

ACHIEVE

BOOK **1** OF THE HIGH ACHIEVEMENT HANDBOOK



FIND OUT WHO YOU ARE,
WHAT YOU REALLY WANT, AND
HOW TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

DR. CHRIS FRIESEN, Ph.D.

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Introduction

What's in This for You?

I'm just going to put it out there — I bet, like most people, you're performing below your potential. If you're like me, you probably have goals and aspirations you would do almost anything to achieve. I believe in having no regrets and leaving no stone unturned.

Imagine this: Your goal is to make your country's Olympic team. This is your dream. You're getting "old" and this is the last year you'll be able to compete. You wake up on the day of the Olympic trials and look at yourself in the mirror. Do you want to be able to honestly say to yourself that you've done everything in your power to get yourself ready for this moment?

Your response to this question will predict whether you are or aren't going to perform to your full potential.

Or maybe your dream is to get into the top medical school or take your start-up business to the next level. Whatever the dream, the principles are the same. You only get one shot at this life, so make the best of it. No regrets.

Before we go any further, I want to ask you some serious questions. Take a moment to answer these as honestly as possible. Have you:

ACHIEVE

- Felt different from others, but were not quite sure why?
- Felt unsure of your purpose in this life?
- Wondered whether you were focusing on the right goals in your life?
- Felt certain paths you took, or decisions you made, just didn't seem to fit?
- Wondered whether your chosen career path was right for you?
- Felt you were just going through the motions in your life?
- Had trouble staying motivated and focused on a big goal?
- Established your big goals, but couldn't seem to stay motivated long enough to make them a reality?
- Felt unsure of yourself and in your ability to accomplish your goals?

Most people say yes to many of the questions above. If you said yes to any of them, you're reading the right book at the right time. My goal is to help you find some answers.

This book is going to show you, step-by-step, what you need to do to make sure you are working effectively toward the dreams and goals that are right for you. We'll cover the WHY, WHAT, and HOW of setting and achieving the right goals.

Many books assume you know what you want and get right to what you need to do. This book spends a lot of time on helping you really get to know yourself first. This is essential if you want to make sure you focus on the right things. It's a mistake to focus on goals without doing the hard work of really getting to know who and what you are.

The key to success is to **know your WHY** — **your purpose or mission**. And to really find out what your purpose or mission is, you need to know your core personality and what you truly value. Only then can you try to discover how you can use your strengths, interests, passions, talents, and skills to work toward your purpose or mission.

Once you know your purpose and mission, then you can choose goals that truly are meaningful to you and then work toward them. This book ends with detailed strategies to make sure you can stick with your goals on a day-to-day basis. This entire process is the key to your ultimate success and happiness.

How This Book Series is Different

This is the first book in The High Achievement Handbook series. Through publishing this series, my aim is to ensure that you're doing the right things to live up to your true potential.

In today's day and age, we seem to have less time than ever before. There is an unbelievable amount of useful knowledge coming out of the fields of psychology, physiology, neuroscience, and others. It's not easy to sift through it all and figure out what's useful and what isn't. My goal is to do this for you. I want to break through the clutter and confusion and bring clarity to what you should be doing in order to reach your potential. For those of you willing to harness this knowledge, the sky is the limit.

So what will this book do? Using what I believe are the three best sources of knowledge — science, personal experience, and results — it will give you *what* you need to know, *why* you need to know it, and *how* to start doing it and reap the benefits of reaching your potential. It will do so in a series of straightforward and logical steps.

First and foremost, the steps and strategies in this book series are based on scientific research. There are a lot of books and

ACHIEVE

programs out there filled with things that have no scientific backing or have actually been shown to be ineffective when tested.

One example is positive affirmations. Telling yourself you're awesome or that you'll be successful is a staple of many self-help books. Recent research by Dr. Joanne Wood¹ has shown that, while repeating positive affirmations may be mildly beneficial for people who already have high self-esteem, it has the opposite effect for those whose self-esteem is not so high. When those with lower self-esteem practiced positive self-statements, their moods actually worsened. On the other hand, when those with low self-esteem were allowed to think negative thoughts, their moods improved!

Second, the steps and strategies in this book series were chosen because I currently use them or have used them myself in the past. It's one thing for me to read about something in a scientific journal or in a self-help book, but quite another to try it out on myself. I personally need to not only see something to believe it, I also have to experience it myself to *truly* believe it.

