

Surrender to Win

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Finding Your Hidden Reserves

Paul Berdiner

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To my Children, Chase & Laine:

You are the best decision I ever made, hands down. And you are my deepest reserve.

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Foreword

Dave Liniger

Prologue

I love this time of day, when tensions start to descend with the sun.

I'm drifting, barely moving actually, on a gentle roll in the slow-moving current of the Susquehanna as it flows south. High cirrus clouds almost veil the slowly fading light to the east over the wooded hills on the way to Lancaster. It's almost serene, the way my jonboat slips quietly between the rocks. A barely perceptible breeze wafts across the bow, pushing two dragonflies into some sort of dragonfly ballet. The muted noise of the light traffic off Route 441 is almost comforting. It's quiet, but not too quiet. The sun is still warm, comforting, and the air is cooling from its mid-summer broiling point.

I'm after smallmouth bass in the shallows, but that's almost beside the point.

I had put in at the Marietta boat launch about twenty minutes before, and I'm off Chickee's Rock, a half-mile across the river from Accomac and down a bit from Flanagan Park. I enjoy the fight a smallmouth puts up, the way it can be almost acrobatic when it hits the crankbait I've been casting between the rocks.

An hour ago, I had been almost frenzied. The pressure some days seems tourniquet tight.

Please understand that it's a frenzy of my own making; a positive, controlled, energizing sort of activity that comes with owning your own company, of being in charge of a group of people who look to me for direction, for advice.

In a way, my life now is all about two things I relish doing these days.

The first is I truly like being able to make the hundreds of decisions a day that I am confronted with—that we are all confronted with: From simple things like what to wear for work or what to eat for breakfast, to the more complicated and pressing decisions, like pursuing a certain business deal or backing off. I relish making these decisions—big or small—because I have put myself in a position to understand the repercussions of everything I do. I'm mindful of where I am and where I'm going.

The second thing I truly like doing is helping people. I absorb a certain amount of positive energy when one of my employees asks for my advice. And they do because they know I'm going to provide them with a reasoned and reasonable direction to go, whether to pursue something or not, and the best way to do it.

Sometimes I wonder if I get more out of the exchange than they do.

And today, as the workday and all its tensions were wrapping around me too tightly, I made the decision to head out to the river and decompress.

It seems simple, but I didn't always know or understand how to do this.

I run my own company and I enjoy the pressure of making it work, of continuing to grow it. Business, in fact, is booming. I'm in real estate in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, the place I grew up and the place that in a way made me who I am today. Certainly the place I love more than any other place in the world. What could be better than that?

After work I had called my wife to see how she and our young son are doing. Well as usual. She knows I like to unwind for a bit on the river before coming home.

The work tension—as it always does—began to melt as soon as I pulled into the parking lot at the landing. By the time I was out on the river off Ayers Point, it was gone. And that's what I look for every time I get out there.

I find serenity on the river, whether I catch anything or not.

At one point in my life, years ago, I felt, maybe even *knew* that such a thing as serenity did not exist, and anyone who said so was sadly mistaken. Sometimes those days seem like yesterday; other days they seem very far away. In those days I was unsettled, unsure of which way to go. Those days are now long gone, years ago, eons ago. But I still look back at them to keep myself in check.

I just don't stare at them. That might be too much.

I have learned along the path of my own journey that you cannot change the past. You cannot change the bad decisions and boneheaded actions you might have been involved in. There is probably no one who doesn't have at least some regrets about something they have done. In fact, I would offer that if there were, that person would be sainted—though even saints probably have their bad days.

Knowing one cannot change the past is not exactly a major breakthrough in the study of human nature. And I doubt the Nobel Prize committee is reserving an award for my astuteness.

But here is something I have learned along the way that might help others. You are completely and totally in charge of how you look at your past. If you take the time for honest reflection, you can find valuable lessons in everything you have done--good or bad, smart or jaw-droppingly dumb.

Some of these lessons might be painful. Some of mine were.

But now that I have the value of hindsight—hindsight I worked very, very hard to attain—even some of my most painful trials, my most draining experiences, have hidden within them a lesson I can use today and tomorrow.

And we all have today and tomorrow and beyond. Every one of us.

It was far from easy for me to learn this lesson. And it won't be easy for you. But learning from your past, gaining strength from your roots and your experiences and maybe those who went before you will transform every decision you make—big and small—into a thoughtful and energizing experience.

I hope what I have learned will be valuable and energizing to you.

Chapter One: Know Where You Came From

The entire country was electrified the summer I was born, awash in the patriotic fervor of America's coast-to-coast bicentennial celebration.

Everyone was awash in two hundred years of American pride.

President Gerald Ford, in his new White House home in Washington, DC, was preparing the celebratory speech he would make an hour away from me and my family and friends in Philadelphia before a crowd that would include actor Charlton Heston, Philadelphia Mayor Frank Rizzo, Pennsylvania Governor Milton Shapp, and countless members of Congress.

Organizers were putting into place plans that had been more than ten years in the making, including elaborate, gigantic fireworks displays all across the country, and a massive one in the nation's capital. A huge fleet of tall-masted ships from around the world had assembled in New York Harbor, where the public was invited aboard.

Queen Elizabeth and her husband Prince Philip were touring the country to honor America's two hundred years of independence from Britain.

There were big celebrations too at St. Joseph's Hospital in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where I was born on June 4, 1976, maybe just not on a national scale. And later, in "the Boro," Washington Borough, Pennsylvania, my hometown, relatives and friends and

neighbors gathered and welcomed me to the place that would forge my life and give me great comfort and pride.

The Washington Redskins were getting ready to start camp down the road in Carlisle that would produce a 10-4 season under Coach George Allen. The Cincinnati Reds--the Big Red Machine managed by Sparky Anderson were that summer heading to the World Series yet again, this time to sweep the American League's New York Yankees.

The Reds had been on a roll all season, as they had been the year before, when they also won The Series. To get to The Series, they swept the Philadelphia Phillies—a favorite of many Boro baseball fans—three games to zip.

People in The Boro were likely humming and singing along to music like *Silly Love Songs* by Paul McCartney and Wings or *Disco Lady* by Johnnie Taylor or *Oh What a Night!* by The Four Seasons.

The Boro, is a simple town, magic and sweet and no-nonsense, a Mayberry nestled alongside the Susquehanna River. The Boro was a place where everyone had set deep roots long ago. It is a place of constancy and stability.

It was an innocent time and an innocent place, and I like to think it still is. I can't imagine a better place to grow up and I can't imagine any other place in the world where I'd rather live.

I entered the world at St. Joseph's Hospital, a gracious, solid presence in nearby Lancaster that by the time of my birth had been around for nearly 100 years. It was founded by the Sisters of St. Francis, from Philadelphia, in 1877.

Today St. Joseph's is a part of the Lancaster County Regional Medical Center. Even the new is rooted firmly in the old.

The story goes that the caring nuns arrived with an operating budget of \$2.50 and two apples. The building had no electricity, no running water, and no beds. One morning, shortly after arriving, Sister Cecilia placed her two apples on a window sill near a statue of St. Joseph and asked him to multiply the food for the people who would come for care. Later that day, according to legend, two barrels of apples appeared.

Is that a true story? I don't know, but I like it—and I'm not even Catholic. It shows the magic of the area, of its rich history of people helping people, of being good neighbors.

I was the second child of Ray and Fay Berdiner, a couple firmly rooted in the small-town ethos that became such a powerful thing for me. My older sister Lisa had been born in 1973. My younger brother Tim would arrive two years after me.

