

FALL UP!

TURN ADVERSITY INTO YOUR SUPER-POWER

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What People Are Saying about *Fall Up!*

“Losing my eyesight totally and permanently in a car crash at age eighteen, I feared my life would be filled with an inability to make and keep relationships. But instead, I became a much more empathetic and understanding person. *Fall Up!* will teach you to harness the power of your own adversities and see your life in a wonderful new way!”

— **David Meador**, two-time national blind golf champion

“An unexpected terminal illness turned tragedy into inspiration and hope, redirecting my purpose in life. What I love about *Fall Up!* is that it helps you to find your purpose with effective, simple strategies.”

— **Dr. Sandra F. Mulhinch**, clinical psychologist

“The tragic loss of my sister forced me to reevaluate my life and move into a new life purpose. *Fall Up!* shows everyone the process of what I went through as well as how you can transform your life into something wonderful.”

— **Stephen Garrett**, M.S., grief counselor

“*Fall Up!* catches the essence of how tragedy can be reexamined and reshaped into a gift in your life.”

— **Jim Stevens**, the Scrimshaw Studio

“A near-death experience became my wake-up call to living a life that really felt purposeful. I am hoping that *Fall Up!* will be your wake-up to help you discover your purpose in life.”

— **Sam Russell**, founder of the Giving Closet

“*Fall Up!* is an incredibly inspiring book. The stories interwoven throughout are perfect examples of the principles of ‘transcendability.’”

— **Kristin Willocks**, EdS, NCSP, school psychologist

“*Fall Up!* shows how you can turn your adversity into a tsunami of positive change.”

— **Kia Scherr**, founder of One Life Alliance

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To Tommie and Myles

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PROLOGUE

Why They Really Lean In

“WHAT IS THE MASTER EMOTION?”

This is the opening question I ask when I start my seminars on emotional toughness. I am really trying to bring insight to which emotion leads to other powerful, positive emotions such as courage, grit, determination, confidence, and peace of mind.

Before I give the audience the answer (and now you), I share with them the essence of *Fall Up!* It all started a few years ago. I was sitting at a Starbucks with a friend, Joel Bunkowske, when we started discussing—for what became many hours—the concept of how people turn tragedy into transcendence, which I call transcend-ability. While Joel had experienced it firsthand (as you will find out later in the book), I also had a few friends who told me about their own amazing life transformations because of a hardship. Joel and I thought it was interesting that while there is some research on this topic, there are many questions still left unanswered.

To fill this gap as well as advance this idea, I interviewed people who said they had experienced transcendence from tragedy. Each person I interviewed shared how they had gone

through specific stages, but ultimately, their tragedy did not beat them down. Rather, their life difficulty helped them find their authentic self and achieve a life full of purpose on a daily basis—which is the essence of the process of transcend-ability and “falling up.”

I am not exactly sure why transcend-ability happens. Perhaps tragedy is the darkness that allows you to see the light in your life. Maybe this pain gives perspective and provides a needed wake-up call to reevaluate your current position in life. Or, it could be the tragedy quiets all the noise and chaos in your life, allowing you to hear your “Lifesong.” What I do know is that such a terrible moment or event helps to recreate in you a life filled with purpose.

So back to the initial question. What is the master emotion? How did you answer?

Many people in my seminars say love or confidence or even fear, but no one ever shouts out the right answer: *Purpose is the master emotion*. I think it is because most people see purpose as an outcome or destination. However, purpose is also an emotion. When someone does something meaningful, they will say, “I feel a sense of purpose or I feel purposeful.” More importantly, when your thoughts, actions, and emotions are filled with purpose—you will have supreme courage and lose your fear of failure or rejection. When you feel what you are doing is filled with purpose, you will have the extreme confidence to overcome any difficult obstacle or distraction, and all your anxieties will melt away. Purpose is on top of the ladder to all other emotions.

When I discussed emotional toughness in previous seminars, I related it to helping you achieve at a higher level. Obviously, people want to discover how to get into the zone and have a peak performance experience. While audiences liked my message, now they really lean in when I tell stories about how people “fall up”

and turn their tragedy into transcendence. Of more significance, they are delighted when I explain that when you have purpose in your actions, you will have supreme emotional and mental toughness. To my surprise and joy, I receive feedback like I never have before in my fifteen years speaking to groups. I can see how this message touches their hearts. Audience members now tell me how they “love” my message and how it impacted their lives in such a meaningful way.

This is the impetus for writing *Fall Up!* At one level, we all want to hear stories about individuals who had severe difficulties yet overcame those hardships and reached their goals. These stories give you the message that your obstacles can be the chisel to free your authentic self. These stories give you hope and inspiration as well as show how you can turn adversity into your superpower for personal growth.

But I want to emphasize that this book is not about tragedy. Let me say that again to be loud and clear. You don’t need to have a tragedy to learn from this book, as the essence is about helping you to be filled with that master emotion, every day and in every situation—to make purpose a verb. I want to help you find your recipe for an amazing life. Hopefully, this goal is achieved throughout these pages.