Last, I've only included steps and strategies that I've seen work on others in my own clinical work and in my consulting with high achievers.

While this book will lay out the path to achieving great things with your life, the path is not necessarily easy or simple. Too many self-help books or online magazines try to make things so easy with titles like "5 Simple Steps to Achieve Any Goal Without Breaking a Sweat!" If it were that simple and easy, you wouldn't be reading this book. So if you're tired of the quick-fixes and ready to do the work to finally take your game and life to the next level, you're in the right place.

¹ Dr. Joanne Wood's study: <http://pss.sagepub.com/content/20/7/860.abstract>

Chris Friesen, Ph.D.

Who is This Guy?

So who am I to give you advice on how to reach your potential? Good question. Like you, I'm just a guy who wanted to reach his potential and do something he loved to do. I have no special talents or intellectual superpowers. What I have done is taken what I've learned so far in my life personally, as a psychologist, and from what has helped others and applied it to myself and my clients. I've learned to harness the power of my personality, values, interests, strengths, and weaknesses. By doing this, I have figured out my current purpose and mission in life. I then applied what I learned about setting and achieving goals in my life. I will share these strategies with you in this book.

I'm definitely not perfect and must continue to work to reach my full potential. That's a lifelong quest that never ends — a process, not an outcome. At the same time, because science and experience are constantly evolving, I know even better strategies and techniques will emerge in the future. This book series describes the best of what we know today.

Like many, I struggled with low self-esteem and anxiety, especially in my early teens. As a teen, I also underperformed in school. My grades were terrible. I'll never forget the day in eighth grade when I was one of two students forced to tour the basic-level high school primarily reserved for delinquents. This was one of the roughest schools in the city, with gang fights and rampant drug dealing. I clearly remember the sheer terror I felt on the tour of that school.

This incident served as my own Scared Straight experience and motivated me to pull up my marks for the last semester, ultimately allowing me to enter the same high school as my friends. And thank goodness for that! In the process of writing this book, I unearthed a number of news stories from the time when I would have attended that school detailing gang attacks,

stabbings, and even the shooting of the school guidance counselor and assistant principal by a student. (Thankfully, they survived!). The school was closed at the end of that year.

Don't get me wrong, I wasn't a delinquent. It was just that my grades were terrible, and that was the school you went to when you were getting grades in the 50s and 60s. Although this motivated me to do what I had to do to get by, it didn't unleash the motivation to perform at my highest potential. This, of course, makes sense to me now. I had only half the motivation equation covered — fear. What I didn't have covered was a real passionate reason to do my best in school. So my grades continued to flounder until my final year of high school.

During my early teens, my passion was instead fueled by playing hockey as a goaltender. I started playing at age 12, which by Canadian standards is late in life. Despite struggling academically and having problems with low self-esteem and anxiety, especially in academic contexts, I found both my comfort and passion in hockey. I started to build what psychologists call self-efficacy — a belief in my ability to accomplish something. I had a very low sense of self-efficacy before hockey entered my life. I soon realized that, if I put my mind to it, I could excel in hockey.

I started to read self-help books like Tony Robbins' *Awaken the Giant Within and Unlimited Power*². I also read what may well be the best self-help book ever written, Stephen Covey's *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*³. These books were major eye-openers for me. I had no idea how much control I could have in my life if I really put my mind to it and I've been fascinated by human potential ever since.

² *Awaken the Giant Within and Unlimited Power* by Tony Robbins <http://goo.gl/lJwo2A> and <http://goo.gl/oyelC4>

³ *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen Covey: <http://goo.gl/g79501>

And it started paying off. Suddenly, I went from being the worst goalie in the local house league to the best. The next year, I made the all-star team. The year after that, I skipped a skill level and earned a position on the team that had won the league championship the year before. The more I applied my passion and discipline and what I was learning from self-help books, the more I improved.

Still, in reality, I remained on the verge of flunking out of school. I was much more interested in sports than reading Shakespeare. I finally made the top level in hockey for my age group and I would have been eligible to be drafted into the Canadian Hockey League. But I was cut from the team after playing only one game. My new team's former goalie had been cut from the CHL and my new team wanted him back. At this level, it was all about winning, so my new team let me go.