Some of my fondest memories today are the years spent in the yard behind our small cape on LeTort Road in The Boro, playing with Lisa and Tim on the swings, in the little sandbox, or wading in the small toy pool my Dad set up for us.

When I was three, my father cut down a golf club and taught me how to swing it in the back yard. And by the time I was four I could drive a ball 100 yards.

That took some patience on his part.

That was the thing about both of my parents—they were always around, always ready to make sure we had something to do, and enjoyed doing it with us. I mean, I'd sit on the front step every summer afternoon, baseball glove in hand waiting for Dad to come home from work.

And work he did.

Through that work ethic came another trait, perhaps not unique to south-central Pennsylvania, but certainly an identifiable characteristic: an intolerance for pretentiousness, for phonies, and for pretenders.

Both my Mom and Dad knew the meaning of work, and the term “work ethic” wasn’t something discussed academically. It was just what people from my family and from The Boro did. My dad, a strapping blonde-headed six-footer, was a work-hard, play-hard kind of guy. He and Mom began dating after he returned from a stint in Viet Nam, a place where a lot of guys his age had to grow up very quickly.

When he got back home he settled into work in the real estate business, which at the time in Lancaster County was growing and promising. I don’t know if it was his time in the army, or just the way he was, but Dad was always dressed to the nines, no matter what he did and where he was. He was sharp, that’s for sure. He even pressed clean, straight creases in his blues jeans—something he still does today.

While the three of us were younger, my Mom stayed at home and took care of us. Mom was always around for us, and always near with a sympathetic ear for whatever was troubling us. Years later, in my teens, as I grew more troubled, I didn’t turn to her as much, though now I know I could have. Even in my worst of times, she was warm, understanding and easy to talk with about anything.

As if they didn’t have enough to do, when I was ten, my parents bought and ran a restaurant, Bully’s on Union, down the road in Columbia.

Where did they get this “work ethic”?

It's in the blood I think. I know it's in mine even today. It just comes naturally. If you look at their own parents, both sets of my grandparents, you could trace the strength.

My Dad's parents were from a long line of "coal crackers"—gritty Eastern Pennsylvania folk, hardened and toughened by the daily grinding sometimes deadly work of eking out a meager living in the coal mines, in his case Schuylkill County.

To help with the family income, the miners would send my grandfather, then just a young boy of twelve, down in the mine for pieces of coal that were left behind.

To provide some perspective on just how dangerous this work was, his grandfather was stranded in a mine for three days before he was rescued, trapped and isolated and for all anybody knew, dead. That's a hell of a way for a young man to grow up, but that was his life. And that's what made him the strong and stoic man he became as an adult—the man that I knew as a kid.

If one were to drive through those parts of Pennsylvania today, decades after the mines were the lifeblood and definition and be-all and end-all of that area's existence, one can still see the rusted-out mine equipment and the abandoned conveyor belts.

When coal mining died, people moved. And for my father's family, that meant heading southwest to Lancaster County for factory jobs.

My father's father has always been a tough man, and when I was younger I'd say he was an unapproachable man. When I was a kid, when I didn't really understand how a life in the mines or any kind of tough existence growing up could shape a person, it was hard to understand why someone might not be the funniest, warmest guy around. When

I was a kid I'd have to say my Grandfather Berdiner didn't seem to be the nicest guy around.

But that changed after he was diagnosed with cancer and later Alzheimer's. He became more approachable, almost *warmer*. And when I think about my own struggles later on, I also grasped and understood a little more about formative events and how they can affect someone.

His wife, my Grandmother Berdiner, was and is still an amazing woman. In the late 1960s she started a personal-care facility out of her house, with just a couple people to care for. Then she built it up to the point where years later when I was still young, she had her own facility. It was always a great place to drop by on my bike to have lunch and say hello. She ran "the home" as we called it, until she was 80 years old.

This was the stuff of which my Dad was made.

My Mom's parents were farmers in a little town just south of The Boro called Creswell. My grandfather, Babe, was built, as they say, like the proverbial brick outhouse. Similar to my other grandparents, they were the salt of the earth: no-nonsense folks who worked hard and had little time for frivolity.

When I was younger, my Mom's mom found religion in a huge way, a scripture-spouting Bible-reading way that for a little kid was tough to accommodate. We'd often go visit them at their orchard, but I tried to stay away from Grandma as much as possible. I think everyone else in my family agreed it wasn't a bad decision to make.

But family roots aside, the one entity that had such a major influence on me was The Boro.

It still does, when I think about it.

For me, there is nothing comparable to walking down the street today and seeing a guy

I played little league baseball with twenty-five years ago on the Washington Boro Lions.

Growing up there was so comforting, so rich in experiences, so—I guess--*memorable*.

I mean, we'd ride our bikes everywhere. We'd fish, we'd go to the annual Tomato

Festival, and we'd hang out at The Mart, a small country store that was a magnet for

kids all over town--drinking tons of Turkey Hill ice tea.

I still love that stuff, as bad as it probably is for me.

It was nothing short of an idyllic existence. Beautiful, fun, unadorned, and pure

Lancaster County.

That's why I still live here, still work here, and think why I always will. It has made me

who I am today; it has comforted me in the bad times, and it continues to reward me

every time I step outside.

Chapter Two: Hard Work Pays Dividends

When I was younger, much of Lancaster County was farmland and that's pretty much still true today. There are close to five thousand small farms that produce nearly a fifth of the entire state's agricultural output. It's a county of small towns—from Bainbridge and Blue Ball to Conestoga and Ephrata to Smoketown and Strasburg.

And of course, The Boro.

I'm not sure who came up with the term, and I'd be willing to concede it might have been a Chamber of Commerce type, but Lancaster County is sometimes referred to as "The Garden Spot of America".

But whether it's gardens or farms or any other type of commerce, Lancaster County is an area filled with hardworking, no-nonsense, get-it-done-and-don't-complain-about-it people. And this includes my parents and grandparents, and at the risk of sounding un-Lancaster County-like, it includes me as well.

I still look in awe sometimes at the bulging forearms and lean, angular physiques of some of the Amish and Mennonite farmers I see around town. They are in impressive shape. A few sets at the fitness club to work on their abs, or to get better biceps definition? I don't think so. The whole concept of indoor workouts on machines would be alien to many people in Lancaster County.

But the concept of hard work is not confined to just the farmers here. Many people around here think the same way. I certainly do. And my parents and their parents certainly did. It's just something that has been passed along, like a genetic trait—in a way not much different from a parent passing down blue eyes or blond hair. Work hard; enjoy the benefits and rewards; don't complain.

That's not a bad concept, and it's not particularly troubling to me at all. In fact, I relish the opportunity. And the idea of hard work has brought a lot of terrifically fun things along throughout my life.

When I was quite young, we lived in a three-bedroom Cape Cod style house on LeTort Road in The Boro. But when I was in the fourth grade we moved three miles—quite a distance in Boro terms—to 2499 Gamber Road. That's where I grew up and that's where I generated some of my fondest, most cherished memories of my childhood.

I mean who wouldn't? We had an in-ground pool that in the summers was a great meeting place for my friends and a base for our excursions around town. We had more than two and a half acres to play around in, explore and to get lost in. It was perfect for capture the flag, hide and seek, and just hanging out.

For a young boy and his friends there wasn't a better setting.

But when I look back on it now, there were some storm clouds growing on the horizon, some things that would presage some trouble down the road when I hit my mid-teens. But the early years on Gamber were, not to put too fine a point on it, idyllic.

And that security and that almost perfect kid-existence was a result of hard work. Not from me of course, but from both my Mom and my Dad.

