

# THE POSSIBILITY OF *Change*

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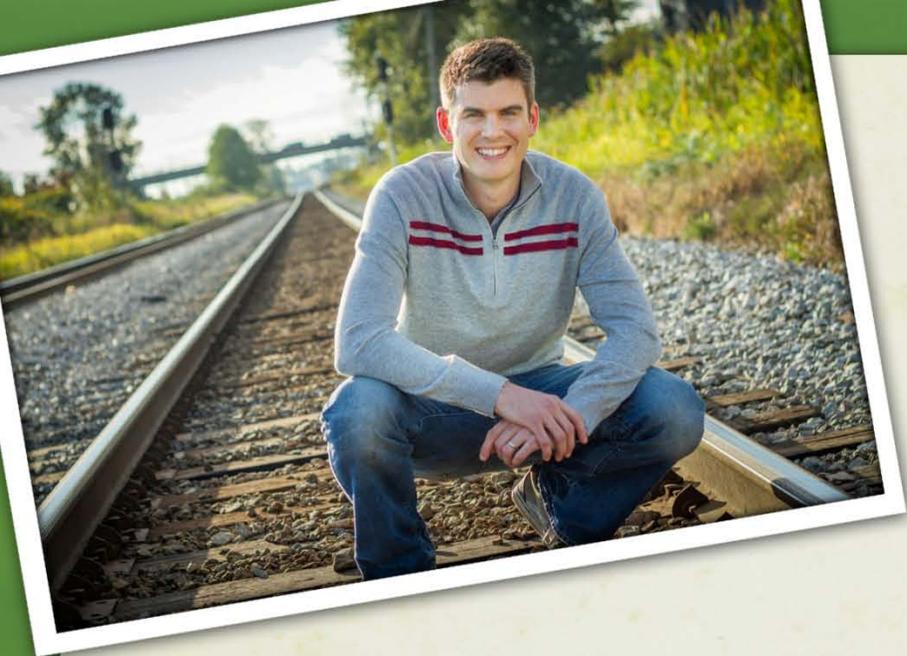
10 INSPIRING STORIES

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PETER CLEMENS

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# INTRODUCTION

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BY PETER CLEMENS

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Change is inevitable. Nothing stays still. Life is in constant motion from the molecular to the planetary level and we change right along with it.

So why did I choose the title *The Possibility of Change* for this ebook? After all, if change is inevitable then obviously it must be possible!

I would like you to consider that we experience two types of changes: those that happen to us and those that we make happen. The first type we often fear and resist. The second type we often want and crave.

Do you want to make a change? Do you *need* to make a change?

Maybe you feel stuck where you are now and are having a hard time figuring out what to do. You may want to make some changes in order to reach unfulfilled goals or dreams. You may just want to break a bad habit, or start a good one. Perhaps you don't like the direction your life is taking.

I know from my own experiences it can be difficult to make positive change happen. And yet I have also come to

appreciate this truth: change is possible. Through the choices we make each of us has the ability to reinvent our life and determine our future. And while it's true we can't control those changes that happen to us from external sources, we can control how we respond.

This ebook features 10 stories written by real people who made a choice to change their life. You will meet people such as Sophy Bot, who decided she would no longer settle for a life that was "good enough" and decided to change . . . well, pretty much everything. You will also meet Izzy, a former U.S. school teacher who quit his job and moved to Japan to become a ninja (really).

When you finish this ebook you may not yet know what changes to make in your life, and that's OK – it can take time to work things out. The important thing for now is to recognize you have the power to determine your future. *You can change.*

I wish you all the best.

Peter Clemens

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Finding The Happiness That Lies Beyond “Good Enough” .....	3
How I Quit My Job, Moved To A Foreign Country, And Became A Ninja .....	7
Depression To Happiness: The 4 Steps That Helped To Change My Life .....	15
How Extreme Focus Can Change Your Life.....	20
Get What You Need To Change Your Life .....	35
Only You Can Change You.....	40
Developing Self-Confidence: Why Most People Approach It Completely Wrong .....	44
How Do You View Life? .....	50
How Breaking The Rules Taught Me To Trust Myself .....	54
Getting Back On The Right Life Path .....	59
Acknowledgements.....	64

# FINDING THE HAPPINESS THAT LIES BEYOND “GOOD ENOUGH”

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BY SOPHY BOT

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What if you could quit your job? Forget the annoyances, leave the frustrations behind and proudly announce to your boss: “*I quit.*”

What if you could escape that relationship you’re so unhappy with?

Or move out of that lousy living situation?

What if you had the strength and the courage to get rid of everything that makes you unhappy and to shamelessly pursue your true happiness?

Not long ago, I had the kind of life that many people dream about. I was married, had a good job where I was steadily moving up the ranks, lived in a nice home and had plenty of money to do the things I wanted to do. In some ways, I had it all . . . except happiness. Happiness was something I’d lost along the way; something I’d forgotten about as I pursued the life I was *supposed* to live instead of the life I *wanted* to live.

But what could I do? After all, things weren’t so bad, right?

## HIDING FROM CHANGE

The easiest thing would’ve been to stay; to keep going down that same path and to make do with what I had, even if it wasn’t what I truly wanted. And indeed, that’s what my family wanted me to do. Nobody wanted to watch me go through a messy divorce or to be left penniless or without a home. Nobody wanted me to get hurt. But what they didn’t realize is that I already *was* hurting.

**We’re so willing to put off change because we’re so afraid of being hurt that we often forget how much we are already hurting.** After all, making big changes in your life is hard, and who wants unnecessary complications? But what would the world be like if we were always willing to settle for “good enough” when, with a bit of effort, “absolutely perfect” could be right around the corner? I’d made my decision: something had to change.

## TAKING THE LEAP

I did it, once – that thing so many of us dream of doing. There my boss was, yelling at me for

something that wasn't even my fault, when I mustered up all of my courage and before I even knew what I was doing I'd already uttered the words: "*I quit.*" Unfortunately, I did this without having any sort of backup or savings. But it's funny the things you notice once you start taking control of your life because, less than two weeks later, my marriage came to an abrupt ending when it suddenly dawned on me just how miserable we'd both become in it.

Unexpectedly finding myself jobless and single and in need of a place to move, something else occurred to me: I owned too much *stuff*. It was now holding me back, keeping me from moving out, and I realized I no longer wanted it anyways. So I got rid of it. *All* of it. And when I looked into my closets, I realized I didn't like my clothing either, that I'd been wearing it because I thought that's what people like me were supposed to wear. So I changed it. *All* of it. And when I looked in the mirror and realized I wasn't happy with my hair, that I'd worn it that way only because my husband had liked it, I decided to cut it off. *All* of it.

**Once you're ready to truly take control of your life, you're no longer willing to settle for "good enough."** That day when I quit my job, I had no idea it was just the beginning of a total personal transformation. All I knew then was that "good enough" no longer was. I was ready to go for "perfect."

## THE ROUGH SPOTS ARE WORTH IT

My life was anything but easy in the months that followed. I was broke, yet I was no longer willing to take just any job – not when I'd fought so hard to win my freedom. My living situation was far from ideal. I rented small rooms in lousy neighborhoods and learned how to live without a husband. And yet, despite all of the difficulties (and despite the fact that my whole family was out there telling me I was *nuts*), I'd regained something that I hadn't had in years: my happiness.

Whatever I had to go through was inconsequential in the face of that happiness. **Nobody ever said changing your life is easy, but the rewards you**

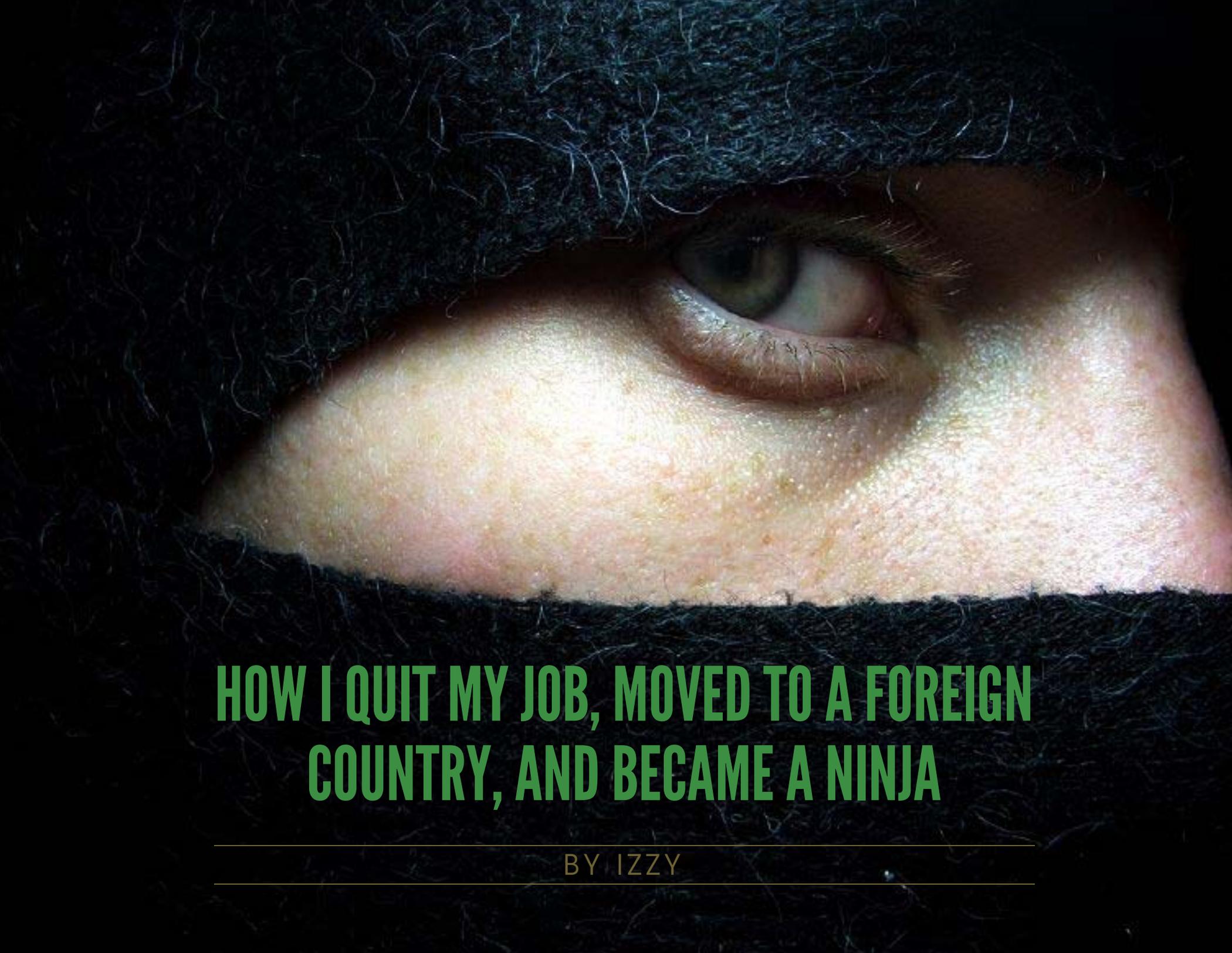
**reap are more than worth the effort.** My material belongings may have been gone but my happiness was back and, with it, I had no doubt that I could regain everything I'd left behind. Only this time I would do it the right way and never – not for one second – forget about my own happiness.

