. Be aware that these tendencies will weaken your efforts unless you defeat them or find ways around them. Turn the page, yes. Evolve, yes. But never dismiss the crucible of forces that forged you up until now. They are the hard-earned, invaluable tools of development.

You will encounter many societal pitfalls. All around you, people will see you as you were. Some of these people will resent your attempt to better yourself. Sadly, you may experience this kind of reaction from close friends, or even family members. Painful as it is, you must proceed without the blessing of these false friends. Their envy should never hold you back.

I will help you to achieve your most highly-evolved self. If you define it realistically and are dedicated, this level of excellence is attainable. It is more than an ideal. It is a condition of personal unity leading to the realization of a personal dream—the dream you harbor deep inside of the life you want to lead, the person you want to be. That dream *can* be reached by achieving a series of carefully chosen goals and through very hard work backed by disciplined self-evaluation.

Achieving your maximum potential, as with all great and worthy struggles, will involve doubt, fear and frustration. However, it will also bring redemption. In the process you will train yourself to recognize and summon your own resolve, adjust your course with canny accuracy, and live a full, balanced life every step of the way.

To accomplish this and all the other critical tasks in this book, the central key is your fully-engaged will, your instinct for overcoming obstacles. At times you may need to persevere as though your life depended on it—because it does. The life you dream of is entirely in your hands.

When you make the decision to begin, all of your inner resources must unite to give you every possible advantage. This book will help you identify those. Using the methods outlined, you must weld them together into a single cohesive power. They will become your armada. Within you, divided and underdeveloped, is all the power you need to fuel the journey toward your goals and, ultimately, your unique vision of life. In the process you will achieve a new self—your highest self, your maximum capability.

No one can live your life for you. No one can make the journey to self-empowerment for you. And yet, if you embark on this adventure, if you tough it out and persevere, you and everyone in your circle of life will benefit enormously. If you see it through without quitting, you will enjoy these rewards for the rest of your life.

Time is precious— a tidal force at your back. There is not a moment to lose.

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1

Reinvent Your Identity

“Everyone has the obligation to ponder well his own specific traits of character. He must also regulate them adequately and not wonder whether someone else’s traits might suit him better. The more definitely his own a man’s character is, the better it fits him.”

—Cicero

What exactly is *identity*? In dictionary parlance, identity refers to the behavioral and personal characteristics that make a person recognizable to others. When a salesclerk asks to see an ID, most of us automatically reach for our driver’s license. There we are, reduced to less than seven square inches—name, address, age, height, hair and eye color, and photographic likeness. The salesclerk looks at the license and then at us and is satisfied that we are who we say we are. Over and over again, this familiar ritual confirms our identity to a world of strangers.

Some people view identity in genealogical terms. I’ve met individuals who can’t wait to tell me that they are descendants of some great civil war general or framer of the U.S. Constitution. Obviously they link their identity to these famous people, but what if, despite frequent reminders, no one else does?

Many of us have a secret sense of ourselves, a romanticized version that we nurture in private. At heart, we are frus-

trated actors, artists, PGA golfers, and skating champions. The dreams stirring in the background play a significant role in how we see ourselves, but how much do they actually affect our identities? I'm sure that I have an entirely different notion of some people than they have of themselves. Is theirs more valid than mine? Would they be justified in saying, "No, you have me all wrong?" Maybe that's what teenagers are talking about when they tell their parents, "You just don't understand me!"

Philosophers and psychologists have numerous theories relating to personal identity, theories that attempt to answer difficult questions about the existence and persistence of identity over time. Have you ever looked at an old photograph of yourself and silently wondered, "Am I still that person?" While you cannot change *numerically* (you are always the same "one"), you can certainly change *quantitatively*, through dramatic events, religious conversions, illness, losing your memory, or simply the growth of your personality. When people describe a traumatic or momentous event in their lives, they often report that they are "not the same person" they were before the event occurred.

The point I wish to make here is that you do not have to wait for external events to transform your identity. You can do it yourself—starting now. You can become the author of that *qualitative* aspect of your identity. In fact, you can design it any way you wish.

Much of this book revolves around the importance of setting and attaining goals. Goals are closely linked with who you believe yourself to be. If you set goals that are not congruent with your identity—with how you see yourself and, to some extent, how others see you—your prospects of reaching those goals will be handicapped. Conversely, if your goals do not help you to strengthen the identity to which you aspire, the person you wish to become, they are the wrong goals.

So before you venture much further in this book, take some time to examine your present identity and think about how you might want to change it. What attributes make you unique? How do you presently see and define yourself? How do others see and describe you?

Most of us receive continuous feedback from the people around us. Even if they don't verbalize their impressions, the information is conveyed through their attitudes and behaviors. All we have to do is pay attention and read between the lines. For example, maybe the reason people seldom seek your opinion is that you pontificate, or have rigid views, or are a poor listener. Conversely, maybe the reason people won't leave you alone is you've made them dependent, or you're a pushover, or an extremely good listener. Ask your friends and associates to be honest with you. Don't be defensive. If you convince them that you are open to candid feedback, most people will share their impressions.

A strong, congruous identity breeds confidence, and confidence fuels work, perseverance and, in time, success. Further, each success builds greater confidence. If your identity is that of a determined, goal-driven person, you will strive to create and maintain that reality.

Strive for a unified identity. If you harbor undefined conflict, some sharp internal division, it will affect your goals by weakening your ability to achieve and maximize personal power. Internal division can undermine all your efforts. The ensuing struggle is similar to family members feuding. They are not a team. They pull apart instead of together.

Division is always a weakness, an impediment to success in realizing goals. Concentrate on areas where you sense division. Pay attention when part of you is saying one thing and another part is urging something else, or when two powerful desires are in conflict. You can't become a concert pianist if you hate to practice. You will probably never own the home of your dreams if you spend every dime instead of saving.

Your final, collective identity will be revealed in the eulogies delivered at your funeral or the obituary printed in the newspaper. How do you want them to read? Start now to build a powerful unity of purpose. Once you look intently at your identity and find your true center, you will begin to see how identity affects all your personal goals, how it widens or limits your progress.