Dad was ambitious and in a way fearless and he knew what he wanted--security for his growing family.

In 1967, going against a trend of young men looking for ways to avoid the contentious, divisive, and growing military draft that would that year pull in more 550,000 American soldiers—the highest number ever—my father actually *enlisted* in the army.

Many young men his age were doing everything they could to avoid the draft and a tour of Viet Nam: getting married, getting into a college, any college, and staying there, having kids, moving to Canada. They did whatever it took to stay out--and for many young men, to stay alive.

To say that my Dad's move to enlist was unusual is an understatement, I think. I can't imagine myself at eighteen or nineteen years old doing something like that. Actually I can't imagine myself doing something like that at any time. Period. But that's how he was.

So at nineteen he went through basic training and then later jump school at Fort Benning, Georgia, a long way from Lancaster County. He was so young and fresh that his first "shave" came courtesy of a drill instructor who burned off some offending peach fuzz with a Zippo lighter.

His parents, my grandparents, were so upset at his enlistment, and so afraid they would never see him again, that after he left home, they sold a lot of my father's possessions.

I guess even he didn't realize the enormity of what he had gotten himself into until he stepped off a helicopter onto Vietnamese soil.

My father was originally assigned to the 173rd Airborne Division. Once he arrived in Viet Nam he was reassigned to the 199th Light Infantry Brigade—a group that had lost so many men the generals in charge needed to assign soldiers from other units. The unit was formed at Fort Benning in 1966, the year before my father enlisted. Nicknamed "the Redcatchers," the unit was hastily moved to Song Be, Vietnam, in December 1966 to provide an increased U.S. presence in the area of Viet Nam near the Cambodian border.

The 199th was created specifically for combat service in Viet Nam and Cambodia. Between 1966 and 1970, the 199th lost 757 men in combat operations, and more than 4,500 of its men were wounded. One of those wounded men was my father.

A few months after he stepped off the helicopter and wondered what he had gotten himself into, a magazine of ammunition he was carrying exploded after it was hit by a sniper's shot. One of the bullets ended up in his arm. A buddy, another Pennsylvania boy from Uniontown, probably saved my father's life when he jumped on top of my father as the firing continued. Uncle Bush, as we call, him and my Father are still good friends today, a friendship bonded thousands of miles and more than 40 years away from the Pennsylvania they both still call home.

But all of this is just a way of saying who my father was and still is. And what he instilled in me as I was growing up. I know his trials in Viet Nam had some bearing on how he tried to influence me. Work hard, don't complain, don't ever quit. Ever.

It's very easy to quit when things aren't going your way, he'd say. But stick it out and you'll see that a lot of tough things are worth it.

He's proud of his service in Viet Nam, of his Purple Heart, and of the time he set aside to do what he felt was right. Today I see him driving around town in his Mercedes with two stickers attached to the rear window: One for MIAs and one for Viet Nam Vets.

When I see that I sometimes think two things, that he's successful enough to drive that particular car, and that he's not ashamed of his service to our country.

The point is, back in the States with a young family and some modicum of security and a regular day job, he quit to study for his realtor's license—a difficult enough process for anyone made even more difficult for a guy with a wife and three kids. But he did it, and he worked two or three part-time jobs to put food on the table for all of us while he was doing it.

That's just how it works.

And I got the same lessons from my mom. She stayed at home until we were all in school. Then she and my dad bought Bully's on Union, the restaurant I mentioned earlier.

What did this mean for her?

She loved to bake, and still does in fact. Bully's was known for its desserts and that was Mom's doing. But that meant getting up early and heading over to the restaurant to get things started. Then coming back to Gamber Road to make sure we got on the bus and off to school.

Then she'd head back to Bully's, do the books, supervise the lunch shift and clean up.
Then head back home to see us off the bus.

Then after all of this, it was back to Bully for the dinner shift.

I don't think I ever heard her complain. That's just the way things were done.

And while all this almost frenetic activity was going on—my Dad out selling houses in the growing Lancaster County market, my Mom taking care of us and the restaurant, I was out being a boy—and doing all the things that meant.

I was a good athlete. I loved golf and I loved baseball, and until things got in the way later, I couldn't wait to be out on the course or playing ball. And my Dad was there all the way, encouraging, helping, advising, sympathizing--the whole time teaching me to never give up, to keep trying my hardest no matter what. "Hard work pays off" was almost a mantra.

Years later that advice would have a profound influence on me. But at the time it just rolled off of me, in one ear and out the other.

Dad took great pride in my golfing skills and made sure I got the right lessons from the right people. I could drive the ball a country mile and won a few junior tournaments. It's funny, but today I rarely play. Maybe one or two rounds a year and always with my Dad as a partner. But even with that much practice, apparently my swing still attracts attention from others, and usually elicits some compliments.

"Well," Dad will tell them with a smile, "there's a lot of money in that swing."

But time learning my golf game was also to serve a purpose later, and to go hand-in-hand with the lessons my Dad tried to impart. My first job as a fourteen-year-old kid was at Conestoga Country Club as a ball and bag boy. It was hard and sweaty work on a hot August day, but it served its purpose in reminding me of my Dad's work hard, play hard ethos.

It was during those years that The Boro and the nearby places we would haunt as kids became a little smaller. When we were younger, we'd bicycle everywhere—and the time and distance we could cover set the scales for everything: twenty minutes to the Mart for some Turkey Hill Tea, twenty-five minutes to the nursing home for lunch and to see my grandmother, maybe five minutes to the ball field.

That all changed, and changed big time, when we got a little older and got our first "quads," motorized ATV's that allowed us to get places fast, and to get to places farther way. And if along the way we *maybe* caused a few problems that had the local police waiting for us when we got home, it was all good natured fun. I don't think we made too many friends with the farmers whose fields we would race in, but it was nothing major.

Kids being kids.

In fact, trips to see my grandparents at the nursing home turned into a whole new world for us. By that time, my grandfather had pretty much given up on the horse-racing passion he had once pursued, which left a beautiful, empty oval track that young hellions could race around all afternoon.

Perfect.

Chapter Three: Growing Pains

There is a great line from a Bob Seeger song I think about from time to time:

“I wish I didn’t know now what I didn’t know then.”

That’s an entire biography in eleven powerful words.

When I look back on it now, small hairline cracks began appearing in my idyllic Lancaster County existence and in my own behavior long before I actually was aware of them.

And that’s one of the reasons I’m writing this book—to maybe help people take inventory of what’s going on with themselves *now*, not later after the damage has been done. My damage has been repaired in the most excellent of fashions, in the best possible way. And I hope by sharing some of my experiences others might avoid some of the mistakes I made. At the time, though, I had no idea I was actually doing anything wrong, really.

And in many ways, I wasn’t. It was mostly in the beginning a case of “boys will be boys.” Maybe sneaking a smoke out back when my Mom was at the restaurant and my Dad was out selling a house. Maybe it was tearing through a farmer’s field on my quad a little too fast. Maybe it was staying out a little too late from time to time.

Just kid stuff.

But this is what I can offer now with the gift and acuity of hindsight to anyone today who might be wondering what's in store in the future, who might feel that things aren't quite working out the way you planned: Be aware of yourself, be aware of the people around you and try to understand why they might be doing what they're doing. Be mindful.

Right now, as I write this, I run a highly successful real estate business in Lancaster and York counties. People look up to me and look to me as an example of how to be a success, and the folks who work for me know I work hard and treat them and others fairly. I have a great and growing family. Honestly, things couldn't be better. As I write this, my wife Casey is expecting and my son Chase is four years old.