Life doesn't always go the way we expect it to. It doesn't always give us what we truly want, and sometimes what it does give us isn't what we wanted at all. But the beautiful truth is that life is flexible. The truly happy people out there aren't the ones who got everything handed to them on a

silver platter. They are the ones who refused to settle, even when that was the easiest thing in the world. They are the ones who were willing to take the leap; the ones who looked at life straight-on and said, *"I am willing to change."* They are the ones who never stopped trying, no matter how hard things got. The truly happy people in this world are the ones who stood proudly and said: *"I will not settle for good enough."*

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*This story was written by Sophy Bot, author of the book [The Hipster Effect](#).*



**HOW I QUIT MY JOB, MOVED TO A FOREIGN  
COUNTRY, AND BECAME A NINJA**

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BY IZZY

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Sometimes people say strange things, odd things, things that make you do a double take.

*Do you ever think about quitting your job, moving to a faraway land, and pursuing some crazy dream?*

Me too; I have a few times.

Sorry, I'm being melodramatic. Let me rephrase that.

It crossed my mind about a thousand times. Notice the past tense.

**So I did it.**

I quit my job, moved to Japan, and am pursuing my childhood dream: I'm trying to become a ninja.

Today I want to share my story in hopes of inspiring and encouraging you to follow your dreams.

## DECEMBER 2009

I had been battling with anxiety, depression, and burnout since

the beginning of the school year. The question loomed in my mind every day.

What am I going to do?

I had been teaching in the inner city of Los Angeles for the previous four years. For the first three years I had enjoyed it, even loved it.

But many things had changed. The work had changed, I had changed, my life had changed.

I was in the middle of getting my master's degree in education. I thought I wanted to run my own school.

**I was wrong.**

**It was a \$20,000 mistake.**

**Some lessons come harder than others . . . Some with lots of zeros attached to them.**

How could I leave teaching? I had two degrees in the field of education, built up my resume, had a

plethora of experience, and was moving up the ladder fast. I could be running my own school in three years.

And yet I hated it.

What do you do when you hate your life, yet you have worked so hard to get to where you are?

Do you know what it feels like to wake up at 2am and you can't fall back asleep because of massive anxiety . . . for an entire year?

365 days, every day, never making it to my alarm clock. Every night, lying in the dark, fearing the events of the upcoming day.

Allow me to get off topic for a moment.

Have you ever heard the story of the whimpering dog?

A man comes over to his neighbor's house and notices a dog whimpering:

*"Hey Bill, why is your dog whimpering?"*

*"Well he's sitting on a nail."*

*"Why doesn't he just move?"*

*"Because I guess it doesn't hurt enough yet."*

I was driving and all the emotion swelled up. Midday, in the massive metropolis we call Los Angeles, I pulled over to the side of the road.

**I stared at the steering wheel. I broke down. I cried.**

What did I do wrong? I had the degrees, the good job, was moving up the ladder. **I did everything they said. . . . and I hated my life.**

It was at this point that the pain of the nail was so strong, I was forced to move.

That day was one of the hardest in my life, but also one of the greatest.

It was the moment I realized:

**If my life was going to change, I had to change it.**

## THE CHANGE AND A PURSUIT OF A DREAM

At first it started as a harmless joke.

*"So you're gonna leave teaching, what will you do instead?"*

*"I want to be a ninja."*

We would both laugh as I evaded the question. But there was something about this dialogue that neither I nor my friends initially understood.

**It wasn't a joke.**

## THE RE-BIRTH OF A CHILDHOOD DREAM

Is this starting to sound strange?

A near-30-year-old dude is talking about leaving his teaching career behind to become a ninja.

Strange or not, it's the truth. Let's continue.

Initially, I didn't tell anyone that I was serious . . . but I knew it. I started to ask an important question:

What is a ninja?

Do you see what was happening? The dream was evolving. I stopped caring if it sounded crazy. I started caring about the answer.

What is a ninja?

**I didn't want to be the ninja from the movies, the historical textbooks, or the comic strips; I wanted to be the ninja from my childhood.**

I wanted to follow my childhood dream.

According to my eight-year-old brain, a ninja does the following three things:

Moves to a faraway land.

Becomes an expert in martial arts.

Lives life by his own set of rules.

Sounds good in theory . . . but words are just words.

## PRESENT DAY 2012

It is 10am on a Saturday. As I write this, my body aches all over. That is what happens when I attend 6 Aikido classes in 3 days.

I now live in Kyoto, the historical capital of Japan. I came here one year ago to pursue this dream.

My life is simple, yet beautiful; I live 10 minutes away from breathtaking temples. I study Japanese, train in martial arts, and work just enough to cover my expenses.

I couldn't be more excited about my life. Every day is a quest to improve, to become better.

**I share my story in hopes of one thing: I want you to realize it is possible to follow your dreams.**

Below, I am going to share the four specific steps I took that allowed me to begin the pursuit of this dream. My hope is that today you change your life.

How I followed my dream (and you can too).

It is easy to glorify my story, but this does an incredible injustice.

It was not easy, and is not easy. It has taken me three years to get where I am now.

## WAS IT WORTH IT?

You tell me. I wake up excited every day. I get to follow my passion. I train in martial arts until my body aches. I learn new things every day, live in a new culture, and, most importantly, feel at peace.

Does that sound like it was worth it?

I want to share with you four specific steps I did to make this dream real.

## STEP 1: COMMIT TO DISCOVERING THE DREAM

As soon as I realized that I needed to make a change, I made a commitment to myself: I would figure out what I wanted to do with my life.

How often do you hear this:

What should I do with my life?

People say it all the time. But that's the problem. All they do is say it.

We have to take action to discover the answer.

**Being aware that we don't know how to do a math problem isn't enough; we have to actively seek the answer.**

I took personality tests, did community service, enrolled in salsa dancing, tried to learn a new language, took up martial arts, joined political organizations, and read book after book.

Every day, I took action to discover what I wanted to do with my life. Eventually, clarity started to come.

I started to see opportunities.

It's a powerful question:

**What do I want to do with my life?**

But it's only powerful if you take the steps to answer it.

What will you do today to figure out your life?

## STEP 2: DEFINE THE DREAM

After I realized I wanted to be a ninja, I defined the dream. I made it crystal clear.

A ninja:

- Moves to a faraway land.
- Trains extensively in martial arts.
- Lives life by his own set of rules.

This provided clarity. Those three things became my driving force.

I would look at those and think: *"How can I make this happen?"*

Do you have a clear vision for your dream?

## STEP 3: SAVE UP MONEY

This is a step that so many people don't want to talk about, yet it's so important.

Here is the thing: following a dream takes creativity and the ability to handle risks. It's hard enough without worrying about money. By taking the time to save money, I freed up my mental resources to focus on the right things.

I ran a budget and was extremely particular about how I used my money.

Yeah, I lived tight. If you want to follow a dream, you have to make sacrifices.

**You can't buy a \$6 latte and at the same time claim: "I'll do whatever it takes!" It doesn't add up.**

Are you taking financial steps to give you the opportunity to pursue your dreams?

## STEP 4: CREATE A PLAN AND FOLLOW THROUGH

I love making a solid plan. The importance isn't in the plan itself, it is the peace of mind that comes with it.

By making a plan, it allowed me to take action.

It's not rocket science; I simply answered the following two questions:

1. Where do I want to go?
2. How will I get there?

Then without any more thinking, I followed through.

The most important part of the plan is execution – not the plan itself.

What step can you take today to begin the pursuit of your dream?

## A FINAL WORD

I share this because I want you to go out and make your life awesome. I want you to realize it is possible.

I am not special, gifted, nor super smart. I just want to be a ninja.

I'll end this with a question:

**If I can quit my job and move to Japan to become a ninja, why can't you follow your dream ?**

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*This story was written by Izzy of [The 30 Year Old Ninja](#).*



**DEPRESSION TO HAPPINESS:  
THE 4 STEPS THAT HELPED  
TO CHANGE MY LIFE**

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BY AMY CLOVER

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always thought happy people were fakers.

Growing up with clinical depression and obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), I never knew what it was like to be happy for more than a few moments at a time.