This was a painful experience for a 16-year-old kid, but it quickly hit me. If I didn't take control of my life, life was going to take control of me. I came to the painful realization that a career as a professional hockey player was not in the cards for me.

I also realized how much I loved learning and reading about psychology, exercise physiology, nutrition, and self-help, and passing along what I learned to anyone who would listen. I realized I wanted a career related to this passion, and so it was time for me to do something about this.

I figured I might be able to take what I had learned from sports and self-help books and apply it to my studies, despite my original lack of belief in my abilities as a student. Amazingly, it worked out enough to get me accepted into university so I could achieve my goal of a career that kept me interested and fulfilled. It wasn't long before I realized that, if I worked hard enough and focused on what interested me, I could get good grades in university.

ACHIEVE

At the time, this was a complete turnaround for me. In fact, in high school, I had such a low opinion of my academic potential that my dad had to practically write my term papers for me! Of course, once I moved away from home to university, getting help from my dad was no longer an option. This was in the pre-Internet era! Amazingly, as I found my passion for learning about the body, health, and psychology, I surprised everyone around me, including myself. I got even better grades on my university papers than I did on the high school papers my dad (who is a great writer, by the way) practically wrote for me! This blew me away.

It was at this point in my life that it really hit me. I realized I could do almost anything I put my mind to, if I wanted it badly enough. Combining my interests, love of learning, drive to improve, and the lessons and strategies I learned through sports, psychology, and self-help books, I completed two undergraduate degrees and won an award for the highest GPA of all psychology majors. I was eventually accepted into a graduate clinical psychology program. My friends and family were just as surprised as I was by this reversal.

This course of events taught me to never underestimate myself or others. We all have much more potential than we believe. This is not to say that I breezed through life after that point. But through the challenges I faced, I learned that things that seem scary or impossible have to be faced head-on. I also learned that it's OK to have self-doubts, as long as we use them to keep us humble and help us move toward our goals and values. These lessons propelled me through my master's and Ph.D. degree programs. They also propelled me through my various clinical internships, residency, and post-doctoral clinical training.

I knew I wanted to study and work with others who, like me, wanted to maximize their potential. But I also knew that to fully understand people, I had to work with people of all types.

Despite self-doubt and fear of the unknown, I repeatedly sought to work with the most challenging patient populations. Through my training and work as a licensed clinical, forensic, and neuropsychologist, I assessed and treated a broad spectrum of people, including those with anxiety, depression, personality disorders, dementias like Alzheimer's disease, brain injuries (from sports concussion to severe traumatic brain injuries), and problems with the law (offenders of all types).

To be able to help people reach their potential, I believed I needed to thoroughly understand and help people of all types, including those who were at their lowest points and those who were not living up to their potential.

This long process of graduate school and clinical training pulled me away from my original goal of studying and working with those who wanted to take their lives to the highest level. It took some time, and the implementation of many of the strategies outlined in this book, to get me back on track toward helping athletes and other individuals performing at the highest levels continuously improve and achieve their potential.

After a combination of 13 years of clinical training and university study, I eventually came full circle. I now work with high achievers of various types. Many of my clients are elite athletes, whether they be professionals, Olympians, or up-and-coming athletes with significant potential.

I also work with other high achievers such as professionals, entrepreneurs, executives, academics, and writers. To help illustrate some of the power of the techniques and strategies that I will teach you in this book series, I will use many of my clients as examples, with their identities and certain facts changed to preserve their anonymity.

The fact that you are reading this book means we likely have a lot in common. We have the drive to take our game and lives to the next level. We want to make sure we're focused on the right

ACHIEVE

strategies and techniques and are not wasting our time. If this is you, then you're in the right place.

I want to re-emphasize something I know I keep repeating. One thing I've learned from my own personal experience, my studies, and my work with others is that we often have much more potential than we or others believe. We also have much more control over our life trajectories than we appreciate. The first step in reaching your potential is to know yourself, your personality, values, strengths, weaknesses, and passions! Without this knowledge, you will never reach your true potential.

We need to know what turns us on and what turns us off. We need to know our personalities, our strengths, and our weaknesses. We need to figure out what we truly value in life and establish our long-term goals. Then we must work hard. Let's not kid ourselves. You don't achieve big goals by sitting around dreaming about them, or by just thinking positive thoughts. Glory doesn't come from easy victories. It comes from achieving ambitious goals that were difficult to attain.