I'm not talking of doom and gloom descending into my life and robbing me a of great childhood, because that's certainly not the case. As I've written about earlier, things were great and fun and exciting and darn near perfect.

But not totally perfect, and that's where I look back now and wish I had been a little more mindful.

When I was young, say in first or second grade—and this really stands out to me now—I remember having tremendous, almost paralyzing separation anxiety. I swear that every time my Mom dropped me off for swimming lessons or Dad took me to baseball practice, I thought, maybe even knew, that they weren't coming back. I was worried for no discernible reason at all that I would be an abandoned child of nine, left to eke out a meager living on my own.

It was totally unjustified, but for me it was a real concern. It was a crazy thought and even now I'm not sure where it came from, and of course they always came back. And

they always assured and comforted me and told me how much they loved me. It was an unsettling feeling and though as I grew older I tried not to show it as much, I was still worried about being left alone.

My parents could not have been better about supporting me, but the feeling was always hovering near the surface. Did that somehow make me do some of the crazier things I did later on? I'm actually not sure. But the advice I would give to anyone else who might have those same feelings of anxiety is to speak about it, don't bury it, get help. Find others who might feel the same way and talk to them about it. There is definitely strength in numbers and you will feel much better knowing you are not alone.

My idyllic bubble burst in other areas as well. I can look at it now and tell myself that's simply life—that you will get thrown a few curveballs along the way. It's not that you should go through life expecting things to go wrong. On the contrary, relish the good things, just like I do on a day of hunting or a few hours out on the Susquehanna, or on a work-free day just being with my wife and son.

But be prepared, just in case, for when things don't go exactly the way you want them to go.

I can tell you this, my early teens were not exactly a bowl of cherries, but then again, whose are? And, please, let me be crystal clear. Things were still pretty great around The Boro, and I was still enjoying myself immensely.

But things were changing.

When I was in the seventh grade, my Mom was diagnosed with cancer. She hadn't been feeling well and a trip to the nearby Hershey Medical Center, one of the best medical facilities in the country, confirmed the worst. It was a tough seeing her sick, this woman who had always been the picture of health and stoicism, a hard-working full-time loving Mom.

Moms aren't supposed to get sick, to get cancer treatments, or be laid low.

For a while there, it was a tense and uncertain time, but in the end after extensive treatment and an operation, she was fine. And she still is even now the picture of health.

And by the time I hit ninth grade, which would be the start of what would be an unremarkable academic career in high school, my Dad moved out. That was exceptionally tough for me to deal with. I think as I look back on it now, there was a strain in their relationship. My father enjoyed the money his hard work had brought him, and the country club life and high living that came along with it. My Mom was always a hardworking country girl, a farm girl who was never quite comfortable with the glitz and shine my dad seemed to enjoy.

Dad moved back in again for a while later on in my high school years, but it never really worked out.

I'm not really sure even today how that affected us. My sister Lisa, three years older than me, thrived in high school. She was a cheerleader and dated the star athletes. She was a very popular senior when I got to the high school, and she thrived on that aura.

Me? I sort of went the other way.

Again, when I look back at it, my Dad enjoyed his success and he treated all of us well. Need a car? Sure. Want some spending money? No problem. I didn't suffer from lack of funds, I know that. I actually totaled a car he had given me and he bought me another one, no questions asked, no lectures. That's just how he was. Was I spoiled? Not at all. The same lessons I learned when I was younger about working hard and trying my best were still the order of the day.

Ironically, around this time my parents loosened up the leash a bit, the one that kept me close to my grandmother's nursing home or the ball field or The Mart. Ironic in the sense that the young kid who suffered so much from separation anxiety could not wait to get away.

By the time I was in ninth grade I was totally enjoying my independence, and I took advantage of that loose leash. And this was around the time that somehow grabbing a case of beer—no small order when the Pennsylvania drinking age is twenty-one—and sleeping out in a friend's backyard seemed like a perfect thing to do.

Speaking of friends, choose them carefully. I have to say now that I didn't do such a great job with that task. The guys I hung around with, and maybe that included me, were popular all right, but for the wrong reasons. We enjoyed raising hell and skipping classes.

When I was just sixteen, with my own car of course, courtesy of my Dad, some friends and I were discovered by the school disciplinary officer parked near his driveway one lunch hour. We hadn't been to school at all that day and were waiting for another buddy to play hooky with us.

Not too smart, when I think about it now, but that's just how I was.

I was sitting in the driver's seat when the school officer confronted us—and I just slammed the car into gear and took off, eventually leading police on a high-speed chase over curbs and down side streets until I was penned in in nearby Millersville and stopped by three cops. At the time I had had my license for six months. My little misadventure got me suspended from school, grounded by my parents, and without a license for six more months.

And that was just the beginning.

Chapter Four: Life is Fragile

As my younger, carefree quad-riding, Boro-hopping ball-playing, hardworking adolescence turned the corner into the more pressing and perhaps more confusing teen years, I faced for the first time some challenges that would begin to chip away at the serenity and sheer joy I had in my early years.

That's not a unique transition, I think. In fact, the opposite would be unusual—a smooth frictionless jump from adolescence into the tempest of teenage angst. I mean, really, who has ever heard of that? And I don't care where anyone might have grown up.

But this is what I have learned: Everyone has something in their past to draw strength from in times of challenge—a touchstone of power that they might not know even exists.

Later, when I was deep into some serious challenges, hard on the edge and barely hanging on, I found my strength and hope. I found that I had hidden reserves. Did I draw on my gratitude for such a great life, or from my ambition, or was it just some sort of basic strength? I don't know, but I had bucketsful.

Everyone does.

At some point in everyone's life a challenge, or a heartache, or maybe even a personal disaster of some kind will fall. When it happened to me, I drew on my own hidden reservoir of strength and peace. I think anyone can if they know where to find it.

What I know now is this: Within each of us is a vast power, often untapped, that can carry us through the darkest times. I had it, and you have it.

You just need to find it.

Was mine genetic? Did I somehow inherit my grandparents' ability to keep charging ahead, even when it seemed there was no hope? Did I get the same strength my father had to go through a tour in Viet Nam, be wounded and face death yet come back to The Boro and move ahead, never once complaining or whining?

I feel each of us finds hope in different things. Some through God and religion, and others through family and friends. It doesn't really matter where your hope comes from. But I believe you need to believe in something--something that has more power than yourself alone.

I have learned that I need to pause, take a deep breath and *think*, every single day, especially when I'm agitated or doubtful or tired or angry or resentful, that there are other elements in play—that I am not the only person around who might be in a bad mood. Then I can realize that I am part of a larger world and that I need to know and understand my part of it.

When I do that, things start to click.

What I can tell you now is that you have that same ability to move ahead and be successful at anything you want to do. I think it is human nature to be indomitable, but I also think it's human nature to bury that strength, to look to others as an excuse for your problems. Find your strength. It is there, I assure you.

One thing I did, and this was over a lengthy period of time, was I got rid of many of my old ideas. Those old ideas, the old ways of thinking were what got me into ruts and trouble and stuck in a sometimes paralyzing malaise.

But I had to hit a bottom first, before I absolutely knew I had to reevaluate what I had been doing and where it took me—which was a place of absolute discomfort and fear.

I thought I had a plan. I knew I was good at sales and I admired what my father had done with his real estate career, but when I began to look back at things, I knew I was just spinning my wheels. I was moving ahead by three or four steps, then taking two or three back.

And I realized that was a colossal waste of time, not only for me, but for the people around me who loved me were trying to help.

And I realized that my plan was essentially no plan at all. Those old ideas were actually a heavy weight I had been dragging around with me for years. It was holding me back, keeping me in place.