You are an extraordinary person. Greatness is within you. It might have been in hiding, but that is only temporary. If you choose to be the person you always imagined yourself to be—then read on—*Fall Up!* was written for you.

FALL UP!

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: The New Science of Super-Resilience

“The eagle never soars in a calm wind.”

— Wilbur Wright

AFTER 432 DATES ON MATCH.COM, I FINALLY FOUND THE ONE—
TOMMIE. Yes, that is her real name, just in case you were wondering. We fell in love, got married, and, because I was in my late forties at the time, we decided to start a family right away.

So with lots of practice, my lovely wife got pregnant. At the two-month mark, we went to her doctor to get an ultrasound of our baby. The nurse greeted us with a big smile, had Tommie lie on her back, and began to put some type of goo on her belly. The nurse then took this round instrument about the size of her hand and told us to watch the monitor above her head. There we saw the miracle of life—the beating heart of our baby.

We were thrilled, and so we raced home. We began to pick out baby names and colors for the baby room and to buy baby furniture. We began telling all our friends and family about our wonderful news.

Then at the three-month mark, we went back to the doctor. We had the same nurse who put the same goo on Tommie's belly. Except this time, within thirty seconds, her face dropped. She turned to me and said in a deeply saddened voice, "I am so sorry, there is no heartbeat."

Those words felt like someone had just punched me as hard as they could in the stomach. My legs went numb. I looked at Tommie. She was devastated and crying uncontrollably. That made me feel even worse. Then my mind began to race, *Could we handle this pain another time if Tommie were to get pregnant again?* At that moment, I felt hopeless.

But, three months later, Tommie got pregnant again, and today we have an amazing boy, Myles Thomas. We are very blessed. This heart-wrenching experience awoke us to the miracle of life, and now we greatly appreciate every moment with Myles, as we know how special he is to us. He is an amazing gift and the joy of our life.

Why *Fall Up!* Is Always Vital and Pertinent

If you are reading this book, chances are you have had a painful tragedy in your life. Perhaps you got divorced, lost an important job, lost a parent, or a dear friend succumbed to cancer. Or you suffered a miscarriage, as we did. To add fuel to the fire, it seems like social media is reporting a tragedy on a daily basis, from a mass shooting to a bomb on a plane, to genocide in the Middle East.

Tragedy is unavoidable. Tragedy is part of the human experience. Millions and millions of people are touched by tragedy.

While painful hardships are a part of your journey, they do not have to beat you up and swallow your hope for a wonderful life. Tragedy need not push you down to the darkest feelings of despair. Rather, the tornadoes in your life can help you discover your wings and allow you to soar upward. The eagle was meant to soar in a turbulent wind.

You can fall up!

Adversity Will Propel You Skyward

A tragic moment in David Meador's life became his force for falling up. Twice the national blind golf champion, David speaks to my sport psychology class every semester because he is very jovial and a great speaker. He starts the conversation by telling my class how a blind man plays golf. But then he speaks of the horrific accident. At the age of eighteen, he was driving his car too fast and could not stop as it approached a *T* in the road. His car crashed into a tree, which in turn smashed his head into the windshield, cracking his skull wide open. When David awoke in his hospital bed, the doctor was standing over him and said these life-changing words: "David, you severed your ocular nerve and you will be blind for the rest of your life."

David then explains to my class that before the accident, he was selfish and uncaring. He had no idea what he wanted to do with his life or who he wanted to become. He was aimless.

But the accident changed him to his core. David tells my students that he became much more focused because he lost his sight. He began to care about others, and his empathy grew exponentially. David proclaims that blindness allowed him to truly see what was important in his life, such as friends and family. He also tells my class that he is the only man in America who can walk through Home Depot and not see a single thing he wants (this always get a good laugh).

The Paradigm Shift

David Meador allowed me to see that the old science of loss is incomplete. Most people are familiar with the groundbreaking work of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross. She interviewed people who were dying and discovered they went through distinct stages: anger, denial, depression, bargaining, and, lastly, acceptance. Her work is the gold standard to understand how we can adjust and move through our loss and grief.

While the Kübler-Ross model has captured our attention for decades, it is lacking the final stage of personal growth. People do much more than just move to acceptance. David Meador did not just accept his lot. He did not just bounce back to his original point. He was not just resilient. Rather, he bounced back higher because of his tragedy. He turned his adversity into a super power for personal growth. David soared skyward and transcended because of the loss of his sight. He turned tragedy into transcendence.

Transcendence is the final stage in tragedy.

It makes sense that transcendence will result from tragedy. Just look at nature itself.

The Nature Factor

Forest fires are the prototypical example of how a tragic event will eventually make the environment more livable for both plants and animals. The tragic fire is a gift to the forest to become stronger for the next generation.

At first glance, it would appear that a fire in the woods would be devastating. But on closer examination, a forest fire can actually benefit the forest and all its inhabitants. A fire cleans the forest floor of debris, which makes the soil more fertile for growth. The fire opens up the existing forest to sunlight, which helps nourish the existing trees. Ultimately, a fire reduces

the competition for nutrients, allowing established trees to grow stronger and healthier.