Think about which scenario will lead to a sweeter victory:

1. Having to barely train or face a significant challenge in order to win an Olympic gold medal.

OR

2. Working your butt off in training and then going to war against the most challenging competitors the world has to offer and coming out on top.

Or what about this:

1. Making partner at your firm after six months on the job due to your good looks, who your previous employer was, or who your father was.

OR

2. Starting from the bottom, working your tail off for three years, and then making partner based on your blood, sweat, and tears.

You know the answer.

When I first came up with the idea of writing this book series, I wanted some form of a written manual or handbook for my high-achieving clients. I then realized such information might have wider appeal. And I thought I might be able to improve on some of the books out there.

I've read hundreds of psychology and self-help books. Some of these I love (e.g., Covey's *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*). Others, not so much.

I wanted to write a book that had the elements I liked — e.g., action steps — without the ones I didn't like — 300+ pages, endless description of research studies, few real-world examples, and a lack of information about the author's experience with the methods they were recommending.

The Promise of This Book

Of course, this book is not about me; it's about you. So you may be asking, what the heck am I going to get out of reading this book series? My goal is to provide you with a series of go-to manuals on the exact steps you can take to help bring you one step closer to unleashing your potential. I want you to leverage the science of sport/performance psychology, executive coaching, and cognitive neuroscience to maximize both your personal and professional potential.

What I don't want to do is bore you with endless details. My goal is to give you just enough information so you understand the What

ACHIEVE

and Why behind each strategy so you can start using them to change your life for the better.

Each of the strategies I will outline has scientific backing. I've also used them in my own life. You see, I know how powerful scientific research is, and I use this as my starting point. As I mentioned earlier, for me to truly believe in a strategy, technique or hack, I have to try it out on myself first before I can really buy into it.

Most importantly, I use them with my high-achieving clients, whether they be professional athletes, students, or entrepreneurs. When science, my experience, and my high-achieving clients get great results, then I add the strategies to my toolkit. The strategies in this book and others in this series have not only turned my life around —they've changed the lives of the high achievers I've worked with.

I promise that, if you implement only a few of these steps and strategies, your performance will improve and you will be that much closer to reaching your goals. If you implement most of the steps and strategies, you will drastically improve your performance beyond what you may have thought was your potential. You can rest assured that you are doing exactly what you need to be doing to ensure your success.

So the question becomes: Do you want to live with regrets because you didn't do all you could to achieve your dreams and goals, or do you want to be able to look yourself in the mirror each day and feel confident that you are doing everything in your power to reach your goals?

If your answer is the latter, then you're in the right place. The strategies and techniques you are about to learn will take your game to the next level. You are about to learn how to unleash your potential and find out who you are, what you really want, and how to make it happen. I want to say congratulations for taking this first step.

Chris Friesen, Ph.D.

Are you ready to take your life to the next level? If so, let's do this!

Visit friesenperformance.com/achieve-free-gift to download the ACHIEVE Framework.

STEP 1
KNOW YOURSELF

Chapter 1

Taking Stock of Who You Are

The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.

— Lao Tzu

Permanence, perseverance and persistence in spite of all obstacles, discouragements, and impossibilities: It is this, that in all things distinguishes the strong soul from the weak.

— Thomas Carlyle

Britain's Danny Williams is no ordinary boxer. Unless you're a hard-core boxing fan, you've probably never heard of him. Although he fought and beat an "old" Mike Tyson in 2005 and even challenged reigning WBC champ Vitali Klitschko, that's not why I'm bringing him up. What is remarkable about Williams is his heart.

This was remarkably displayed early in his 20-year boxing career when he faced off against another Brit named Mark Potter in 2000. To call this fight dramatic would be an understatement. By all accounts, the fight was supposed to be fairly even. But in Round 1 Williams was knocked down by Potter. Then in the 3rd round, Williams suffered one of the most painful and dreaded

injuries when his right shoulder dislocated. He couldn't move his arm.

Most mere mortals would have called the fight and given up, assuming we had an almost zero chance of winning a match that required above all else the use of our arms.

At the end of the third round, one of Williams' cornermen tried to push his shoulder back into its socket. Seeing this, the fight's promoter, Frank Warren, begged Williams to stop the fight. To the shock of the packed crowd in the Wembley Conference Centre, he refused.