They say that insanity is doing the same thing repeatedly and expecting different results. And when I started thinking about it, that is exactly what I was doing. So when other people pointed out to me that my old ideas, my old ways of doing things were getting me nowhere, I absolutely *knew* I needed to completely and thoroughly chuck all of them. Just plain get rid of them all.

These habits, these ideas that I was stronger than my problems, that I would eventually overpower them, were self-defeating. I was at war with myself, and I was losing.

And when I realized that, I threw the whole painful and paralyzing weight off my back.

It's up to you.

Whatever you may be faced with in life, or whatever might be troubling you, make a decision to change. Starting now make a commitment to change, start with Baby Steps. Change is hard work. This might mean putting some relationships on the back burner or even terminating others.

But once that commitment is made a tremendous weight will be lifted from your shoulders. It was for me. Maybe it's the same thing that powers and guides a cancer patient with a terminal diagnosis toward hope rather than despair. Maybe it's the strength that prisoners of war in Viet Nam drew on to ace sometimes years of torture and come out intact. Or maybe it's what keeps the man lost at sea for weeks the strength to hold on to life.

My own struggles—and I'm not talking about the Biblical Job here—arrived in my early teens, just when I was hitting puberty and dealing with the normal changes brought on by becoming a young man. Normally that's a time that cries out for stability and comfort and lack of change. It was a time when the confluence of my own physical changes blended with outside problems. And it was a Perfect Storm of bad timing.

I was watching the tension between my parents grow, watching them argue more frequently and I was growing increasingly uncomfortable doing so. I was slapped with my mother's cancer, with having to watch her go through treatment. She was and is a beacon of strength for me, a strong but gentle voice of reason and comfort to me.

Seeing her sick, sick with cancer of all things, did not sit well—even though she accepted the test with her usual calm and equanimity.

She made it through just fine. But I guess it was just one more jostle that my fragile teenage psyche didn't need.

So while this was going on, the parental struggle and my mother's illness, I discovered what would become for me over the few next years the source of my biggest failures and the one thing that brought more disappointment to the people around me who loved me more than anything else in my life: My love of alcohol and the wrenching, devastating effect it had on me for a few years.

To say now that I'm well past that time, which I am and have been for almost a decade, is to pay short shrift to the struggles I went through to get where I am today.

Ask anyone who is successful and they will tell you the same thing. They've all had struggles whether personal or in business. They all failed before they succeeded.

Here are a few people you just might be familiar with who knew failure first-hand. They are all household names, of course, but it wasn't always that way.

They all heard "no" before they heard "yes."

But they never gave up.

Before Walt Disney built the empire he has today, he was fired by a newspaper editor because "he lacked imagination and had no good ideas."

At one point Walt Disney was reported to have had to eat dog food because his fledgling animation company had gone belly-up.

Before author J.K. Rowling saw her astounding success with the Harry Potter series, she was a divorced, single mother on welfare struggling to get by while also attending school and writing a novel.

And Oprah Winfrey was once fired from a job and declared “unfit for TV,” something she has referred to as “the first and worst failure of her TV career.”

And how about Jerry Seinfeld? The first time he walked onstage he was booed right off.

I don't even particularly even like to talk about it, to tell you the truth. But to me my victory over that one all-consuming poisonous struggle is something I look back on with a kind of backhanded pride. It's backhanded because I wish I didn't have to say I had the strength to overcome an addiction to alcohol, and a source of pride because through that struggle I learned about my own strengths and weaknesses. And that is the source of the power and solace I was speaking about earlier in this chapter.

I remember my first experience—or was it experiment?—with alcohol. It wasn't the first time I tried it, but I would characterize it as my first “alcoholic” experience. I was thirteen.

Some friends and I somehow managed to grab a full case of Moosehead Lager, a strong beer almost hard-to-swallow taste, that some would call skunky. It's a popular beer in Canada, and an acquired taste one normally gets from sipping a bottle or two. Not for us, though. Three of us, camping in a friend's backyard right in the middle of The Boro, managed to knock back the entire case after my friend's parents went to bed on the early fall night and early the next morning. It was a crisp, snappy not-quite cold night, with the sweet autumn smells of apples and nearby farms wafting through the

backyard as we drank and laughed and got up from time to time to run through nearby pumpkin patches.

But I say “remember” with a touch of irony. Because the next morning my queasy near nauseous questions to my friends had a lot to do with asking what I had actually done the night before. I had blacked out, an oft-repeated phenomenon that would follow me like a bad nightmare through my drinking bouts over the next eight or nine years.

It was a pattern I'd quickly grow to regret, but one for a while I could not stop: great raucous times drinking with friends, followed by questions of what I had done the night before, followed by guilt bordering on mortification. Repeat.

Friends, my real friends, not my drinking friends, tried to help. Relatives tried to help. What I know now is what worked for me. People can offer all the help in the world to you, extends their hands and their pleas and their love. But until you are ready to accept a problem, ready to stop fighting it, all the offer in the world will do you no good. Stop the fight.

I fought it, even though I knew I had a problem. I fought it with every nerve fiber, every thought, every breath almost. I remember thinking often to myself that if people just left me alone I can take care of the problem myself.

And I was wrong.

But it hit me one day. I'd like to say I saw a flash of bright light, and heard a deep resonant voice saying, “Paul, I have come to help you.”

But it didn't happen that way.

At one point in my early twenties, facing some of the minor legal problems that not surprisingly dogged me during my drinking days, sitting on a stool alone in a bar, well on my way to drinking myself into more problems, I gave up. I surrendered. The war was over, and I was done fighting.

And through that surrender I was able to start a journey that allowed me to win, to win back so many of the things I might have lost and to win other things I never would have attained.

I surrendered and I won.

What a hard concept to grasp: surrendering in order to win—and that's exactly what happened.

It was a moment of extreme clarity for me. Sometimes achieving a victory means giving up old habits, of accepting ones weaknesses to gain new strength. And that was what I tapped into.

And I looked to other for help along the way as well. If you asked a passerby what he would expect if he went to a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous, he'd tell you, "Well, there will be about twenty or thirty unshaven and shaky guys just off the street or fresh from jail sitting around drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes to beat the band. That's what you'd find."

That is the stereotype, and it's far, far from the truth.

An Alcoholics Anonymous meeting--and they are held across the country thousands of times a day--is more likely to be in a well-lit church basement or town hall annex and

feature men and women from all walks of life: executives, doctors, priests and ministers, salesmen and nurses, housewives and mechanics. And an AA meeting is more often than not an uplifting combination of advice and reading and comfort from others whose stories are not so different from yours. That is the strength of AA. It tells you clearly that you are not and never were alone.

That is where I found my solace and help and comfort.

I was powerless for a time over alcohol. And try as I might my own self-will was not enough to overcome that powerlessness. I asked for help from AA, and I got help.

That's what worked for me.

That is the irony of it all. I surrendered then I fought. I fought for sobriety and it became a gift that has served me well for ten years now.

I never lost hope even in my darkest hours. Babies are born with hope, don't let it die.

Chapter Five: The Value of Role Models

The thing about The Boro and growing up there was its naturalness-- the summer smells drifting off the orchards and farms and the Susquehanna as it drifted slowly to the Chesapeake a hundred or so miles away. Or the way the snow drifted against fences on a bitterly cold almost blindingly bright December mornings. I noticed it in the people, too. They didn't seem to have a pressing need to be anywhere else, or to pretend they were someone else. Lancaster County, with its large Amish and Mennonite populations, might actually be a national symbol for simplicity and lack of pretension. A place where phoniness might simply wither away for lack of attention.