Fire also strengthens the habitat for all the species that live in a forest. Fire clears unwanted brush, which allows new grasses and herbs to regenerate, providing nutrient-rich food for many wildlife species. It also increases the water supply with the removal of unwanted brush. With fewer plants absorbing water, streams are fuller, benefiting all types of plants and animals.

Some species of trees actually *need* forest fires. Certain trees have fire-resistant bark and cones that require heat to open and release seeds for regeneration. Without fire, these trees would eventually succumb to old age, unable to bring new life to the forest.

A devastating fire is actually the lifeblood of the forest and turns the forest into a thriving habitat.

Transcendence Is Built into Our DNA

Transcendence is part of our nature as well. Take the stages of muscle building. Your muscles are more than just resilient. They will continue to grow based on the adversity you place upon them. More specifically, you must expose your muscles to increasing amounts of weight (or resistance) to enhance muscle growth. Once you have exposed your muscles to severe adversity, they will adapt by bringing in extra fluid and protein as a response to the stress placed upon them. More stress must be placed upon the muscles for them to continue their growth stage. This process does not have a ceiling; rather, your body will continue to build and grow as stressors and adversity are placed upon the system.

Interestingly, if you stop placing your muscles into adverse situations, you will lose muscle mass. You have experienced this if you have stopped working out and discovered you can't lift the same amount of weight as before. You need to again go through

the rebuilding process. Your DNA makes you an amazing adaptive organism as your muscles can cycle back and forth from adversity to strength.

The New Science of Super-Resilience

Given that transcendence from tragedy happens all around us as well as within us, we must revolutionize our thinking about how people can have an amazing positive transformation from a severe adversity. We must learn the secret to using adversity as a superpower for personal growth. There must be a new science of resilience.

While my academic background and consulting experiences are in resiliency and positive psychology, I had not researched anyone who had used tragedy as a launching pad to greatness—until I started work on this book. I was keenly interested in this new principle, so I interviewed people from all over the world who declared that their tragic moments propelled them forward into the person they were meant to be. As you will see later in the book, I interviewed Kia Scherr, who lost her husband and daughter in a Mumbai terrorist attack, but said that this terrible pain helped her find her true path in life. Because of her tragedy, Kia created a foundation for peace and discovered her life's work. As another example, I sat down with Frankie Caterisano, who told me that she was a severe procrastinator. However, that all changed after a motorcycle accident, which killed her husband and broke both her hips. This painful tragedy propelled her into being an unstoppable person with immense focus and desire. As a result, she went back to college to finish her degree as a physical therapist.

While *Fall Up!* includes many uplifting true personal stories, more importantly, **this is the first and only book** to share with you the stages for achieving **transcendence**. Amazingly, it was discov-

ered from these interviews that everyone progressed through the same stages to reach transcendence—in the same sequential order. **I call this process “Transcend-Ability,” and this is the future for understanding the complete process of resiliency.** The following are the unique stages to reach transcendence, and they create the overall framework for this book:

Stage 1: The Wake-up call

At this stage, adversity awakens you to the realization that you are not on your true path. Some people have described it as if they were sleepwalking through life and hardship awakened them from their slumber.

Stage 2: Flip the switch.

Here, you make the shift to believe the event has a purposeful connection in your life. You begin to realize that you have the power to choose your attitude and see your painful event as an opportunity for personal growth. Once this happens, this tragic event sparks the realization that you must redesign your life for the better.

Stage 3: Release your genius.

When you move into this new direction, you are forced out of your comfort zone. This process helps you to see talents that you never knew existed. You then use these newfound strengths to move to the next step.

Stage 4: Discover your LIFESONG.

At this stage, all the distractions, chaos, and misinformation that had consumed your life turn quiet. Now, you can finally hear your true Lifesong—your life's purpose. Consequently, you live in your flow and find joy and contentment beyond compare.

Stage 5: Make *purpose* a verb.

Discovering your Lifesong is not enough, however. You must take action. When you make *purpose* a verb, you have reached the final stage of transcend-ability. At this final stage, you move from a “me” orientation to a “we” orientation, and your focus turns to having a meaningful impact in the world. Living in your purpose makes you radiate amazing energy, and the world responds in kind. This is the sweet spot in life.

Now that you are aware of the stages of transcendence, you will see these stages everywhere (if you look closely). You will see them in stories of tragedy you read in books or in stories told by the media, and even in people you know.

Take for instance Michael J. Fox. Most people know that the famous actor has Parkinson’s disease. It causes him to have severe tremors in his body and limits his ability to speak well. Parkinson’s caused Fox to give up his amazing acting career that had made him both rich and famous. Most would think that Parkinson’s was a terrible tragedy for him.