Amazingly, with only one arm properly functioning, Williams fought through the next two rounds, even though Potter tried to take advantage by repeatedly punching Williams' damaged arm and shoulder. The referee did nothing.

As the sixth round began, Williams looked like he was recovering somewhat. He was able to bend his arm in an attempt to protect his chin from Potter's relentless attacks. But this lasted only about 15 seconds before his shoulder dislocated once again.

Everyone knew it was only a matter of time before either the referee stopped the fight or Williams succumbed to Potter's blows. But the crowd couldn't help but feel a sense of awe at what they were witnessing. How was this guy doing it? How could he withstand the pain? Didn't he know he was finished? Why didn't the bloody ref stop the fight?

"They have to call the fight!" the color commentator kept repeating. "He's going to get knocked out! ... He's in a no-win situation!"

Despite the pain and the odds, Williams was not about to give up his Commonwealth title or cede the vacant British title. No way. He had trained too hard and too long for this. He believed in himself even when nobody else did. He normally fought orthodox

— or right-handed — he kept fighting just like he always had, but now only using his left arm.

What happened next is the stuff of legends. Even Stallone couldn't have written a more dramatic ending. Williams kept pushing forward, catching Potter with a perfect left uppercut that sent him to the canvas semi-conscious.

Potter rose to his feet before the 10-second limit. Williams attacked again with his one and only weapon — his left arm. He swung once and missed. He swung again — and connected! Potter staggered, and fell to one knee. He again made it to his feet before the limit, but the momentum was no longer in his favor. Once the referee signaled the fighters to engage once more, Williams charged Potter again with nothing but his one arm and his unbreakable spirit.

Williams connected, and Potter crumpled. The referee was having no more of it. Against all the odds, Williams triumphed! The color commentator could barely comprehend what he had witnessed. Even Britain's own ultimate tough guy chef and star of Hell's Kitchen, Gordon Ramsey, can be seen ringside standing and staring in disbelief.

After the fight, Williams said simply: "I would never quit!"

What is it that Williams tapped into to keep moving forward despite the pain and odds? Was he stupid? No. Does he have something most of us lack? No.

He showed heart and an unstoppable spirit because he had an overarching goal, a mission, a purpose that was bigger than the pain. Bigger than the fear of getting knocked out. Bigger than the fear of permanent injury.

In battling the odds to become the British and Commonwealth Heavyweight Champion, Williams demonstrated a number of the primary differentiators between those of us who

ACHIEVE

are successful in sport, business, and life, and those of us who aren't. These differentiators are learnable. So what are they?

The Seeds of Success

Successful people know themselves well; they grasp their strengths and weaknesses and then live their lives based on their deepest values, mission, purpose, and goals, and not based on their immediate urges, moods, or circumstances. Nietzsche said it best, "He who has a why to live can bear almost any how."

Successful people know that they have much more control over the trajectory of their lives than most people realize. They know and accept that they will repeatedly go through rough waters. They know that's how the world works and don't fight or complain about it. They also know that if they keep pushing forward, they will eventually reach their destination.

They also know that even though they are steering their ship, they can only control what has been given to them. They accept themselves for who they are and work with or around what they are given. They know they can't control what the world throws in their path, but they can control how they react to this. They know that they can anticipate and act before the world acts upon them.

They also know that once they get to their destination, there will be another destination they would like to visit on the other side of the horizon and that the cycle will continue. Because of this, they accept and enjoy the struggle, as they know that the journey *is* the destination.

So what does this mean for you? This means that you need to accept and live your life like successful people. So you should:

- Know and accept your strengths and weaknesses, and work with or around what you are given.

Chris Friesen, Ph.D.

- Live your life based on your deepest values, mission, purpose, and goals, and not based on your immediate urges, moods, or circumstances.
- Realize you have more potential than you already believe.
- Realize that you have much more control over the trajectory of your life than you already believe.
- Accept that you will repeatedly go through difficulties. Don't fight or complain about it. Instead learn and grow from it.
- Know that you can anticipate and act before the world acts upon you.
- Know that if you keep pushing forward, you can eventually reach your destination.
- Know that you can't control what the world throws at you, but you can control how you react to this.
- Know that once you achieve your goal, there will be another goal you will want to achieve.
- Know that the journey *is* the destination. Accept and enjoy the struggle and triumphs.
- Realize that whatever path you choose, it's going to be hard and painful at times. You need to be ready for this and accept it as worthwhile if you are to live the life you really want.