I was so used to struggling that I couldn't imagine a life in which every day was easy. I couldn't grasp the idea that other people's happiness could be real.

Or maybe I just didn't want to.

Because I didn't want to burden other people with my depression, I didn't talk to anyone about it.

I tried to act normal. I tried to be like everyone else.

I drank heavily and took diet pills to make myself more attractive so that people would concentrate on my outsides (heaven forbid they find out how much was actually wrong with me).

I felt trapped by my disorders, by everything I thought was wrong with me.

It got to the point of holding so much in, I didn't think I could handle it anymore.

### **In 2005, I tried to kill myself.**

Thankfully, my roommate stopped me. I was admitted to an inpatient program against my will the next day.

In the mental ward, I had no freedom.

I was forced to be at a group meeting at a certain time. I was told to go to sleep at a certain time. I couldn't even choose whether I took medication or not.

Being truly trapped was the most horrible feeling I have ever experienced.

When I was released, I felt enlightened.

### **I had been taking my freedom for granted.**

Out here in the free world, I have the **choice** to do something about my unhappiness.

By accepting the diagnoses of these debilitating disorders, I was removing responsibility from myself. I

felt like I was given a hopeless life sentence that wasn't worth fighting against.

After being shown what life could be like without choices, without **trying** to improve, I knew there was no way to keep living the way that I was.

**I made the choice then and there to change my life.**

Over the next few years, I took steps to overcome my depression, as impossible as that might sound. I decided not to give up and refused to give in to my disorders.

I failed a lot, but every time I fell down, I got right back up again.

Today – seven years later – I am a bubbly personal trainer and online coach, determined to empower you to overcome your setbacks and discover your happiness.

**No matter where you are in life, if you are not happy, something needs to change.** Life is too short to be lived in a haze of hopelessness.

Many people who come to me online and in my personal training business tell me that they feel helpless to change.

There are indeed some diseases, disorders, and situations that you will have no control over, that cannot be changed.

**But you always have the choice over how you react to them and what you do when they threaten to take over your life.**

What we want to do is create space for happiness, even if you think your life is full of darkness.

**There is light somewhere, and I am determined to help you find it.**

I found the following steps extremely helpful on my road to recovery, and I hope you will, too.

## TALK ABOUT IT

Find a trusted friend, family member, or therapist whom you can talk to openly.

**Getting your emotions out and asking for support without guilt is crucial to the healing process.**

Make sure this person is:

- Supportive
- Willing to help
- Unbiased

I am the biggest proponent for therapy because it was so crucial to my journey. Even if you haven't been diagnosed with anything in particular, therapy can help sort out confusing thoughts and issues that you may be carrying with you that could be keeping you from full-fledged happiness.

## REFOCUS

Instead of dwelling on the negative things happening **to** you (such as things you have no control over), focus on the positive actions you can take.

**What can you do to create happiness in your life?** Even if everything around you seems dim, you

can always take action to create some semblance of light.

For instance, in the very beginning of my recovery, I had no idea how to start "being happy." I tried a lot of things to get my mind off the negative thoughts, but I found exercise to be the most effective. It decreased stress, helped me **focus** throughout the day, and made me feel stronger during and after my workout. This is how I discovered my passion for health and fitness, which has added countless amounts of happiness to my life!

## MAKE A MANTRA

If you didn't know I'm a self-development writer, you do now!

Seriously, though, mantras help me through every part of my day.

I have a few, but the one I use in most situations is, "*You can do this.*"

**Find a phrase, quote or word that strikes a chord in you.** Your mantra should give you strength when you need it in challenging moments.

A few others that I use:

- Don't let this defeat you.
- This won't kill me. I will come out stronger.
- Breathe.

You can say them out loud, but for social reasons, I tend to repeat inside my own head.

## GIVE HAPPINESS

I dare you to try to help someone else feel better, then personally feel depressed after. It's impossible!

**The feeling of giving happiness to someone else has a way of taking the heaviness out of your own life.**

Now, I'm not saying, *"Go help other people so that you never think of how depressed you are."*

On the contrary, I recommend you put yourself first. Take care of your mental and physical health, but after that therapy session, go volunteer at a soup kitchen. You'll be amazed what the combination will do for your spirits!

The most important thing to do is to make the choice to fight for happiness.

Letting life happen to you by default leaves you with very few options.

Why can't **you** be the one living the life you've always dreamed of?

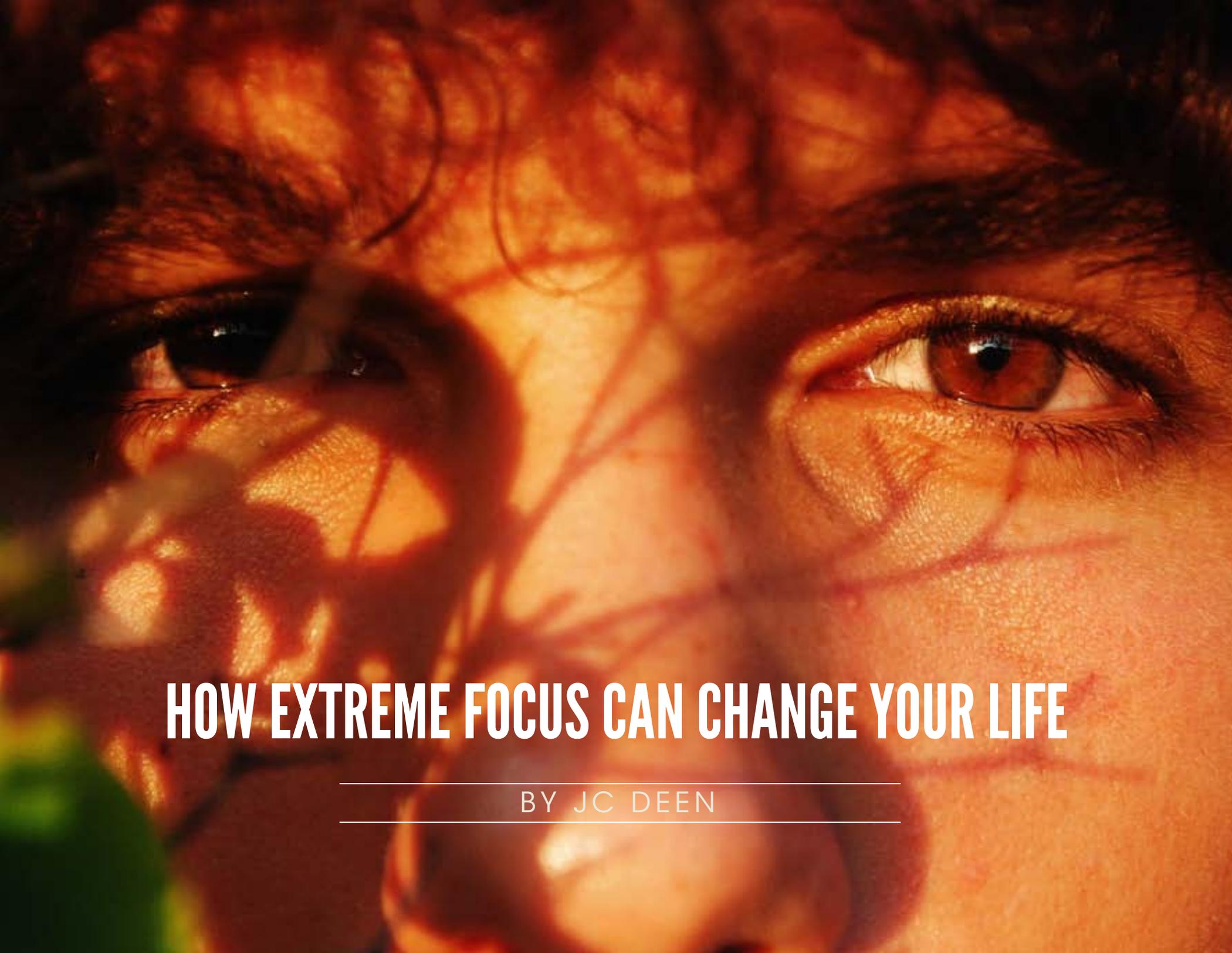
Why can't **you** be the success story you read about in magazines?

Why can't **you** be the one to change the world?

Make the choice to change your life. Make this **your** moment.

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*This story was written by Amy Clover of [Strong Inside Out](#).*



# HOW EXTREME FOCUS CAN CHANGE YOUR LIFE

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BY JC DEEN

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I've fantasized about living a successful life since the age of 14. I was first exposed to ideas of entrepreneurship in high school, but never really understood what it might entail.

All I knew was I wanted to have an impact on others. I wanted to create something I could be proud of forever.

I had a feeling I couldn't put my finger on. The people who had **made it** seemed different; they seemed to be cut from another cloth.

The more I hung out with those I deemed successful, the more I learned about their thought processes . . . and they didn't seem normal.

Their thinking was outlandish and, at times, a bit unrealistic, but I loved it because it seemed their thoughts were far above the average person's. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

Today, I want to share a very personal story in hopes that it will inspire you to do things you might not have ever thought possible.

I want you to think about why you're here and what it is you want more than anything. My aim is to encourage you to, no matter the circumstances, never give up on doing exactly what you feel most passionate about.

**The fact remains: nothing worth having ever comes easy.**

If it did, everyone would live a happy, comfortable life with no worries or stress. But if that were the case, what would be the point of courageously chasing your dreams anyway?

Here we go.

## THE STRUGGLE BEGINS

Back in early 2005, I was preparing to graduate high school. I applied and was accepted to a local college: the University of Arkansas. I was on my way to studying biology for my undergrad. Then I planned to head south about three hours to finish my graduate studies at the pharmacy school in Little Rock.

There was a problem though. I didn't want to study biology. It was an external pressure and I finally told my parents it was not what I wanted to pursue.