But true to the stages of transcendence, Michael J. Fox calls his battle with Parkinson’s a *gift*. Yes, he sees it as a blessing because it was a wake-up call for him. As he puts it in his autobiography, *Lucky Man*, the gift of Parkinson’s allowed him to **flip the switch** and be less selfish and to focus upon his family and the community. He also mentions that Parkinson’s forced him to realize his true **purpose** in life: the Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson’s research. This foundation is focused on finding a cure for Parkinson’s disease as well as promoting the development of therapies to make life better for those living with Parkinson’s today. Michael J. Fox made *purpose* a verb by working toward the betterment of mankind rather than just the entertainment of people.

Another prototypical example of the stages of transcendence

that has captured the media’s eye is the life story of supermodel Petra Nemcova. While vacationing with her boyfriend at a luxury resort in Thailand, a tsunami pounded their bungalow. The wave took her boyfriend out to sea and he drowned. But by the grace of fortune, the force of water pushed Petra high enough to grab the branches of a palm tree. Battered and bruised from all the debris, she clung on for eight hours, all while she heard the terrified calls of children pleading for help. Petra could not let go of that branch. She knew if she did, she, too, would drown in that death-filled debris. At that moment, she felt completely helpless to save them. But those horrific calls for help were Petra’s **wake-up call**.

While recovering from her wounds, both physically and emotionally, Petra began to see that this horrific event had significance in her life. Petra **flipped the switch** and decided that she needed to help children in some way.

Petra returned to Thailand and discovered these children needed new schools. She realized she needed to start a charity to fund this educational goal. This forced her out of her comfort zone, and it allowed her to realize her true genius as an organizer and fundraiser. From this horrific experience, Petra **heard her Lifesong**: She created a charity called All Hands and Hearts. To date, it has opened more than one hundred schools in impoverished areas throughout the world.

At one of the school openings, a young girl came up to Petra and told her, “You are our guardian angel.” To Petra, that was one of the most wonderful moments in her life. Because of her tragedy, she achieved transcend-ability as she now lives in purpose, and her life could not be any sweeter.

Both Michael and Petra show us the eternal message of this book: **Tragedy is not meant to diminish you and beat you down; rather, life’s hardships are meant to lift you higher. You can fall up to become the person you were meant to be.**

The Journey Is Complete

Knowing the stages of transcendence helps us understand the entire process of being super resilient. This journey to understand resiliency took a long time to complete, but was accomplished when all the pieces fit into an overarching framework. A similar tale involved the discovery of the modern light bulb.

If you are like most people, you probably thought that Thomas Alva Edison invented the light bulb, but that answer is only partially correct. In 1801, the English chemist Humphrey Davy demonstrated that light could be illuminated when platinum strips were heated with electricity inside a glass cylinder. In 1841, Frederick de Moleyns was granted the first patent for what he called “the electric light bulb,” and his invention used a charcoal filament. In 1850, Joseph Swan developed a paper filament dipped in a carbon solution. There were at least twenty other inventors from either Europe or America who added to this new invention. However, the main problem with their electric light bulbs was that they functioned only a short time before they went out. None of their light bulbs were feasible for general consumption.

The genius of Thomas Edison was that he had vision—he could see the big picture to this light bulb problem. Edison understood that these inventors only had pieces to this puzzle, but the real picture was far from whole. So Edison improved on their already-existing designs to complete their journey. In 1879, Edison invented the incandescent light bulb using a carbonized bamboo filament that lasted twelve hundred hours, and now our world is lit forevermore.

This Edison tale is very similar to our story of transcendence from tragedy. Many exceptional minds have investigated the science of resiliency and its relation to personal growth. They have tried to understand why some people keep standing when steamrolled by the hard knocks of life while others fall into de-

spair. For example, in his book, *Learned Optimism*, Martin Seligman explains how to become aware of your attributional style. Your attributional style is a personality dimension to how you explain the causes for failure and success. When you become aware of your style, you can change your thinking about failure, and, in turn, become more optimistic and hopeful for the future. Another example is Carol Dweck’s popular book *Mindset*, in which she explains how to flip the switch and find the proper mindset in order to see your struggles as a growth opportunity. In his bestselling book, *Go Put Use Your Strengths to Work*, Marcus Buckingham proposes that to be successful you must become aware of your signature strengths as well as use your signature strengths when confronted with difficult situations. In *When All You’ve Ever Wanted Isn’t Enough*, Harold Kushner tells us that we must be driven by purpose in all life situations if we want to be authentically happy. Craig and Mark Kielburger wrote an amazing book, *Me to We*, which describes the power of connection and its impact upon our happiness. They explain poignantly that we can overcome our hardships when we move from a place of selfishness to a mentality of service. In *Transformed by Trauma*, Tedeschi and Moore, illustrate how people can grow in the aftermath of trauma and live great lives.

Unfortunately, many brilliant minds and many wonderful self-help books have only enlightened us to pieces of the whole picture—an unfinished puzzle. They lack the complete vision for harnessing the power of loss, adversity, and hardship. The journey was incomplete—until now.