Maybe it's just me, but I've always felt that way. And that's why I'm still living here now, utterly incurious and disinterested in living somewhere, anywhere, else.

Ostentation doesn't sit well in The Boro. It clashes with the general and subtle ethos around here about being genuine and not feeling a pressing need to follow the latest fad. I like to think of it this way--you won't see an Amish farmer in Gucci sunglasses driving his buggy with vanity license plates down Route 30.

I don't want to sound like a gushing teenage poet here, but the thing about the naturalness, that glow of freshness and comfort, that sort of unspoken energizing plainness, is that insincerity in any form stands out even more here for its almost glaring, shouting, grating presence.

The Amish are not necessarily impressed by someone's new I-phone apps or the latest fashion du jour. And neither am I. Neither are a lot of people around The Boro.

Are there people dripping with insincerity in The Boro, in Lancaster County? Of course there are. But I actually think in my own biased way that there are fewer of them here than elsewhere. And I just don't have much to do with those people.

A large part of what anchored me, and anchors me still, are the role models I had and have. There are a few people who have helped me at various times, but two in particular have served as beacons for me—a way of fashioning my own behavior and attitudes. I can't say enough about how a good role model, a hero if you want to call it that, can help you get right-sized. It will help to cut the baloney and the distractions and thoughts of your own expanded self-importance down to size.

It's a pretty cool thing to have a role model and mine have helped immensely. They've produced for me something like a roadmap for living. They are guys I know who have been through some struggles some pain and come through strong and in a way more upbeat.

After my early years of hanging with what is typically called "the wrong crowd," I've learned to stick with the winners. If you don't stick with the winners, guess where you are going and how people will look at you? You're going to be pegged right down there with the losers--the people you associate with.

A role model, I think and have come to believe thoroughly, is someone you can look up to without being embarrassed about it. In a way a great role model is like an experienced guide through a wilderness where you've never set foot.

And this is what I'm talking about when I think of the naturalness and *un-phoniness* of The Boro. Media heroes and Hollywood Legends are manufactured and tissue thin. They are fragile and imagined creations who would crumple in an instant if faced with a crisis of any dimension—with real life and the surprises that often brings.

I actually don't have the time, and certainly don't have the inclination to rant about unscrupulous businessmen, sleazy and untrustworthy politicians and cheating athletes who continue to disappoint their followers. It's hard to go even a single day without another "shocking" revelation about someone who had been held up to public worship, their sanctified images etched in our collective consciousness. Celebrity X is a saint, then we learn that he or she stole or cheated or doped or God knows what.

It's a boring and predictable rhythm, almost funny if it weren't so sad.

I'm certainly not shocked, and I think that's in large part because my own hero worship is grounded in the huge amount of respect and admiration I have for both my father and Dave Liniger, the founder of Re/Max. They both are real and genuine and as far as I can tell, without pretense. You get what you see with those guys..

To many who lived through them, and to other younger people who have read about them, the late 1960s were to many a time of "sex, drugs, and rock and roll." It was a time that baby boomers, the first generation of Americans born after World War II were coming of age. Young people were rebelling against an establishment that they saw as unethical, power hungry, selfish, and insular. It was a time of great unrest: Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy were assassinated; cities were burning, college campuses

were the backdrops for demonstration, the Democratic National Convention in Chicago became a chaotic stage of almost theatrical antiestablishment theater.

The late 1960s was a time of unsettling protests and bitter generational divides. Free love, long hair, questioning authority, smoking marijuana and tripping on LSD were the order of the day for many young men and women.

“Don’t trust anyone over 25,” “Hell, no, we won’t go,” and “Hey hey LBJ how many kids you kill today?” became often-heard mantras of protest.

The buildup of American troops in Viet Nam reached its peak in 1968 when President Lyndon Johnson approved the raising of the maximum number of Americans fighting there to 549,500. That same year the unpopular war became the most expensive in American history—and the deadliest for America and its allies with 27,915 South Vietnamese and 16,592 American soldiers killed.

Not surprisingly, the number of young American men who sought alternatives to serving in Viet Nam also reached its height. Guys burned drafts cards, scrambled for college deferments, became conscientious objectors, and moved to Canada or Europe to escape the long arm of Uncle Sam.

I’m not certain if this has anything to do with it, but the two men who have served as my role models, who have kept me centered and productive through their actions, both served in Viet Nam in the late 1960s. They weren’t protesting anything. I’m sure there were many other places they would have loved to have been at the time, but I think there is a sense of obligation to what they saw as right and expected led them there.

My father actually enlisted an even rarer event than simply being drafted and accepting it. As I mentioned earlier, his parents were so distraught over his entering the army voluntarily they sold all his belongings after he left home for boot camp and after, service with the 173rd and Airborne and the 199th Infantry.

But that's just how he is. When he feels something is right, he does it, and what other people think has no bearing on it.

1968 was not a good year to be in Viet Nam, but there he was—and a volunteer on top of it. And one young enough to have his first shave in boot camp, as I mentioned before, the 199th was deployed near the Cambodian border in the northern Viet Nam operating patrols mostly to stop infiltration of supplies brought down the Ho Chi Minh Trail by the Vietnam People's Army, more commonly known as the NVA.

Life on patrol in the jungle, and days on end on patrol, had to have been incredibly stressful. I read one account by a soldier in the 199th who watched a fellow member of his platoon get up and just walk off into the jungle—never to be seen again.

Sounds fairly stressful to me.

When my father returned from Vietnam with a Purple Heart and a reminder from his wound that he was one of the lucky ones, a survivor, he picked up where he left off. He remained loyal to the platoon mate who jumped on top of him when he was hit, probably saving his life. They are still the best of friends.

My father doesn't shy away from talking about his army experiences, but he doesn't dwell on them or suffer from nightmares or regrets either.

He returned home to Lancaster County, started his life with renewed vigor, got married, started a family, and with extra effort got his real estate license. He enjoys the success his hard work has brought him, and it is really nothing more than that. He is a genuine, real guy, and I like that.

My father is a man of purpose, a strong man who encouraged me and helped me through some tough times.

Another man I admire a great deal is Dave Liniger, another Vietnam veteran and another man who has made a very good living through his own hard work in the real estate industry. A very good living indeed.

Like my father—and like me, I guess—Dave was born in a small town, in his case Marion, Indiana. While still in the Air Force and stationed in Arizona, he became interested in real estate after successfully buying and selling property to supplement his income.

In 1973, he founded RE/MAX, which revolutionized the real estate industry with a business model that combines a maximum commission concept with world-class support services. I know a little bit about RE/MAX because my own very successful business is a RE/MAX agency. You might be familiar with its famous hot air balloon logo, which has another tie-in because Dave Linger, not a guy to sit still for long, once attempted to circumnavigate the globe in a hot air balloon.

But what I admire most about Dave Liniger has nothing to do with his business acumen and prowess or his drive and no-nonsense commonsense approach to work. It is how he has dealt with different challenges in his life,

Only a few years ago, Dave was seeing the results of his decades-long hard work, and his awards and praise are almost too much to detail. He was named the Inman News "People's Choice" Most Influential Real Estate Leader. In 2010, he was included in Bloomberg BusinessWeek's profiles of the 50 Most Powerful People in Real Estate. He was featured in Entrepreneur, Forbes, Fortune, Inc., Success and other leading publications and media outlets across the globe. He received the Warren Bennis Award for Leadership Excellence from the Global Institute for Leadership Development and has been inducted into the International Franchise Hall of Fame, the Council of Real Estate Brokerage Managers (CRB) Hall of Leaders, the Real Estate Buyer's Agent Council (ABR) Hall of Fame, and has earned the Council of Residential Specialists (CRS) Special Achievement Award.