I broke the news over dinner. I wanted to study something other than science and the war began. My mother was supportive, my father wasn't.

The problem was that neither of them had gone to college, so the notion of me getting a fancy degree was their dream. However, I imagined this field of study was going to create nothing but resentment and lack of fulfillment in my future.

The following fall, I simply took the general prerequisites, aimlessly wandering through academia. I led a great social life, joined a fraternity, and made lots of friends. But, no matter what I did, I still felt empty inside.

I wasn't making a difference. My existence didn't seem to matter much.

That following spring, I entertained the idea of leaving northwest Arkansas for a while. I'd lived

there my entire life and I needed a challenge. I needed a change of pace – a change of scenery.

Either I would succeed or I would fail.

After visiting Nashville that spring, I got into Belmont University and made plans to move.

During my first visit I met someone who is now one of my best friends and mentors.

More on that later.

## **GREAT LESSONS ARE NOT ALWAYS OBVIOUS**

Once the spring semester was over, I moved back in with my dad and started working a dead-end retail job until the fall semester began. Since I was moving, I knocked out some more useless classes at the community college.

No real goals, nothing to focus upon.

I'd had enough at this point, and decided to take the spring 2007 semester off because I would soon continue my studies in Nashville. I picked up

another part-time job to pay for my gas and random outings. In the meantime, I started working for a local salesman: a direct marketer.

While I initially believed this to be one of the worst work experiences of my life, it actually turned out to serve me very well.

I spent a few hours daily doing nothing but calling the coldest leads you've ever known. My job was to pitch them on a product I didn't believe in to get them interested. Once they were hooked, I'd hand them off to my boss for the close.

The first week was the worst experience ever. I really don't know why I stuck with it but I did anyway. In retrospect, it all makes sense. At the time, I was miserable.

If you've never cold-called someone, you cannot fully understand my experience.

Yet at the end of each day, it got easier. No longer was I afraid of picking up the phone and giving my sales pitch. I didn't care if someone told me "no" or

told me to "jump off a bridge." I became a machine and selling became easier with time.

What did I learn? A few things, actually.

**I learned how to communicate with a stranger.**

While this seems elementary, the thought of approaching and conversing with a complete stranger scares many people. Not to mention the idea of pitching your product/ideas to someone you've never contacted and will likely never speak to again.

**We are much more concerned about ourselves than others are.**

I found the more I let go of my preconceptions about what I believed others might be thinking of me, the better I became at building rapport and nailing a conversation. Once you remember that we, as humans, are inherently selfish, you realize the other person is more worried about what they're going to say as opposed to what you're about to rattle off.

**How to get a result.** The more time I spent selling, the better I got at obtaining a result. Now,

regardless of whether or not I got a “yes” or a “no,” I was still getting a result. I became diligent and assertive. I made sure no stone was left unturned and that I walked away feeling good about the exchange, regardless of the outcome.

**“Nos” are rarely personal.** It just means that whatever happened in that moment, the person was not ready to make the exchange. Most of the time, when a person told me to jump off a cliff or to drink lighter fluid, it was merely a reflection of something they were struggling with internally. I just happened to be the first person they could take out their frustrations on. Once I figured this out, I never got upset; it was just part of the game.

## THE BIG MOVE AND UNBELIEVABLE GRIEF

As the summer came to an end, it was time for the big move. My mother and father had divorced in May 2007. As a result of the splitting up, my mother wanted to follow me to Nashville in support of this decision to start my new life.

I never asked her to do this, but was incredibly grateful she wanted to help support me as I transitioned to the new city and continued my education.

I remember weeping uncontrollably in my room the day before I moved. I began to question my motives. Why did I want to leave it all behind and venture out, knowing that failure is a possibility?

I wanted change more than I wanted to sit and rot. I needed to get out. I needed a challenge. And boy did the challenges come.

After the 10-hour drive into Nashville with a truck full of stuff, we rolled into a very small apartment complex and proceeded to move into the cabinet-sized living quarters.

To this day, I have no idea how we fit everything into that dump, but we did. We used one of the bedrooms for storage only, so I spent the next year sleeping in the living room on the couch.

## FINANCIAL DISASTER AND MORE DEAD-END JOBS

Classes were scheduled to start within a few weeks. I was afraid and excited at the same time.

As for the backstory – this was in 2007, during the mortgage crisis. It just so happened that my mother worked in real estate banking as a loan closer. She helped build a bank from the ground up for 10 years before eventually moving to Nashville. As a result, she owned a nice share in the privately-owned company.

She opted to cash out her retirement and move it into other investments while she found work in the new city. However, something wasn't quite right.

The disbursement never came and the officers were not returning her calls. Something was fishy, and time was ticking.

Long story short, the bank failed and just about everyone involved lost their entire retirement due to the fraudulent owners' actions. I immediately withdrew from the high-profile college because

accruing the debt that Belmont would incur would be my financial demise.

She fought and fought for what was rightfully hers, but it never came.

So I did what I knew I had to do: go out and get a job.

By this point, I'd given up on academia. It was time to hustle.

Over the next year, I worked part-time at a few places. One job was in a local gym where I built a great relationship with the owner, but I just couldn't make ends meet. Something had to change, but I had no direction, no idea what I was to do.

## STRESS AND ITS EFFECTS

Later into 2008, I began looking for a full-time job as opposed to random part-timers. At the same time, I began to withdraw from friends and depression slowly started setting in.

I'd officially been in Nashville for a year and had nothing to show for my move. I was embarrassed, regretful and lost for ideas. Around the same time, my mother explained to me some symptoms she'd been having.

A few weeks, and numerous doctors visits later, she was officially diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. I remember welling up as I sat in the white room with her as she was given the diagnosis. Hitting rock bottom seemed to be in my near future and that's where I was headed.

I was still looking for a full-time gig, and work at the part-timer was slowing down. So I had a ton of time to reflect and think about my situation. I needed an outlet – something to work on.

I'd always been into health and fitness and I found myself reading article after article on the topic. I had a conversation with an Internet entrepreneur. I told him I wanted to start a website; an outlet where I could just write and nothing more.

He asked me what I felt I could write about. Health and fitness immediately came to mind and my website JCDFitness.com was born. At first, I just wrote without any real direction. It was my outlet and I didn't care if anyone was reading. It felt good to do something that felt meaningful.

Within a few months, in December of 2008, I landed a corporate gig.

## **AND THIS IS WHERE IT GETS REALLY DARK**

At first, the training was easy. I didn't care for the work, but it was easy and we were paid decently for sitting in a cubicle farm answering phone calls all day.

But over time, the stressors grew exponentially. I'd never worked in a setting with such high expectations. Jobs were threatened if we didn't meet certain quotas. Email after email came with rigid guidelines or changes to policies.

Within a few months, I'd become a drone – floating through the workdays writing subtle haikus to

myself. I'd show up at 3:00 in the afternoon and put in my time until midnight every Tuesday through Saturday. I lost a piece of my soul every time I scanned my badge to enter that building.

The faces all around me were long and worn out. The atmosphere reeked of disgust and everyone muttered how badly they hated their work.

In the meantime, I was losing weight, and my skin was turning pale. I had trouble sleeping and I couldn't maintain a workout schedule.

I had some labs run to find out what was going on inside my body. The results came back with signs of very high stress levels. My thyroid hormones were out of whack and my testosterone levels were that of a 90-year-old man.

The stress was killing me and I was only 22 years old.

By May 2009 I was a zombie.

I had to call in "sick" because I would wake up unable to leave my bed. Some days the world was so black all I could think of was ending it all. I no

longer wanted to do anything. I wanted to lie there and rot.

Other days were perfectly normal, but it was during these low episodes in which I knew something was very wrong.

I eventually began having anxiety attacks that would cause me to miss work altogether.

Shortly after, I found myself in some major counseling with a psychologist in town.

After a few sessions, she eventually suggested I see a psychiatrist due to her belief that I was showing signs of major depression and the possibility of bipolar disorder.

I ran so fast out of the clinic. Could I be so depressed and lost? Could this be happening to me?

I realized in this moment that I must change. While everything around me was crumbling, I knew within my being that I was in charge of how I felt and that if I fought hard enough, I could change everything.

I was going to be a miracle story. The thing is, hardly anyone knew about my suffering.

## A RAY OF HOPE

After I ran out of that clinic in such ferociousness, I had to make a plan. I had a few objectives in mind and they were:

- Work toward something that made me happy.
- Get out of the job that was killing me.
- Get my health back on track.

## THE ADVICE OF OTHERS

I had a good friend who encouraged me to begin brainstorming some ideas on how to regain my focus and eliminate some stressors. While I'd given up on the idea of continuing college, he suggested I seek some financial aid and apply to some schools. What could it hurt?

So I did just that. I applied to Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) and a few other universities.

In the meantime, I sat down and figured out what I wanted to do with JCDFitness. How I kept up my writing despite the turmoil, I will never know . . . but my audience was growing.

I saw the potential to pour my efforts and knowledge into the site and hopefully help some others sidestep some of the fitness mistakes I'd made in the past.

This was also the time I began to get to know Alan Aragon, one of my biggest influences within the fitness world. He has since been a big help to me and for that I'm forever grateful.

I started to exercise again and take better care of my body. I was eating better and actually getting to sleep at night.

Shortly after my application to MTSU, I received a full ride for the following academic year. Come August, I'd be living in a new place, surrounded with people my age and back on track to finish my studies; three whole years of being out of school and I'd never been so excited in my life.

## SOME MORE HOPE

After I headed back to campus, I cut my hours down from 40 to 20 at the call center. I was working 10-hour days on Saturday and Sunday, while traveling back to MTSU during the week for a full school schedule.

This lasted until February 2010 when some major scheduling conflicts arose in the workplace. As you might imagine, the corporate world is not very accommodating to a class schedule. I was to either accept the new routine and quit school, or quit the job.