Know Your Destination

If I'm to help you become truly successful, we need to make sure you know yourself and where you really want to go. In other

ACHIEVE

words, you need to know your WHAT and your WHY. There's nothing worse than relentlessly pursuing a goal, and then coming to realize it was not the right goal for you. This has become all too apparent with many high achievers I've worked with.

I once worked with a young and highly talented basketball player named Leroy. Leroy rocketed up the ranks and was playing for one of the top college basketball teams. But his performance was progressively worsening. At first, everyone thought he was struggling to adjust to the faster pace of college play and the combination of academic, social, and athletic demands placed on college basketball players. But when his performance continued to slide in his second season, his coach insisted he see a sport psychologist.

After we worked together for a few weeks, it became apparent that Leroy struggled even to motivate himself to apply the strategies we discussed in the sessions. He admitted he hated being in the spotlight and all of the buzz around basketball. He told me that he often felt annoyed and overwhelmed by all the noise and chatter in the locker room and on the court. He didn't feel anxious; he felt overstimulated, which is common for those who share his basic personality tendency, which I will discuss later in this book.

Leroy told me that, ever since he was a young kid, he was taller than his peers and basketball came easily to him. As a teenager, people started to give him more respect and attention because of his basketball talents. Prior to this, he felt that nobody thought much of him or his future. Suddenly, his family started to talk about how he was the one child that would "make it." Like any kid, he was encouraged by this attention to continue to pursue basketball.

But through our discussions, I noticed he never spoke about having a strong passion for the game. Instead, he talked about feeling obligated to his family, friends, and coaches to not let

them down. He noticed how his family would often joke about the expensive things that he could buy them once he made it to the NBA. This also served to motivate him to continue with basketball.

As we got to know each other, I asked him about his passion for the game. He gave me flat responses. I asked him if his dream was to play in the NBA. Surprisingly, Leroy said that nobody had ever asked him that, and that he was unsure. I asked what he would do with his life, if money were no object. He was unsure.

Leroy was studying criminology at university because he always had been fascinated by detective stories and crime shows. He admitted that, even when he was a young teenager, he often read books in bed when nobody was around, as reading was not something his family or siblings valued. Surprisingly, he never paid much attention to basketball or other sports on TV.

But his coaches and even his professors seemed to expect him to put little energy or effort into his studies. The message he was receiving was that he was there to play basketball and that academics were of little importance.

Leroy lit up when describing his favorite detective novels and crime shows and all the ways detectives could find their suspect with a mixture of old-fashioned detective work and modern forensic technology. He also lit up when talking about his criminology courses. When he talked about this interest with me, it was like I was talking to a completely different person.

Although it took some time, Leroy finally admitted to himself that he almost hated basketball and was really only playing to please others. He eventually admitted he felt trapped and dreaded a future in basketball. Of course, he admitted that making a lot of money in the NBA would be nice, but he really didn't believe he could put in the work it would take to make it. He realized that basketball was taking away from his chance to achieve his real dream, which was to become an FBI agent.

ACHIEVE

After lengthy and heartfelt discussions, it became very clear that Leroy never really loved basketball and his lack of passion for the game was not something I could help him with. Without this passion, it is extremely difficult to make it to the top. The only thing I could do was help him figure out what he really wanted to do with his life. Leroy ultimately gained a better understanding of his personality, values, strengths, and interests using a number of the strategies outlined in this book.

In the end, Leroy decided to finish his second basketball season while doing his best not to let his studies slide. He wanted to make sure he would have no regrets if he stopped playing. In the end, he did stop playing. He sends me occasional updates and last I heard he still has no regrets.

After he stopped playing, his grades skyrocketed and he was a changed person. He went from being a kid living out the dreams of others to a man living out his own. He was accepted into one of the country's top master's degree programs in criminology and couldn't be happier. He found a calling that was in line with his personality, values, and natural interests.