But all that praise and all that acclaim became almost meaningless in 2012, when he developed a horrific staph infection along his spine--the worst his doctors had ever seen. For four very long weeks it looked as if he might not survive. He slipped into a drug-induced coma, his organs failed, and at one frightening point he flat-lined, technically dead until a frantic attempt to revive was successful.

When he finally woke up, he was paralyzed and faced the very real possibility that he would never walk again. Weeks of intensive care were followed by months of rehabilitation—and slow, tedious sometimes almost hopeless period that took this self-made man who had everything to the brink of despair.

But he refused to quit, to give up, or even to think the worst. His will to not only survive but to walk again was buoyed by family, friends, health care professionals and a lifetime of positive influences.

Lying in his hospital bed he devised a goal-oriented plan to survive, the same type of goal-oriented plan he has used to become so successful in business.

Earlier I wrote about how we all have a source of strength—a touchstone of power, sometimes hidden but always there—on which we can rely. I had mine and as I said, they got me out of my own jam.

I'm not even remotely comparing my own situation with Dave Liniger's, but his own extremely perilous situation is an example of what I was talking about: Being able to reach into your own reserves. I think everyone has those reserves somewhere.

In his absolutely wonderful book, *My Next Step, An Extraordinary Journey of Healing and Hope*, Dave writes how he tapped into reserves of strength to fight through his pain. He thought of his wife, Gail, who had shown incredible grace and courage during her recovery from a tragic airplane crash twenty-nine years earlier. He was guided by a simple mantra: "Just 10 steps." He focused on that. He took a narrow view and wasn't overwhelmed by the bigger picture that could have discouraged him and left him in a wheelchair.

If he could take 10 steps, he thought, he could take 20. If he could take 20, he could walk a mile. After three critical surgeries and six grueling months in the hospital, Dave

finally returned home. He continues to heal, but is back running the company he loves and getting stronger every day.

Anyone who reads *My Next Step* will be inspired to find the courage to accept their situation and to do what's necessary to take the next step toward a meaningful life.

A genuine guy? Yes. A role model for me? Absolutely.

Chapter Six: Seek Tranquility

I like to think everyone has a place they visit to reenergize. For me, it's the woods.

I've seen a groundhog swim. I've heard a tree fall in the forest and I know it makes a sound. I've spent entire days alone in the Pennsylvania woods, entirely comfortable in the beautiful isolation. I love the near perfectness and silence of just being in the woods. And I love the solace and tranquility it brings me.

If you mention Pennsylvania in passing to someone who's not familiar with it, or someone who has never had the experience of the surprisingly long drive across the state on Interstate 80, they will likely think of Pittsburgh or Philadelphia—big cities. Big urban center with all their attendant big urban center problems—the traffic and endless strip malls and suburban hell.

And as a poet once said, “Oh what an ugly city every city is.”

But the reality is—my reality anyway—Pennsylvania is the Alleghenies and the Poconos and the forests—plenty of forests. It was and still is the place that inspired its very name “Penn's Woods.”

That's my Pennsylvania anyway.

When I was younger, really younger, the outdoors struck me almost dumb with pleasure, with the sheer excitement of being outside, far from anything and everything.

My affection for alcohol a little later, those few years when my path was detoured and my attention span to the beauty of the outdoors temporarily rerouted, that magical spell the outdoors held for me was broken. I was too busy with other things—so distracted by what I know now the complete and total waste of “partying” with my friends, that I never gave up going out in the woods a second thought.

What a shame.

But sometimes you can look at a bad time, an unfortunate time you know was wasted, and still get something from it. I did for sure.

There is a serenity in the woods that is special, much like my time on the river. I’m not sure if it’s the independence and confidence of finding my way in unfamiliar territory or enjoying the scenery, or whatever it is. But I find a certain peace just by sitting under a tree miles from nowhere, not even sure exactly where I am. The wind blowing through the trees the only sound I can hear.

Now when I head out into the woods, I enjoy every second of it.

It’s possible, even in what a lot of people view as “congested” Pennsylvania, to surprise even myself. I might be following a narrow crossback trail up a steep hillside, stepping gingerly over fallen limbs and moss decked rocks, slipping occasionally but moving up all the time. I might emerge at the top and be hit with a vista that will take my breath away—maybe a wide valley squeezing a narrow tributary of the Juniata or Susquehanna. Not a road or a person or a single intrusion in sight.

In the fall the valley would be cast with head-slapping, stunning canvas of reds and yellows oranges as the maples and oaks work their way toward winter.

In the summer the sun might be penetrating and intense as I work my way up the hillside. Maybe I'm even getting a headache from the exertion and heat and humidity. But then I'll reach the trail crest and look out. Maybe the small streams below will glint in the sunlight. And the valley might look like an ocean of green cooled by the mountain breezes topping the trees.

I absolutely love it.

This summer my wife and I bought some land near Mifflintown, a small central Pennsylvania town whose population hovers below 1,000 people. And we live *out of town* so you can imagine my sheer joy at the tranquility I get from the isolation.

Mifflintown is the county seat of Juniata County, and it serves as a sort-of county headquarters for whatever businesses you might find—which isn't too many. Which I, of course, also love. There is just not a whole lot there: a Radio Shack, a small market, a couple convenience stores, a restaurant and a hotel. Empire Kosher Poultry, the nation's largest producer of kosher poultry, has both its corporate headquarters and a processing plant not too far away.

But here's what I like about it most. It's actually not too different, if you stretch the reality out a bit, that this description from an 1855 book called *History of the Early Settlement of the Juniata Valley*.

“When he first entered the wilds of the Juniata, his eye, as far as it could reach, beheld nothing but a dense forest; but his quick penetration observed its natural beauties, its advantages, and the fertility of its soil. Hence he did not long stand upon the crest of the Tuscarora Mountain, debating the advantages to be derived from making it his home, or the risk he was taking upon himself in doing so, but plunged boldly down into the valley and called it his own. He found it peopled with dusky warriors and their families, who received him with open arms; and the golden hues of hope for the future lightened his cares, and made his privations no longer a burden. On the banks of the beautiful river the majestic stag trod, a very monarch; and the pellucid stream, from the bubbling brooks that formed it, to its mouth, was filled with the noble salmon and sportive trout, with little to molest them; for the Indians did not possess the penchant for indiscriminate slaughter of game which characterized their successors.”

It's interesting, because I love to hunt too. Very much so. But like the Indians before me in the Juniata Valley, I don't have the penchant for "indiscriminate slaughter" of game either.

I bow hunt, which to me is the ultimate test of man against his prey. Because I get solace from the land around me, because I like the rhythms and the smells and the patterns of tracking an animal sometimes all day for just one clear shot, I have a deep abiding respect for what I'm hunting.

For me, it's not a contest of me *against* my natural prey, it's me becoming part of the natural process. Of life and death and survival. All the while being totally outside everyday life: the traffic, the work deadlines, the daily pressures.

I've worked at being a good, effective, humane bowhunter for years. It's the ultimate challenge. A typical rifle hunter might sit in a treestand and shoot a deer from as far as 600 yards away.

A good bowhunter has to be smart enough and stealthy enough and sure-handed and clearheaded enough to take a shot from as close as three or four yards. Try that sometime.

A good bowhunter might have to walk slowly along a narrow faint patch, both looking for game—or finding it—tracking the game. He might have to use camouflage and know how to walk upwind so he doesn't spook his prey. Bowhunters know the land and they know their prey. They don't separate themselves from nature, they become a part of it.