At this point, I worried because I was midway through the spring semester and was about to lose my major source of income. Luckily, I'd saved up enough for about 6-8 months of unemployment and I quit the corporate hellhole.

For once in my life, I felt completely liberated. I no longer had the anxieties I did going into work. I didn't worry about my boss's calls or weekly reviews. The stress was gone, for the most part.

So I took the next few months to relax and begin figuring out what I needed to do to create the life I wanted.

## IT WAS TIME TO FOCUS

I realized at this point that I needed to find work and continue my studies. All my energy at this point went toward creating content for JCDFitness, writing guest articles, and school work.

I began taking fitness clients and doing some freelance writing. I remember the first month I made enough to pay for my living expenses and groceries with nothing but money I made from consulting and writing.

I was so pumped (and a little freaked out). For the first time in my life, I'd made things happen on my terms and I loved every second of it.

I kept doing this until the semester ended and eventually worked part time over the summer at a local gym helping with flood relief from the massive Nashville flood in May.

## ON LOOKING UP

My health was back to normal and the labs proved it. I'd moved closer to my friends in Nashville for the summer and spent it with my best friends.

This past summer (2010) has been my most productive one yet.

I managed to knock out 13 hours of classes whilst working 20 hours per week at the gym. My days started at 4:30 every morning.

I managed to land articles in some major online fitness publications, most notably the Alan Aragon Research Review, Bodybuilding.com and WannaBeBig.com.

I was terribly bored with my schoolwork and needed a creative outlet – something other than my fitness writing to keep me sharp.

So in the late night hours, I began taking WordPress templates and dissecting their code. As a result, I taught myself how to do web design. I completed tutorial after tutorial until I was proficient in Photoshop.

Then I went to work. In June, I sent out a newsletter to my readers promising a brand new web design. I had no idea what I was going to do for the new look but had to hold myself accountable, as I couldn't afford to pay \$2,500 for a pro web design at the moment.

So I created a test server and built the new JCDFitness design. I launched it and no one could believe I did it all myself. Hell, I couldn't believe it.

Shortly afterward, a few friends hired me to do their websites.

Then I got inspired.

What if I could continue pursuing the things I loved most and get paid for it? Better yet, what if I could get paid to help others change their lives for the better, and improve their relationship with health, fitness, and their dietary habits?

The following fall, I didn't sleep. I was up in the morning at 5 a.m. to work on articles before class. During the day I'd go to my lectures and at night, I

was up reading nerdy books on web design till about 1 a.m. I did this the entire semester.

Within that time frame, I'd become proficient in Photoshop, CSS, and HTML. I'd put my skills to use on a few websites and I was really enjoying my work.

I was also taking on fitness clients as they came for personal consultations. The joy I got from helping others reach their goals was incredibly fulfilling.

I was getting a glimpse of what my life could look like doing my own thing on my own terms. It was addictive.

## THE TEXT MESSAGE

Late one night I got a text message that would change my life. You see, at the time, I was living in the college town about 45 minutes southeast of Nashville, so my trips back to the city were usually on the weekends.

The text message was from one of my best friends and mentors who lives in Nashville and runs a very successful performance coaching business.

It read: *"Hey, both my roommates are moving out in January, why don't you drop out of MTSU and come live with me?!"*

I literally fell out of my chair. Here was an opportunity of a lifetime – the chance to live with someone who was not only one of my best friends, but someone who had much more experience than I with entrepreneurship.

I couldn't believe what I was reading. Then he said: *"I'm kidding about dropping out, but you have a place to stay and it'd be great to have you here."*

There was only one problem. My lease on the crummy apartment wasn't up until the following August. The choice was an easy one – I had to get out of that place as soon as I could.

So what did I do? I made darn certain over the month of December that I would find someone to take over my lease. And sure enough, I made it happen.

I'd moved out the day before Christmas, crashed at my mom's place for a few weeks and then moved into my new place. Life leveled up from great to awesome.

Shortly thereafter, I did a complete redesign of and from that point on I was incredibly busy with fitness consults and web design inquiries. I actually went to Vegas in March to celebrate my roommate's birthday on the profits I'd made from the previous months.

I was finally seeing the light at the end of the tunnel. It was all becoming real, and I'd never been more excited **and** scared at the same time. All of those that once discouraged me from entrepreneurship and personal training and who told me to get a "real job" were now eating their words.

Those who told me I was wasting my time "playing on the Internet" were completely wrong.

I felt an extreme sense of accomplishment and was fired up to keep marching forward.

## GETTING FROM POINT A TO POINT B

For anyone out there who has goals and dreams, the biggest obstacle we often face is getting started. The next obstacle is continuing our journey. It's not always easy to stay motivated, especially when the environment we're in isn't the most ideal.

I'll say this again: I have not "made it" just yet, and I still have a long way to go. I do know something for sure. I have the best job in the world because I am continually challenged and I get to work with people on a daily basis.

Someone once asked me, "*Why do you do all the stuff you do?*"

*My response was, "I'm extremely passionate about people. I'm also incredibly passionate about health, fitness, and design work. This way, I get the best of both worlds: I do what I love whilst working*

*with people. A work day for me is hardly ever 'work' at all."*

I'm currently 24 years old and have never felt more fulfilled in my life. I'm extremely fortunate to have found my passion at such a young age because now I can continue working and pursuing what I love in full force.

However, I understand there's often a major disconnect when it comes to getting from Point A to Point B. In my case, I had to hit rock bottom before I knew exactly what I wanted to do with my life.

## IT'S NEVER SUPPOSED TO BE EASY

I always find comfort in the words of Tyler Durden from the movie *Fight Club* when he said: "It's only after we've lost everything that we're free to do anything."

Now, I don't particularly believe you must hit the bottom of the barrel before you will know what to do with your life. It was simply the wake-up call I desperately needed to get my crap together.

What I do believe, though, is that you will have struggles on the road to finding your life's purpose. The road to being who you were meant to be is never an easy one. It's going to require hard work, diligence and persistence in the face of adversity.

Sometimes you're going to feel beat down. Sometimes you may think your goals are unreachable. There will be times when your loved ones will try to discourage you from doing what it is you're passionate about. Sometimes their motives are selfish and other times they're legitimately worried about potential disappointment or afraid of failure.

Here is what I say to that: **Go on and fail.** Fail forward, but never ever give up on what it is you want the most. I look at "failure" as just another way NOT to do something. Either way, if you keep pushing, you're going to get a result. Over time, you'll be much closer to your goals than if you never tried in the first place.

**The only person in control of you is yourself.** You have the ability to make a conscious decision on a

daily basis to work toward your goals and to make your visions a reality.

I've never shared this story so openly before but with it, I hope to encourage and inspire you to do much more with your life. If you have big dreams and aspirations, I beg you to push hard and never give up because there are people out there who will benefit from your efforts.

You are only limited by the size of your belief. I choose to believe anything is possible and everything is within my reach. It only takes time, hard work, and knowing full well that you will make it.

You will make it.

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*This story was written by JC Deen of [JCDFitness.com](http://JCDFitness.com).*



# GET WHAT YOU NEED TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE

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BY MAYA ACKERMAN

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We have enormous resources at our disposal. We each have 24 hours a day, each packed with 60 fresh minutes. We have a beating heart and lungs full of air in a body capable of incredible things. And there is usually even a little money.

So why is it that despite all of these resources, we often find ourselves stuck, unable to do anything, unable to make desperately needed changes in our life? Let me tell you why. **Because it has all been spoken for.** All of our resources have already been allocated.

## A PERSONAL STORY

This used to be me: selfless and sacrificing. Life was busy and stressful, and there was never quite enough time to do what I liked, pursue my dreams, or even just relax.

I thought that this was how life was meant to be, that this was as good as it got, until, as if out of nowhere, my marriage was falling off a cliff. This was three years into what I thought was the perfect marriage, and we already had a small child.

I found myself sitting in the therapist's office with tear in my eyes, mumbling, *"My life is an endless stream of obligations. I can never do anything I want."*

That's when I knew it was time for a change. Pushed to the edge of my limits, having donated all of my time and energy to my family, I was utterly miserable and my life was falling apart. Enough was enough.

I became acutely aware of everything that I had been giving away. Suddenly, it was clear how to make a change. This was my life, my time, and my energy. With this realization, things started to change very quickly. I became a lot more assertive. I learned to say "no." Virtually everyone started to take me more seriously and treat me better. Even waiters at restaurants became nicer.

For the first time since I was married, I had my own space in my house: A large room with my piano and a glass desk at which to work and practice music.

I experienced tremendous personal growth. I put aside time to sing every day, something that I've

always wanted to do, and improved very quickly. I stopped piling work on myself. I rested when I was tired.

It used to be that no matter how much I earned, there was never enough money for what I really wanted. But then, I got a nice haircut and some new clothes. I found money for additional singing lessons.

My life was better than ever. I woke up every morning excited to start the day. I finally had enough time and resources for what I wanted and I felt more alive than ever before. What's more, no one was hurt by any of this. Within a few months, my marriage was back on track.

## THE APPLE PIE ANALOGY

Imagine everything you have – all your time, energy, and money – as a fresh apple pie. Some of this pie belongs to your boss. Another piece goes to your partner. There's a piece for each of your children, your friends, your parents, and your neighbors. Don't forget the random guy you helped in the mall yesterday. . . . Where is your piece?!?!?

We try to be selfless. We try to be generous. But, sometimes, we go too far. We give, and we give, and we give. . . . And then, all of sudden, nothing is left for us. NOTHING.

Of course, it's good to treat others well. You need to devote time to your job and your partner, and, obviously, your children need you. The problem is that many of us go too far, to the point that there is nothing left for us.

Is it any wonder then that we find ourselves unable to move a muscle, even when we desperately need to change our lives?