Fall Up! is the first book that provides a complete picture for blossoming from the bitters. By understanding the stages of transcendence, you will be able to progress through each stage and acquire transcend-ability. With transcend-ability, you will become super-resilient and bounce back higher than you ever thought

imaginable. *Fall Up!* shows you how to turn adversity into your superpower for personal growth.

Knowledge gives you this power. The knowledge in this book will give you the power to propel your life to a new dimension. All you need to do is take the first step.

***Fall Up!* was written with these five main goals:**

1. Discover the new science of super-resilience. While the Kübler-Ross model had its day in the sunshine, you must move forward and radically change your thinking about resilience. You can do much more than merely accept a loss; you can actually transcend from any difficulty. This is the new science of personal triumph—this is the new science of resilience.

2. Demonstrate the stages of transcendence. These stages are the new science of resilience and create the roadmap to finding your authentic self. Thus, these stages become the chapters for *Fall Up!* These chapters are your essential guide to harness the power of your adversity to become the person you were always meant to be.

3. Illustrate how to turn tragedy into transcendence. An ancient proverb states, “Tell me a fact and I’ll learn. Tell me the truth and I’ll believe. But tell me a story and it will live in my heart forever.” The next chapter is an entertaining parable about fictitious character Annie Ainsworth, who moves through the stages to achieve transcend-ability. The parable is then followed by chapters filled with real-life stories of people I interviewed who achieved transcend-ability as well as stories about people you will recognize from media coverage as well as from history books. The knowledge of how another person has accomplished the Fall Up principle will help you do the same.

4. Demonstrate how to achieve transcend-ability. Transcend-ability is a skill that you can acquire through knowledge and with

effective strategies. Each chapter concludes with useable activities and important tips that will allow you to capitalize on your unique gifts. Because busy people want to make good use of their time, these activities are streamlined for the fast pace of today’s world. But don’t let the brevity of the activity fool you. Each is packed with a power punch to help you create the life you were meant to live!

5. Find your authentic self. *Fall Up!* is not about tragedy but about finding your true self. If you are not as happy as you want to be—if you are not content in your life—if you are not on your path—then this book is your wake-up call!

Harold Kushner once stated this amazingly powerful truth: “When you have learned how to live, life itself is the reward.” The time is now for you to reward yourself by living your Lifesong. This is your truth. It is within your grasp. You can chisel away what is unneeded and discover what is essential. ***Fall Up!* gives you the power to recreate your life into your personal masterpiece.**

CHAPTER 3

The Wake-up Call

**“What is necessary to change a person
is to change his awareness of himself.”**

— Abraham Maslow

HIDDEN IN OUR SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS, THE WAKE-UP CALL LAYS THE FOUNDATION for many of our books as well as it creates many of the themes for our favorite movies. The perennially movie favorite, *The Wizard of Oz*, uses the storyline that the struggles in Dorothy’s journey awakens her to her authentic self and pushes her to become the person she was always meant to be.

At first glance, *The Wizard of Oz* appears to be amazingly entertaining and creative. With so many memorable characters, such as the Munchkins, the Scarecrow, and Glenda the Good Witch, it is hard to pick a favorite. *The Wizard of Oz* is also an amazing musical with such timeless tunes as “Over the Rainbow” sung by Dorothy dreaming of a better future. And who could not love the Cowardly Lion barking out, “If I were king of the forest.” Every song and dance captures your imagination and complements each scene as if both needed each other. It is one of those rare movies that you never want to end.

But *The Wizard of Oz* is more than just a song and dance. This unique movie captures our heart because it speaks eternal truths of the human condition. At a much deeper and engaging level, this movie represents a journey of self-discovery. Dorothy's journey on the yellow brick road is actually her journey of self-awareness. This is where the Scarecrow, Tin Man, and the Cowardly Lion come into the symbolic mix. The Scarecrow represents intelligence, the Tin Man personifies compassion, and the Cowardly Lion signifies courage. Together, these characters symbolize essential qualities that Dorothy needs on her journey to grow up—to become the person she is meant to be.

By the movie's end, the Great and Powerful Oz pulls back the curtain and enlightens the audience to an essential truth of the human condition. The Wizard gives the Scarecrow a paper diploma for his smarts; the Tin Man gets a ticking watch as his heart, representing compassion; and the Cowardly Lion receives a badge of courage. However, these were only symbolic gestures—the Wizard just made them become aware of the characteristics each had always had.

In essence, this same truth applied to Dorothy. She always had these qualities (smarts, courage, and compassion), but it was her struggles with the Wicked Witch that released her true strengths and freed her authentic self. **It was Dorothy's hardships that propelled her to Fall Up.**

You are just like Dorothy! You will face many tornadoes and wicked witches on your journey. At times, these life setbacks will seem quite unfair and appear insurmountable and unconquerable. And like Dorothy, these hardships will be your **wake-up call** to “go home” and find your true path—your “yellow brick road.” **The first stage of achieving transcend-ability is the wake-up call,** and this process extends far beyond the silver screen.