There is nothing worse than going through years of blood, sweat, and tears pursuing a goal that ends up being the wrong goal for you. Leroy is one of the lucky ones. There are many worse stories of athletes and others who pursued the wrong goals for the wrong reasons, and, as a result, ended up being miserable. Often they don't even know why. Sometimes they become depressed, anxious, and addicted to substances to get by.

Don't let yourself be one of them. Following the steps and doing the exercises in this book will help ensure you are on the right path for you.

Chapter 2

Know Your Core Personality Tendencies

The most difficult thing in life is to know yourself.

— *Thales*

You can't drive a car until you know how it works. Or at least, you can't drive it *well!*

The same is true when it comes to your life. Without a solid understanding of your basic temperamental personality traits, what I call your Basic Personality Tendencies, you will find yourself frustrated and ineffective trying to live up to your potential. So in this chapter, you're going to learn about your core personality.

One of the biggest mistakes most self-help books make is to assume we are all the same. I believe the one-size-fits-all strategy is one of the primary reasons most self-help books don't lead to any lasting change for the majority of people reading them. Also, many self-help books are written by people with no training or serious study of human nature. Without this training, they often are unable to critically evaluate scientific research to determine whether their advice has any merit.

ACHIEVE

On the other hand, when books on psychological topics are written by academics, they often are laden with science, but weak when it comes to translating that information into actionable strategies that people can actually use. Conversely, there is a huge body of research on personality that has not made it into public consciousness.

That's a shame because psychologists from around the world have produced consistent findings in the measurement of our basic temperaments or personality traits. This subject has been near and dear to me for a long time. In fact, my undergraduate and master's theses dealt with what kinds of things our personalities predict, from adjustment and success in university to political orientations. My Ph.D. dissertation was also about how our personalities predict the types of psychological problems we develop.

That said, there are a number of personality measures being sold to people and businesses that are not based on good science. These measures are primarily sold and used by people with little to no training in psychology or personality, such as business consultants, executive coaches, and life coaches. If you've ever taken any of these assessments, don't put a lot of weight on the results. If you plan on taking one, or if someone like an executive or life coach tries to convince you to take it, tell them you'll pass.

Many of these measures like to pigeonhole people into personality "types." The idea that you neatly fall into one of a number of supposed personality "types" is flawed and not well supported by research. Personality psychologists have found that categorizing people into types is not a very accurate way to describe personality. We are much more nuanced than that; people just don't fall into neat little boxes.

Any serious personality researcher measures traits on a continuum or spectrum, not as an either-or proposition. Cross-cultural personality research has found that we all tend to differ

across five to six global personality dimensions, each made up of a number of different but related traits that will be discussed below. Many popular measures sold to businesses are missing some of these key personality dimensions.

For example, one of the most obvious ways we differ from one another is in our tendency to experience negative thoughts and feelings. I refer to this as Negative Emotions — short for Susceptibility to Negative Emotions and Stress. This dimension is not even measured by some of the most popular measures used in business and by life and executive coaches.

The nail in the coffin for many of these personality “type” measures is that they have been shown to be unreliable. When a measure is unreliable, it is by definition invalid. In other words, useless.

For example, independent researchers have repeatedly administered these personality “type” measures multiple times to large groups of people only a few weeks apart. They found that a large portion obtained a totally different result or “type” each time they took the test. By definition, personality traits are enduring ways of acting, thinking, and behaving. Personality is not the same as your current mood and doesn’t change week-to-week. So if you get a different result each time you take the test, then it can’t be a valid measure of personality.

So don’t make any decisions or draw any conclusions about yourself after taking any of these popular personality “type” measures. No serious personality psychologist uses them anymore, as there are much better measures available that are in line with modern personality research which don’t have such fatal flaws.

What You Can and Cannot Change

One thing you need to know and accept is that there is a continuum of what you can and cannot change about yourself. Some things, like height, are essentially unchangeable once you become an adult. Other things like muscle composition are alterable to a certain degree, depending on a number of factors, including your genetics. The same thing goes for your psychological makeup.

Your Basic Personality Tendencies are difficult, but not impossible, to change at the core. Your tendencies are essentially hard-wired into you starting from a young age due to a combination of the genes inherited from your family and your various experiences.

The neural pathways in your brain that control these are repeatedly activated on a daily, if not minute-to-minute basis for years and years. The repetitive activation of your basic personality strengthens these neural pathways, making them harder and harder to change the older you get.