To effect change in your life, you need some resources. There is simply no way around it. You need some time. You need some energy. And, yes, for some changes you may even need a little money. But the good news is that most likely you already have all these resources . . . you just need to reclaim them.

## RECLAIM YOUR TIME

*You want to change your life, but you just don't have the time.*

You don't have time for yourself? Where did it all go? You have given a large enough donation already. It's time to reduce your contribution. Reclaim your time. Start small. 10 minutes, just for you. Then an hour. Then an evening. You desperately need some time for you, time to do what *you and only you* want to do. Time that you use to feel better, to improve your life, to bring about change.

It is time to stand up for yourself. Don't be afraid to say "no." It's ok to give yourself some time. You are not being selfish. You are being kind – to yourself. We are all here for a limited time. It is our responsibility, indeed our duty, to use some of it for ourselves.

## RECLAIM YOUR ENERGY

*You want to change your life, but you just don't have the energy.*

Perhaps the most unfortunate thing about how we treat ourselves is that we typically give ourselves the lowest quality time there is. It's 20 minutes before bedtime. Here is my "me time!" This is not going to cut it. Less time, but when you have more energy, would be a lot better.

This is your energy! Should you not get first dibs at it? Reclaim your energy. Use it towards your own means. Give yourself some time when you are at the top of your game, and you'll be amazed at how much you'll be able to do for yourself.

## RECLAIM YOUR MONEY

*You want to change your life, but you just can't afford it.*

It's absolutely amazing that most of us don't have money for ourselves. We can afford huge homes, sometimes with extra rooms that are hardly ever used. Some of us can afford more than one car per household. We somehow find a way to send our kids to college. We work so hard, and find a way to afford everything – except that which we really need and want.

Sometimes the problem is that not a penny of our money is really ours. Before you even have a chance to look at it, it's already made its way into a shared account. If that's the problem, give yourself an allowance. Surely you should be allowed to keep a small percentage of your income. But sometimes our partner is not the problem at all, or maybe there isn't one in the picture. Most often, we are the ones stopping ourselves from using our resources to our benefit – even when we desperately need to. So I say, reclaim your money. Use at least a little bit just for you. You can start small. But it is well worth the effort – sometimes, a little money used well can make a big difference.

Now I know that it's not easy. When you get into the habit of giving, it becomes very difficult to take, even from yourself. We grow to view ourselves as

generous, loving, and considerate, and we are afraid to shake this image. But *"those who matter don't mind, and those who mind don't matter,"* (Dr. Seuss). You have the right to your own resources. You have the right to affect change in your life.

So go ahead. Take the first step. Reclaim 10 minutes of your best time starting today. Today, give yourself permission to use your own resources to improve your own life. You have everything you need at your disposal. You need only to use it.

When you use what you already have, there is nothing that you cannot achieve.

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*This story was written by Maya Ackerman of [Great Living Now](#).*



# ONLY YOU CAN CHANGE YOU

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BY CRAIG MOLLINS

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**M**y life changed with a spade fork in my hand and the hard earth under my feet. I was a screwed up and angry fifteen-year-old, standing in my family's backyard vegetable garden. Red eyed and brain fogged from heavy drinking and chain-smoking pot the night before, I was in a pretty ugly state. It was a Saturday morning in the spring, and my parents had gone away to the country for the weekend, leaving me home alone, much to my relief of not having to go with them.

My father left me with a project for the weekend. He asked me to dig up the family garden, which was hard and compacted after the long winter. Next to going away with mom and dad, digging up that garden was the last thing I wanted to do with my weekend.

My life at that time was an ongoing state of angry torment. I was in a hateful mood all the time. I got in fights at school during the week and went out with my friends on the weekends drinking, taking drugs, and committing acts of vandalism. At home I hated my family, and social life at school was a torturous

struggle. I dealt with all this pain by staying stoned whenever I could, which was pretty much all the time since I sold pot to support my habit.

So there I was standing on the hard earth in Dartmouth, in the month of May, the late Nova Scotia spring just about to burst forth. I knew fully well that I wasn't going to dig up the garden, but I had to go through the motions anyway. I knew I would dig for maybe five minutes before throwing the spade fork down in a disgusted fit.

And so it went. I hated the garden, I hated my father, and I hated the spade fork. But most of all I hated myself, and spending three or four hours sweating away in the backyard would be spending way too much time with someone I hated so much. So I dug for two minutes and then I stopped. I stood there and thought for about five seconds, and that was it: *"Fuck this, I'm not digging up this fucking garden!!"* as I slammed the heavy oak handled fork to the hard, untilled ground.

I was so pissed off at life for exposing me to such bitter suffering. I was smothered in a cocoon of self-

loathing, and the only thing I knew how to do was to keep spinning more webbed walls. This had been going on for years, and I just didn't see another way to approach life.

But then something happened. I don't remember what triggered it, but suddenly some kind of new awareness opened up inside of me. I was all of a sudden aware of my past and understood how I had arrived at this juncture of my life, and I saw my future unfolding before me with vivid clarity.

I could see my past and I could see the rest of my life, and what I saw was myself going down the slippery slope of failure, the same slope I had been sliding down since the beginning of my teenage years. And the hard surface of that untilled garden was the perfect frictionless pathway I needed to keep on sliding down and down and down.

I suddenly saw that untilled garden as yet another of the thousands of untilled gardens of my painfully hateful existence. The past and future came vividly together in that very instant. It was a moment where I stood back and viewed everything from above

with complete awareness, and in that moment it was clear exactly where I had been and exactly where I was going, if I continued on that same hopeless path.

As that flash of realization illuminated my mind, I stopped in my tracks and did a 90° turn, directly onto a new path. In that moment I made the choice to get off the sliding slope to nowhere. What I saw in that moment was that life wasn't going to ever change unless I changed.

Up until that point I had been living with the belief that I was a victim of some unknown hurt, that somebody somewhere had wronged me, and that one day it would be fixed. I had believed some external justice system would come to the rescue. I would be saved and would finally be happy. The big realization in that moment was that, that wasn't ever going to happen. It was completely up to me.

So on this particular day, as my mind opened, I leaned over and picked up that spade fork. I picked it up with a joy and an enthusiasm like I had never known before, and never in my wildest

dreams could I have even imagined it. I picked up that spade fork, that tool of enlightenment, and I dug up that big old garden. I was so happy and so exhilarated that I don't think I even stopped for a

break. And on that particular day, I found my footing in the good earth and began the journey forward.

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*This story was written by Craig Mollins of [Mindfulness Anger Management](#).*



**DEVELOPING SELF-CONFIDENCE:  
WHY MOST PEOPLE  
APPROACH IT  
COMPLETELY WRONG**

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BY R.C. THORNTON

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I recently came to some new conclusions about developing self-confidence, namely finding the confidence to make changes in one's life (such as living a more meaningful life). They're a bit unconventional (actually, they're the exact opposite of how most people will tell you to develop confidence). I'll share my epiphany with you first, and then tell you about a recent experience that got me there.

Many people say: first, try to build your self-confidence by convincing yourself to feel good (e.g. dress well, seek positive affirmations, etc.; and then go try to change the world).

But I realized that never worked. No matter how "confident" I felt, I could never feel confident enough to do what I wanted to do.

I realized, then, that this approach was completely wrong. The key to confidence is entirely about **doing things despite the fact you're scared stiff**. It's acting when you don't know how to act. It's trying even when you'll probably fail. It's *ignoring*

your low self-confidence, rather than trying to negotiate it away.

When you do this over and over again, you realize three things:

1. Failure isn't actually that bad.
2. You will improve and get better.
3. You feel awesome.

What this means is that the old idea of trying to boost your self-confidence in order to feel daring enough to do something great or make a change is entirely incorrect. *Act first*; your confidence will increase soon after.

## HERE'S HOW I GOT THERE:

Last semester, I decided to start a radio show at my school discussing the local start-up and tech environment. I got the idea from my friends always telling me "you have a voice that would be great for radio!"

Mind you, I was an accounting student, so I hadn't exactly been spending my years at school preparing to host a radio show. I always liked giving speeches, so I thought "*maybe doing radio is a natural extension of that desire.*"

I got a talk show gig by hounding the station news producer for two weeks (sorry Nick!). Finally, I got in touch, told him my idea, and to my complete, unfettered surprise: he let me have my show.

Such began *Start Up with R.C. Thornton*. The layout wasn't exactly unmanageable: ½ hour, once a week. When my excitement of having my VERY . . . OWN . . . SHOW!! began to subside, I realized something: uuuh . . . I actually have no idea what I'm doing.

Sure, radio is part talking; that's the part that's most visible to the audience. But the more I thought about it, I realized I had no idea:

- How to *write* or *format* a radio show
- How to know *what* to say at the right time (you can't script the whole thing)

- What kind of guests (if any) should come on the show
- What I should ask them; how I should act towards them
- Should I be funny, serious, goofy, stoic, crazy?

My boyish infatuation with having a second in the spotlight had subsided. I now appreciated the ineffable conundrum I had naively gotten myself into.

At one point, I thought about giving up before I tried. I couldn't shake the feeling that my first recording would be a dismal failure. Through my tumultuous frustration, an interesting idea popped into my mind:

***"Who cares if it's bad? Just try anyway. I'll bet you'll screw up a few times, keep working at it; then you'll do great."***

Ignore my insecurities? Try anyway? I guess I'll try that; after all, I really had no other option.

I showed up for my first recording. I felt so nervous. I had spent the entire day before writing up a show format (I had no idea what I was doing, so I just

made some stuff up). I had two guests calling in, and even still, standing in the lobby of the recording studio, I really had no idea what I was going to ask them.

The producer called me in (he looked calm; I tried to). We walked into this room with big, expensive-looking microphones and a sizeable mixer panel. He showed me how to talk into the microphone and a few other clerical-type pointers.