Frankie Caterisano was awakened to her true path one fate-filled night on the back of a motorcycle. During her college years, she loved to ride on the back of the motorcycle, especially when her husband, Mark, took the corners or sharp turns. It was quite thrilling to feel the momentum of the bike glide along the pavement. Until that one moment that irrevocably changed both their young lives.

On the last turn for home, a drunk driver veered into their lane, hitting their bike straight on with immense speed. Her husband took the brunt of the smash and died instantly. Fortunately, Frankie took only a glancing blow and was thrown thirty yards onto the sidewalk.

When Frankie awoke in the hospital, the doctor told her that her pelvis was crushed and that it was highly unlikely she would ever walk again. For three months, she lay in her hospital bed, heartbroken and reliving that terrible accident, over and over again in her mind.

But that life-changing moment became her **wake-up call**. As Frankie told me, “Mark was unstoppable. Nothing would deter him from his goals in life. I, on the other hand, was the prototypical procrastinator. I always looked for excuses not to finish something or achieve my dreams. Amazingly, it was if Mark's soul went into mine, and I realized that I now needed to be unstoppable like him.”

Frankie's turn with tragedy created a turn toward transcendence in her life. She now felt unstoppable. While always smart, she was not adamant about college and using her talents. Though she had to drop out of college for six months because of the accident, nothing would deter her from her Lifesong. Frankie finished her degree as a physical therapist so she can help others with similar physical difficulties. By the way, Frankie walks with only a

slight limp when she goes to visit her clients, which typically starts an interesting dialogue about how to stay focused on your goals.

Frankie's story is not unique. History is lined with stories of people whose emotional suffering chimed as a wake-up call. Their darkness forced them to become unstoppable in reaching their dreams—to discover their Lifesong. One amazing example in history was the life of Samuel Morse.

The Historic Wake-up Call

While most know his name from the famous communication code he developed, what is lesser known is that Samuel Morse had an incredible talent as a painter. Originally, he had planned to make a living as a portrait artist, and he was quite good at it. He painted Lafayette as well as President James Monroe. But those plans changed when his wife and love of his life, Lucretia, passed away. Samuel Morse was not, however, at her side. Rather, he was three hundred miles away painting portraits. Unfortunately, and tragically, he did not get the news in time to say good-bye to his dying wife. Morse was completely heartbroken.

The pain of that loss and his inability to be at her side in her last moments haunted him for the rest of his life. But his tragedy became his **wake-up call** to discover a faster way to communicate than by carrying the news on horseback. Morse made it his mission to find a better way so that others would not suffer the same fate he had.

Besides being an artist, Morse also had a talent in science. While studying at Yale, he was exposed to the new field of electricity and its fundamentals. Morse began to understand the physical properties of electromagnetic currents. But that was only the first step. By chance, on a voyage back from Paris, he met another voyager who was experimenting with electromagnets as a form of communication. Morse now had an epiphany and realized he

could use this new science to design a technology to create instantaneous communication.

As history has been written, Samuel Morse created his famous communication code with different electrical impulses representing symbols. In certain combinations, those dots and dashes represent different letters, leading to a signal that could be sent across a wire. The person on the other end of the wire would hear the message being transmitted via taps and pauses, write it down, and then decode it into words. Morse's new technological invention allowed a message to be sent at the speed of light instead of by the speed of the horse. Fantastically, his tragedy still inspires us today as his communication framework acts as the foundation for our computers.

The Emotional Bottom Sparks the Wake-up Call

The painful tragedy of Samuel Morse inspired him to sail into our history books. Many people who were interviewed for this book felt a similar moment of inspiration from their tragedy. Remarkably, many stated that it was if they were sleepwalking through life and their emotional pain acted like a slap in the face. Their hardship awakened them from their slumber of living an unhappy and unfulfilled life. Such is the story of Sam Russell.

As a young man, Sam Russell moved from Texas to Hollywood to be a fashion stylist for the rich and famous. This was always his dream. He loved clothes and being around celebrities and pretty people. But Sam was always finding himself in destructive, abusive relationships. On one unfortunate night while driving, his significant other hit him in the face out of anger. Sam lost control of his car and swerved into oncoming traffic on a very busy highway. By sheer luck, no one died. But that near-death experience became his **wake-up call** as it opened his eyes as well as his mind. A repressed memory had awakened from the

deepest recesses of his mind. Sam had been sexually abused by his uncle.

While this repressed memory revealed to him why he was in one bad relationship after another, it also placed a direct spotlight upon his life. Sam began to look at his life at a deeper level. He realized that being in Hollywood was not his true life trajectory or end point.

While he was financially successful as a clothes stylist for the Hollywood stars, Sam now felt a dark hole in his life. The tragedy forced him to come to the realization that hanging with the movers and shakers of the entertainment world no longer fulfilled his essence. He needed to shift to a more meaningful direction. He had no choice. A change cried out to be heard.

Sam Russell's genius lay in his ability to fit people perfectly for clothes. As he put it, "I could see their soul and outfit them to a tee. I now knew I needed to harness this strength for the common good. I am meant for a greater purpose in the lives of others."