Although much of your Basic Personality Tendencies are difficult to permanently change, things like values, beliefs, attitudes, interests, goals, habits, and self-perceptions are much more malleable. Before we get to some of your more easily modifiable features, though, first we must help you learn about your Basic Personality Tendencies.

Living your life or pursuing goals that are incongruent with your Basic Personality Tendencies invites failure. In a groundbreaking book, *Personality in Adulthood*, the National Institute of Aging's personality psychologists, Robert McCrae and Paul Costa, found that our personalities are set like plaster by the time we reach the age of about 30. They and other personality researchers from around the world have repeatedly found that, despite what happens to us (e.g., divorces, job losses, lottery winnings, deaths

of loved ones), our Basic Personality Tendencies don't change much over our lifespans.

This may sound depressing to some, but let me clear up what I mean and don't mean by Basic Personality Tendencies:

- Basic Personality Tendencies do not refer to our beliefs, values, interests, talents, or IQs.
- Basic personality refers to temperaments that are present at birth, then shaped by life experiences. About 40 percent to 60 percent of our basic personality is considered heritable. This means they are inherited from our parents in our genes or the result of "nature." The rest is considered to be influenced by "nurture" — what we experience in life.

Anyone with multiple children will tell you that each child came into the world with their own unique personalities, despite few changes in parenting styles, nutrition, and home environments between siblings. So make no mistake — Basic Personality Tendencies are real and have a huge impact on our lives.

Mindsets

I want to make something clear at this point. I'm not suggesting that our personalities are unchangeable. There is accumulating evidence of something called neuroplasticity, which refers to the fact that we can change our brain functioning through changes in lifestyles, daily habits, and through other experiences.

But this can only go so far when it comes to Basic Personality Tendencies. It is very rare to take someone who is extremely outgoing by nature and turn them into someone who is introverted for more than a short period of time. And that's not really the point, anyway.

ACHIEVE

Changing basic personality should not be the goal for most people. The goal should be to come to know their Basic Personality Tendencies and learn to either work around them or work with them along the path to success. That said, some may need to change their personality as much as they can in a direction that is more conducive to reaching goals that are in line with their values and purpose.

And there is hope for those who want to work on a Basic Personality Tendency. There is a significant body of research that suggests that if you believe that your personal qualities and abilities can change — if you have what Stanford psychologist Carol Dweck calls a “growth mindset” — then you are more likely to be able to change them. On the other hand, if you believe your traits and abilities are fixed, you are unlikely to be able to change them. With a growth mindset, you are more likely to challenge yourself and persevere in the face of setbacks.

So let’s assume that you are in the early stages of getting your start-up off the ground and you believe you are an anxious introvert. You know that eventually you’re going to have to pitch to investors to secure the needed funding for your product. If you have a fixed mindset, you’re going to have a hard time believing you can pitch and schmooze with investors. You’ll either avoid doing this or try to pawn it off on someone else. You’ll probably say to yourself: “I’m way too anxious and reserved to pitch and mingle... I’m just not like that.”

But if you took on a growth mindset you would realize that even as a temperamentally anxious introvert, you could improve by working on your anxiety, presentation skills, and ability to charm and engage in small-talk. The growth mindset would enable you to alter your behavior, at least temporarily, or even possibly change your personality to a certain extent.

In the majority of people, personality traits are relatively enduring ways of thinking, feeling, and acting, but this does not

Chris Friesen, Ph.D.

mean that personality tendencies are unchangeable. If you believe they are unchangeable, they will be. If you believe there is leeway, you will be able to adapt your personality somewhat to suit your values and purpose.

Stanford psychologist Carol Dweck and others have now measured the effects of mindsets, but the wisdom has been known for much longer: Confucius said: “He who says he can and he who says he can’t are both usually right.”⁴

Resources

Mindset by Carol Dweck, Ph.D.

Personality In Adulthood: A Five-Factor Perspective (2nd Edition)
by Robert McCrae, Ph.D., & Paul Costa, Ph.D.

The Owner’s Manual For Personality At Work: How the Big Five
Personality Traits Affect Performance, Communication,
Teamwork, Leadership, and Sales by Pierce Howard, Ph.D., &
Jane Howard, M.B.A.

⁴ Confucius quote: <https://goo.gl/q4VHkl> or: <http://goo.gl/ogvZaK>