Then he turns to me, and asks: "Are you ready?" My answer? "You bet." What I was actually thinking? "No way." The show started. The opening music faded in. The producer pointed at me. That was my cue. I started:

***"Good morning ASU, welcome to the show! This is Start Up, with your host, R.C. Thornton. In tech start-up news today, Crowdtwist.com raised \$6 million in Series A funding from a large pool of investors. Crowdtwist's appeal is that it provides an engagement tool that***

***reaches customers across a number of platforms, including e-mail and Facebook."***

And then? Nothing. I completely froze.

I stared at my notes. Then the microphone. Then my producer. I shrugged and was beyond the ability to speak. I still had about 24 minutes of my 30 minute show left.

The rest of the show went pretty much like this. My guests called: my interview questions were terrible, and elicited nothing interesting from them. I talked like a stick: boring, frightened, unengaged. . . .

The recording ended. I took off my headphones. I was sweating more than I had since I ran cross country in high school. I asked, with disappointment: "How did I do?"

"You did *all right*," he said.

We spent the next half-hour going over all the things I did wrong: I cut the guests off; I asked the wrong kind of questions; I wasn't able to be flexible (I tried to read everything from my notes); I

sounded too much like an infomercial; I didn't offer a lot of useful insight, and instead just repeated things from the news.

Some of this feedback stung: I thought I was a better public speaker than this!

This went on for 8 more sessions: I'd prepare my show, tape it, and get feedback from the producer. I tried something new with my show for each episode, notably with different types and configurations of guests.

Let's fast-forward to the last show I did. How was it different?

- I was really funny!
- I had excellent insight about the topics discussed; I offered an extensive analysis in addition to presenting news of current entrepreneurial events.
- I flowed naturally. My jokes were situational and interesting.

Basically, I was a baller. I was a great radio host. I got compliments right and left, and my producer readily admitted I had improved immensely. My classmates slowly found out about my show, and were impressed! Not only has my radio persona improved, my general public speaking, writing, and informal communication abilities have skyrocketed.

All of this because I tried to host a radio show, *despite* that I at first had next to no confidence in my abilities to do a good job. I ignored fear, and it paid off in spades.

I could've tried to boost my confidence the old-fashioned way. I could've *said* "R.C., *don't worry man, you'll do great!*" I could've worn my three-piece suit to the studio. I could've tried to look cool or talk a cool game. I could have "waited" until I felt enough confidence, like so many people try to do.

But none of that would have prepared me for my first 30-minute radio show. If I had relied on requiring a perfectly sound sense of self-confidence prior to going on air, I never would have. *Start Up with R.C. Thornton* never would have been.

And that's the lesson I want you to walk away with:  
**the only way to build your self-confidence is to do something you do not feel comfortable doing.**

Doing this makes you *used to*—and perhaps will make you *prefer*—being outside of your comfort zone.

This also means that **the wrong way to build self-confidence is trying to talk yourself or tricking yourself into feeling good before trying to do something.**

What makes you lack self-confidence? Do you think you would be bad at living your life the way you wanted, or making a crucial change in your life? Rather than talking yourself into thinking you can make the change, may I recommend ignoring your fear, and *trying to make it work anyway*?

I think it will make a huge difference.

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*This story was written by R.C. Thornton of [Decoding Startups](#).*

# HOW DO YOU VIEW LIFE?

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BY ANNE-SOPHIE  
REINHARDT

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**D**o you see life as a constant string of responsibilities or as a plethora of opportunity? Do you feel crushed by the weight of it or enthralled by its wonders?

Most people walk through life with constant fears, doubts, and a mindset of scarcity. They are afraid of losing their job, being lonely, failing, not knowing what the future holds, conflicts, embarrassments, making difficult decisions, being rejected, and maybe even being successful.

That's why people stay in bad relationships or soul-sucking jobs, or never stand up for themselves. Basically, they're terrified of life.

I used to be that way. Heck, I was raised this way. My parents brought me up to fear the looming future that was going to be darker than you could possibly imagine. Life seemed anything but grand and I was not particularly looking forward to living it.

I believed I was never good enough, that the world was a competitive and harsh place, and that I'd

have to fight an endless battle trying to get my tiny share of money, love, and justice.

I went through school making straight A's, thriving in every way, but still always terrified of failing. Teachers fueled my worries with the repeated mention that our grades would determine our future. I believed them. I knew I was going to have a job I loathed or at best tolerated, but at least I would make good money in order to secure myself a safe spot in this horrible world of insecurity.

Well, that was until I completely lost it, and dropped out of school because of major depression and my raging eating disorder. Saying that I went through a huge identity crisis is an understatement. Life was so oppressive at this point that suicide seemed like my only option for finding relief.

When that didn't work out, I realized that dropping to such a low place gave me the chance to completely rebuild my future and evaluate what life is really all about.

It took me another 7 years or so to completely get it together, but those years of gluing the pieces of my life into a new shape were more rewarding than I can describe. Difficult, but necessary. I learned so many lessons, had so many eye-opening moments and realizations, and I am sure that I will draw from them for a long time.

One of the biggest accomplishments for me was letting go of this notion that life is solely about paying the bills, having responsibilities, and essentially going through the motions.

Sure, those things are part of it, but approaching every action and decision from this point of view limits your personal growth and overall life experience to a minimum. This is a mindset that is keeping people locked in one spot, functioning, but not living.

However, once you start seeing life as an adventure, everything changes. The possibilities and opportunities that unfold themselves in front of you seem endless.

The thrill of the unknown, of risks, of allowing yourself to fail knowing you'll grow because of it is indescribable.

Once you stop taking everything so very seriously, seeing the world as your enemy and opportunities as rare and hard to come by, you will feel your freedom, see the abundance and trust that you are and will be safe. You will see that there's room for everybody to prosper.

You will believe in yourself and in your skills and you will put them to use for something meaningful and fun.

It takes a paradigm shift to fully grasp this principle of abundance, but once you do, it's amazing how your view of the world - and life - changes.

I am glad I came to this realization. I have found a peace I never knew before and while I am confident that life will send me many surprises, challenges, and obstacles, I know I will always be able to master them.

I am hoping you can come to the same conclusion whenever you're ready to live life to the fullest.

You owe it to yourself and you may even owe it to the world. After all, changing the way you look at life altogether may play a part in changing the world, even just a tiny little bit. I never thought I could do it, but here I am, helping men and women all over the world fight their eating disorders, body image issues, and other problems in life. All

because I started to believe, trust, and hope that life, after all, is not a dance with a beast on a cliff, frightening and insecure, but a roller coaster with ups and downs and some loops, sometimes scary, but often fun. So, hop on that train with confidence and energy and get ready for, literally, the ride of your life.

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*This story was written by Anne-Sophie Reinhardt of [aMINDmedia](#).*



**HOW BREAKING THE  
RULES TAUGHT ME TO  
TRUST MYSELF**

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BY JENNIFER BOYKIN

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Remember that fable, “The Emperor’s New Clothes?”

In it, a pretentious emperor who is overly in love with himself and his finery is fooled by shifty tailors who make a fortune tricking him into believing he’s wearing the most exquisite outfit in all the land. In fact, it’s so exquisite, only the most educated and refined people can actually even see it.

The emperor can’t see it, of course. But his pride doesn’t allow him to speak that truth.

Instead, he orchestrates a parade so he can prance about before the commoners in his charge.

Until a kid at the parade, seeing the emperor’s bare behind, exclaims, “*But he’s NAKED!*”

I’m that kid.

I’m the strange one in my family. I don’t always follow the rules. In fact, sometimes I’ve intentionally set out to break them. Because I think some of those asinine rules are sort of – well, asinine.

And, if they’re dumb enough and they continue to hurt or limit me, I simply let them go, and live my own beautiful life.

Here are some of the rules I’ve broken over the years:

### **GET A GOOD SOLID JOB AND KEEP IT. FOREVER.**

A lot of people find success with this model. Not me, though. Nearly 30 years ago, I graduated at the top of my class and was hired by IBM. I HATED that job. But, everyone said it was a good one. In fact, they told us that 3000 people applied for each spot that they filled.

Did I mention that I HATED that job? It was such a bad fit. But the “world” said I should be grateful. So, I stuck it out.

Until a good friend was diagnosed with cancer. At 25. Her tumor was spotted by her Labor & Delivery nurse when she was delivering her son.

The very next day, I quit what was, at that time, the most secure job in the universe. Oh, by the way,

within a few years, IBM announced its first EVER reduction in force. Many of my former colleagues lost their jobs.

**Lesson in Self-Trust:** Follow your heart. The security you think you feel from your current circumstances is just an illusion. Nothing stays the same. Everything and everyone dies. Live your one beautiful life today.

## DON'T TELL

If ever a rule was meant to be broken, it's this one. Nevertheless, for generations, it's been a pervasive socializing message we pass on to our children.

There are many wonderful people in my family. But, for generations, our story has been riddled with alcoholism. We do lots of good in the world. We're loving. We can be lots of fun. But, many of us drink. To the point that some of us die.

Like my father.

But, we don't talk about those things.

So, I didn't. I grieved in isolation until a high school reunion a decade or two later, when I found out that several of my "best friends" also grew up with alcoholic parents.

For YEARS, we sat together, ate lunch together, were in marching band together.

But, none of us broke code. Every one of us suffered in silence. What a waste!

**Lesson in Self-Trust:** You're as sick as your secrets. All around you people are hiding their pain. Stop comparing your insides with everyone else's outsides. Instead, be vulnerable. To be free of the feeling of isolation, you have to take a risk. Intimacy begins with I.

## DON'T CRY OUT LOUD

Along the lines of "*don't quit your day job*" and "*don't tell anyone what's really going on,*" is the message that you do not show your "negative" feelings. Instead, you suffer in silence. Forever.