The new Lifesong for Sam Russell was to create a charity called the Giving Closet. Because of his wonderful connections, the best clothes and jewelry worn by actors in Hollywood movies are donated to this charity. Of more significance, the Giving Closet donates a \$10,000 wardrobe to a woman in dire straits so that she can get a job and get back on her feet. Sam uses his genius to make this deserving person look professional and feel wonderful, both on the outside and from within.

Sam Russell feels that this is his destiny and said that there is no greater pleasure than to see a woman's face light up when she has the right wardrobe. Sam can see the transformation in each of these women and this gives him immense joy and positive energy. Sam's tragedy was the painful slap that forced him to find his sweet spot in life.

Your Physiology Acts as a Wake-up Call

While an awakening can come when you hit emotional rock bottom, as it did for Sam Russell, your wake-up call can also result from being out of sync with your authentic self. This is a common occurrence as well as a universal tragedy. When you are not following your true path, you intuitively know it. Your subconscious knows it, and as a result, this discomfort can erupt in many ways. It might come in the physical form as intense headaches or a session of acne. This circumstance of being out of balance with your Lifesong can also develop into insomnia, sadness, or severe bouts of anxiety.

Your physiology will scream out to you when you are not on your true path. You just need to listen.

My **wake-up call** came with a severe bout of anxiety that I would regularly experience at 3:30 in the morning. Like an alarm clock, I would awaken in the middle of the night with a feeling of dread and panic. It would feel like I was in a dark hole of depression. The pit in my stomach went to my throat. My heart would palpitate and my hands would tremble. But, like clockwork, I would close my eyes, take a couple of deep breaths, and after a few minutes, that palpable feeling of despair would leave me.

I did not understand why I had this dark emotion. I had a great job as a professor and greatly enjoyed teaching college students. I played golf almost every day and was working on becoming a great amateur player. This time in my life should have felt like a fine wine, smooth and easy.

Then I got my wake-up call one Tuesday afternoon— I saw Dr. Phil on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. He was speaking to a woman who was struggling in her marriage. She was describing the same exact feelings I had, and they were occurring at roughly

the same time in the early morning hours. Dr. Phil told her that her body was screaming out to her for a change. She was in a bad relationship with her husband and her physiological response was her wake-up call for a change.

This was my awakening. I now realized that I was in a bad relationship with my work. But until that moment I did not realize it.

Yes, being a college professor is a good life, but there is a superficiality to it. Most professors will tell you that students primarily want to know three main points:

1. Is this going to be on the test?
2. How can I get an “A” in the class?
3. Do I really have to buy the book?

I needed a deeper connection than that. I needed to realign my career. I needed to adjust my path and discover my true Lifesong.

I have a very creative soul and was not using this strength in my career. While I was teaching college students the basics, I needed to expand my message to a larger, more mature audience. So I began to write books on emotional development and speak throughout the country to associations, organizations, and businesses about purpose and happiness.

Once this happened, that feeling at 3:30 went away. It vanished because my true Lifesong was, and is, to share with the world my wisdom about personal development and help audiences find their own Lifesong.

I knew I was in my sweet spot when I received a letter one day from a Nicaraguan priest. It was written in Spanish, so I had to decode it on Google. But those words transcended any language. The opening was as sweet as anything I had ever read, as it said: “God bless you, Dr. Steinberg, for writing *Flying Lessons*.”

This was my second book about showing parents and teachers how to build mental and emotional toughness in children for school, sport, and life. He asked in the letter if he could use my book, which had a Spanish version, in his church schools.

The letter gave me such a feeling of authentic joy. No round of golf ever gave me such immense happiness. I framed that letter and posted it in my office, and I still look at every day. I had realigned my life to be filled with the sweet feeling of purpose.

Like Frankie Caterisano, Samuel Morse, Sam Russell, and myself, most people are unaware of the depths to which their darkness has grown. Unless your physiology calls to you or you suffer a severe hardship or painful tragedy, most people will continue to sleepwalk through their lives. Your true Lifesong will lie slumbering out of reach of your awareness without a wake-up call.

But you can awaken to your life and discover your “yellow brick road”! This essential skill is within your grasp. Henry David Thoreau once stated, “In the long run, men (people) hit only where they aim.” I would add: “We need to become aware of where to aim.” The following activities will help give you a wake-up call so that you aim your life in the right direction:

1. Develop a higher level of emotional intelligence.

This is one of the key steps to self-awareness, but this process is not new. The ability to master your emotions was prized as far back as ancient Greece. Plato used the term “sophrosyne” to describe the ability to value fortune and disaster in the same light. The Greek philosophers cherished a tempered balance, and they believed qualities such as self-mastery and self-control would transcend time as essentials for a prosperous life.

In today’s literature, Daniel Goleman has popularized this same notion in his seminal book, *Emotional Intelligence (EQ)*.

Goleman has proposed that two essential qualities of EQ are emotional awareness and emotional control. EQ is an essential ingredient to discovering your true path in life.

While there are many methods to enhancing your EQ, one of the first steps is to get in tune with your emotions on a daily basis. To accomplish this, get an EQ journal and begin to record how you feel about interactions, tasks, etc. I know it sounds simple, but this process is very powerful for developing a greater sense of your emotions and how they impact your decisions and behaviors. When this happens, you are on your way to enhancing your EQ.

2. Always ask why.

Ted Williams, known as the greatest natural baseball hitter of all time, always focused his attention on swinging the lumber. Ted Williams wanted to know as much as he could about hitting. Figuratively, he wanted to get a PhD in the science of hitting. In his autobiography, *My Turn at Bat*, Williams wrote, "I want to know why. I think *why* is a wonderful word."

Fall in love with the word *why*. Each day ask yourself five "whys" about your life.

Why did I act this way when my spouse made that statement? Why did I respond that way to my child? Why did I cry when I read that passage in the book?

These questions and their respective answers will lead you to a greater level of self-awareness.

3. Your future self

Listening to your future self is a very powerful awareness tool. The first step is to imagine that you can go back in time and speak to your high school self. What advice would you give your high school self? What answers would you give your high school self to the following questions:

1. What should I major in, in college?
2. What profession is best for me?
3. What type of person should I marry?
4. What strengths do I have that I don't know about?

Now, take it one step further and imagine you meet yourself twenty years into the future. What pearls of wisdom would this future self give you today? What answers would your future self give you to the following questions:

1. Am I on my true path?
2. How can I be happier?
3. What should I change in my life?
4. Am I using my true strengths?

All the wisdom you need is within you. You just need a prompt to access it!

4. Harmonizing activities

Which activities place you into flow?

That is, which activities place you into flow so that when you are doing them, you lose track of time, and are emotionally engaged. List at least three activities.

Next, ask yourself "why" these activities place you into flow. The activities that place you into flow shine a light onto activities that give you meaning and purpose. Once discovered, you need

to add these activities into your life on a regular basis. This includes in your work and in all aspects of your life.

5. Energizing activities

Teddy Roosevelt, one of our greatest presidents, thrived on risk. In one of his now-famous speeches, he said, “Far better it is to dare mighty things to win glorious triumphs even though checkered by failure than to take rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much because they live in the gray twilight that knows not victory nor defeat.” From history we know that Teddy thrived on risk, from riding up San Juan Hill with the Rough Riders to busting trusts and monopolies. He found his true path when he filled his life with action-packed activities.

Do you thrive on risks? Do you enjoy driving fast in the rain? Have you bungee jumped?

What activities get you pumped up? What activities inspire you and give you great positive energy? List three:

Next, ask yourself “why” these activities give you great energy. Activities that give you great positive energy act as clues to your authentic self. Once discovered, you need to add these activities into your life on a regular basis, both at work and in aspects of your life outside work. When accomplished, you will be moving in the right direction to creating your life filled with song.

6. Negative energizing activities

If you are like I am, doing high-risk activities gives you heart-burn. I try to avoid high-risk stuff like the plague. As such, you must discover which activities drain you. Same as with the activities that pump you up. Also ask yourself “why” these activities drain you. This helps bring awareness to your authentic self.

Once discovered, remove these activities from your life.

7. Why do you choke?

Besides becoming aware of activities that drain you, you need to know why you choke (perform at your worst at inopportune times). Write down three events in which you performed very poorly:

Now, address why you choked during these events. Was it because you worried about what others thought of you? Was it because you tried to be perfect?

Knowing why you performed at your worst helps you to avoid the wrong path in life.

8. Emotional hot buttons

Carl Jung once said, “Everything that irritates us can lead us to an understanding about ourselves.” Next time you have a few conversations with a significant other or loved one, write down the statements that upset you. These statements are your red flags as they are pushing your emotional hot buttons. Look closely at these red flags and you will gain a much-greater glimpse of what

is blocking you from reaching your true potential and finding your sweet spot in life.

9. Do you self-handicap?

French chess champion Alexandre Deschappelles had great insecurities about his abilities. To remedy this, he would only play an opponent if that person would remove one of Deschappelles' pawns and then make the first move. Thus, he would not look like a fool if he lost. His ploy supported his fragile ego. Psychologists have labeled this phenomenon as self-handicapping.

Do you self-handicap? Do you create obstacles in your life so you don't achieve your goals? Do you engage in activities so that you never hear your Lifesong?

Becoming aware of your self-handicapping strategies is an essential step to removing them from your life. And with their removal, you are more likely to discover your authentic self.

10. Outside the box

There is a psychological principle that states, "It is hard to know what the picture looks like when you are inside the frame." In many cases, it is difficult to really know what your self-handicapping strategies are as well as your red flags. You have poor perspective because you live inside the frame. To prevent this, ask your friends what your red flags are (e.g., what gets you upset easily, and what obstacles do you purposely set). This information will bring important awareness to what is blocking you from hearing your Lifesong.