In fact, merit badges are awarded for lifetime achievements in martyrdom.

Remember that song by Melissa Manchester, *"Don't Cry Out Loud?"* . . . *"just keep it inside, and learn how to hide your feelings."*

Well, when I listened to that song, I really, truly thought Melissa was giving me my very own personal marching orders for life.

I was thirty years old before I realized she was being ironic.

Because my baby died. And I simply had to cry out loud. For a long, long time. My grief was so powerful there was no way to hold it in.

Over time, though, I saw that expressing my feelings was actually the key to healing from my devastation.

But there was more – because my daughter's death was so incredibly devastating, it unleashed all the buried sorrows from the years before. In fact, part of my daughter's legacy is that I had the opportunity to grieve every silenced loss that had come before.

I cried. For all of it. Out loud. Until I didn't need to anymore. And then, I was healed.

**Lesson for Self-Trust:** The only way out is through! Feel your beautiful feelings. Don't let anyone tell you your feelings are "wrong." Or even "right" for that matter. You feel what you feel and that is that. You don't need to justify your feelings to anyone. Oh, and here's a bonus tip – you don't have to ACT on your feelings either. You can just open up to your own beautiful truth, feel your feelings, then let them go.

## **BREAKING THE RULES. SENSIBLY. OR, NOT.**

Though it may sound like it, I'm not a casual or frivolous rule breaker. When I'm considering a major life change, I don't leap and then look. And, I don't buck the system just to be ornery.

On the other hand, when something is "off" in my life, I no longer pretend that everything's just "fine" over here.

Your One Beautiful Life is entirely too precious to waste being untrue to yourself and others. If you can, when you can, speak your truth.

Start small. If you don't like broccoli, for heaven's sake stop filling your plate with it at Thanksgiving! Don't smile when you're angry. Don't say "it's okay" if it isn't.

Speak your beautiful truth. Trust your beautiful heart. Take up your own beautiful place in this world.

Trust yourself. The emperor and his finery are just an illusion. Cloak yourself in your own beautiful humanity and, if the "rules" are killing your beautiful spirit, let them go. Spread your beautiful wings.

Look once. Maybe even look again. But then, LEAP like it's nobody's business!

We make our choice. And then?

We make our choice right.

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*This story was written by Jennifer Boykin of [Life After Tampons](#).*

# GETTING BACK ON THE RIGHT LIFE PATH

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By Ali Luke

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**D**o you sometimes wonder if you're on the wrong path through life, but can't see any way to rework your footsteps and join a different one?

After I graduated from university, I wrote in my journal:

*"It is exciting to have my whole life ahead of me and know that I could do pretty much anything I put my mind to. It's daunting but exhilarating to stand at the summit of 16 years of full-time education and gaze out at the land around me. I could go anywhere from here."*

But I didn't "go anywhere." I took a well-trodden path by getting a job (tech support) in London, leaving home, and renting accommodation. The first couple of weeks were fun: I'd worked in temporary office jobs as a student and enjoyed the environment. I was excited to be in London; I was learning a lot of new techy things at work.

But after a month, I wondered, *"Is this all there is now? For the next 40 years of my life?"* And I stumbled across the following written by Steve Pavlina:

*"It's funny that when people reach a certain age, such as after graduating college, they assume it's time to go out and get a job. But like many things the masses do, just because everyone does it doesn't mean it's a good idea."*

**Lesson learned:** just because "everyone else" is taking one route (whether in their job, social life, eating habits, or spending habits) doesn't mean that you have to follow them. Take the time to look for the beginnings of other paths, even ones which are hidden and rarely trodden.

## THE WRONG PATH NARROWS QUICKLY

While the wrong path is easy to join, every step makes it harder to turn back. Your "wrong path" might be overeating (not only gaining more and more weight, but entrenching bad habits deeper and deeper), getting into debt (which can spiral out of control), or abusing alcohol and drugs (an incredibly hard path to break away from).

After I'd been working for about six months, my boyfriend moved to London (he'd be starting a university degree there in the autumn) and we joined together to rent a flat on a year-long contract. We looked for what we could afford based on the assumption that he'd get a temporary full-time job. Unfortunately, finding work proved more difficult than either of us had guessed, and my savings dwindled from £5,000 to just £32. I was lucky enough to get a raise at work, though, which stopped us from dipping into the red. And once my boyfriend's student grant came through, I started to save up again. But, at this point, I was convinced I'd need to stay at my job for at least the next three years, whilst he was studying.

**Lesson learned:** Lack of money is probably the biggest factor for many of us in sticking with the wrong path and not going after our dreams.

## THE MYTH OF THE ONE TRUE PATH

Once you're well onto the wrong path, the other people you meet tell you it's the only path. They may hate it and wish they were walking a different way, but they refuse to accept that other paths can actually be safer, more enjoyable, and lead to better destinations.

I found that colleagues were often fed up with the humdrum Monday to Friday, 9-5 routine. But whenever I mentioned that I was saving money (usually to explain why I was bringing in lunch from home, or why I didn't go out often), they were bewildered. They couldn't understand why I wouldn't just live paycheck-to-paycheck, like everyone else.

**Lesson learned:** Be willing to ignore your peers. You don't have to conform to whatever the "norm" is, especially if it'll take you further down a path you don't want to be on (spending too much, eating/drinking in an unhealthy way, schmoozing your way up the corporate ladder . . .).

## RUMORS OF OTHER PATHS

Sometimes, people might wander across the path you're on, then head off into – as far as you can see – a bewildering maze of trees. These people might be artists, freelancers, writers, part-time workers, full-time moms, charity volunteers, or world travelers. The one thing they share in common is a certain glow, an inner joy.

As I traveled down the wrong path, I met some of these people. Consultants who worked with my company. Full-time authors at writing conventions. I read and listened to freelancers, entrepreneurs, life coaches, and others, learning from their books,

blogs, and podcasts. I realized that there really were other paths, not just this gray, endless one.

**Lessons learned:** Stay open to other possibilities. Just because you've never tried something – or perhaps never even heard of it – doesn't mean it's not real.

## ESCAPING YOUR PATH

One of the hardest things about being on the wrong path is that you can't turn back. There's no way to undo the weeks, months or years that have passed: they're gone. Wishing that you'd made different choices, or that you'd had better advice, is a waste of time . . . you can't change the past. But you don't need to start again from the beginning of the path. You can cut through the woods.

I saved up for eight months, replacing the whole £5000 that I'd spent the previous summer. I freelanced "on the side" for five months, earning enough money from writing to convince me I could do it for a living. I also did some free work on

websites, building up a small portfolio. I worked the hardest I ever have in my life, and there were times when hacking through the forest seemed like far too much work – but the alternative was that long, gray path.

**Lesson learned:** It'll be a struggle when you leave your path. Whether you want to quit your job, lose 50 pounds, travel to every country in the world, or earn a million dollars, the initial stage will be hard and frustrating at times.

## INTO THE SUNLIGHT

There will come a moment, one shining day, when you hack through the last of the tangled brambles to stand blinking in the sunlight. Your feet are on your new path, which turns and twists through pleasant greenery, and the birdsong above brings an instant feeling of calm as soon as you step out into the light.

Thursday, July 31st was my last day in technical support. I finally started on the path I should have taken two years ago: writing, blogging, and creating websites. The slow, plodding pace of the old path is gone, and the new one is filled with diversions, resting places, and wonderful fellow travelers.

**Lesson learned:** Do whatever it takes for you to get onto the right path – it's worth it.

\* \* \*

**Editor's note:** This story was originally published in August 2008. You can read an update here: [Four and a Half Years of Change ... and a Goodbye.](#)

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*This story was written by Ali Luke of [Aliventures](#).*

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you for reading this ebook! I truly hope it has awakened in you the possibility of change. If you know someone who would enjoy or benefit from this ebook, please feel free to forward it to them.

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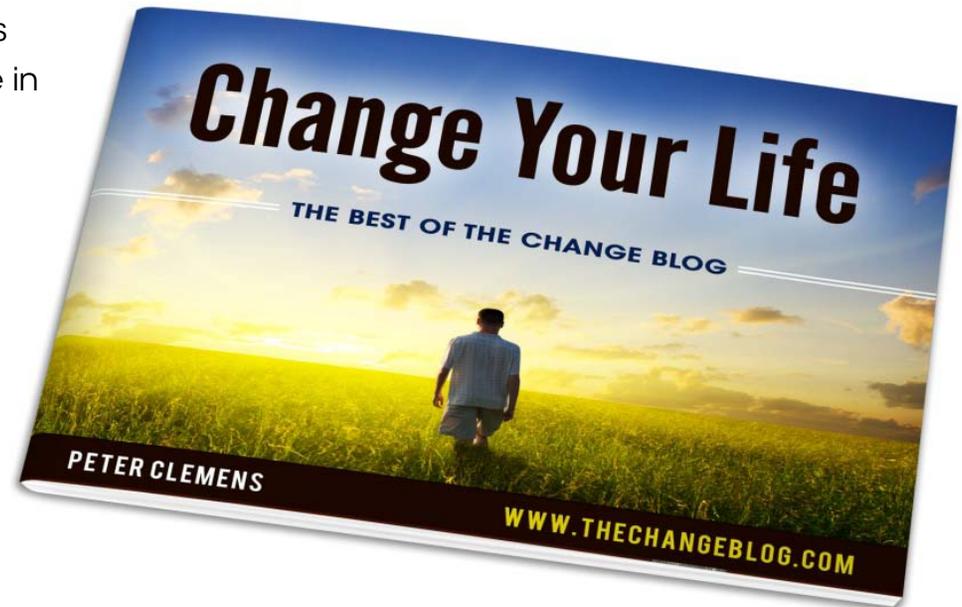
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