And because bowhunting has a different season from rifle hunters, it's a more practical pursuit for me in my efforts to spend time outside, and whether I'm alone or with good friends, I am energized when I'm out there.

I'm perfectly happy, and I've done it countless times spending an entire day tracking a deer and not taking a single shot.

I'm outside, and at peace.

Chapter Seven: Working

I get out of bed every morning and can't wait to get to work. And I can't wait to get to work because I love what I do, and I love the fact that people come to me for advice and look to me as an expert in my field.

How did this happen?

As I look back on it, it happened with a bit of serendipity, a lot of hard work, and a head-slapping clarity that washed over me when I finally gave up drinking for good and took all the time I had wasted and turned it into a strenuous and unflinching program—really a journey—of self-improvement.

I say serendipity because at two of my first jobs, sales jobs, I had two very different role models. Two managers who were experts at two very different aspects of sales. I didn't choose them for their expertise, it just happened. But I did know enough to take advantage of what they were offering and learn from them. Sometimes I wonder if there is such a thing as a half-guru, which I'll explain in a bit. But these guys were awesome in their own ways.

Finding the right career is like gears meshing so smoothly you don't feel the change of momentum, the increase in power as your speed picks up. That's how my job growth went, and I embraced it. And that's why I feel it is exceptionally indelibly important to embrace what you do. Don't waste the effort if you are still looking. Find your passion and embrace it.

The life we live is way too short to be stuck in a dead-end job. I look at our career choices one of two ways. Either be successful in your own right or help make someone else become successful. Becoming an entrepreneur is not for everyone, For me, punching a time clock day in and day out, while lining someone else's pocket just isn't an option. I prefer to hold my own destiny. Whether I succeed or fail, it is in my hands, not someone else's. If you are passionate about something, it will come to you. You won't have to search for it. My own passion is and has been for as long as I can remember, the real estate business. And now I own my own real estate company and my passion is working with the agents who work for me, pointing to trends, making predictions, giving advice. It's what gets me out of bed in the morning and keeps me going and smiling and chugging on through the day.

Are some days hectic beyond belief? Absolutely.

Do I sometimes dream during the day of being out in the woods away from work? You don't even have to ask, because yes I do.

But they say if you love what you do, it's not really work.

And I love what I do.

I was fortunate in one way in that I knew right from the beginning, even when I was a kid. Thanks to my father, I wanted to be involved somehow in real estate.

Maybe because of that, I never had a desire to go to college and in high school I did just enough to get by. I just wasn't interested, to tell you the truth. And in a way I think I was lucky, because I watched friends later go through four years of college and all the

academic rigor (and OK, the partying) it entails , graduate, and still have absolutely no idea what they wanted to do. A bachelor's degree and nowhere to go. So I'd see English majors painting houses, history majors tending bar, business majors joining the army. And I know I made the right decision for me at least.

But as I said, I knew early on I had a gift for connecting with people right from the start. So after high school I embarked on the remarkable journey that has gotten me here. Don't get me wrong, because I certainly had my periods of disinterest in work. Those numb periods were sparked mostly in my younger days by my thirst for alcohol and whatever relief I thought it was giving me. For a while, even as my career edged upward, I was still drinking too much, and still at times doing just enough to get by. That's what alcoholics do. What a waste of time and energy. But I know that you can't change the past, and I certainly can't change mine.

But one thing I do know now, I can change the way I look at my past—and as bad and sometime embarrassing as some of the bonehead things I did were, I can turn that around now and say it taught me some valuable lessons.

I have come to accept those things I cannot change. The business world will surely keep you on your toes. And I have learned that no matter how successful a person is, at some point there are going to be bad decisions--whether they make them or someone else does—that will affect them in a negative manner. In business one can spend hours or even years trying to follow a course you think is best, only to find out later it was a mistake. That's how life works. Sometimes you might simply make a wrong decision

about the business associates you choose to work with—only to find out later that they had been trying to undermine everything you were working for.

As old wise man once said, “Keep your friend’s close, and your enemies closer.”

I’ll talk a bit more about sticking with the winners and why in the next chapter.

Lessons that I have turned into motivations to keep moving up and keep improving and never stop looking for the

But when I finally and completely and totally stopped drinking, I felt a great weight had been removed from my shoulders—and it was a great feeling.

Even before high school I was learning and working toward where I am today. My various jobs at the country club were exceptionally helpful to me later—and I even use some of things I learned then today. Because it was a country club, it was proper and it was mostly calm. I had worked every day with club members who were of course older than me, but these were people who expected graceful and polite behavior—which honestly at the time was not one of my strong suits. But the jobs there taught me about respect and manners and how to look and sound professional. And it was there that I realized I had an instinct for knowing the right thing to say in a variety of situations. And more important, I think, an instinct for know what *not* to say.

My first job out of high school—when I was 18 or so, was a sales job pitching time shares at a resort in the Poconos—a sort of Northeastern, sort of mountain, sort of low-scale vacation region that is within striking distance for mostly people from New York and New Jersey who want to get away but can’t afford Vail or Aspen or Switzerland.

The deal was that these people had accepted a free weekend at the resort with the stipulation that they would agree to sit down and listen to guys like me sell them sometimes expensive timeshare packages. It was a tough introduction to sales, believe me, because a lot of these people thought they had no interest in the timeshare program—just a nice weekend away in the Poconos. Talk about high-pressure sales!

So I would find myself in a sale where my potential client walks into the room knowing I'm about to slam him with a hard sell. It was great job for the first month because the timeshare people were paying me four hundred dollars a week for the first month to show up and learn the ropes. But after that I was thrown to the wolves, on my own and on commission.

But I learned quickly. I watched and listened to the other sales guys. I was just a kid, and I knew I wanted to be in sales, but these guys were older doing it for a living and supporting families and they were good. Real good.

And that's when I knew I'd like to get into sales for a living. And that's when I started, when the first germ of an idea started, that I needed to develop some tools to be good—really good—at my chosen profession.

We got a new manager—my first half-guru as it turns out-- who was big on the psychology of sales and he taught us the concepts of selling—and he was very, very good at what he taught. In addition he also sent us to conferences and seminars.

As I mentioned the whole deal with these time shares was sitting down at a table with a doubting and sometimes hostile customer and not getting up until we had sealed a deal. There was some serious pressure, I have to say. But it was a challenge and I loved it—

and I ended up selling some high-end \$14,000 timeshares, so I apparently was learning.

But the time share deal was only a seasonal job, and two years later I decided to really dig into a challenging job—telephoning people in the dead of winter to sell them lawn care services. Sort of like selling refrigerators to Eskimos. It was not exactly where the leads were during the long Lancaster County winters.

But our manager—my second half guru—was a genius at motivation, a truly rah-rah guy, and I don't mean that in a cynical way at all. He was great, and once again I learned. He was the most enthusiastic guy I had ever worked for and he really sold me on the value of energy.

Imagine a sales room with wall-to-wall cubicles, each with nothing but a phone on the desk. The first time I ever showed up at work, my manager cranked up the music and had us dance for fifteen minutes before starting the day.

I thought the guy was crazy! But it worked. The energy level in the room soared.

I'd go into the office, grab a pile of sheets with information on former customers and then call out of the blue and try to talk them into returning for another year. Eight hours of cold calls. But as with my other job, I listened to how the others guys were being successful and again I learned a lot. And in the end of my time there I'd often see my name up on the board as one of the sales leaders for the day. And by that time I had

refined my own art of selling to the point where I knew luck had little to do with closing a deal.

And at that point I had become a student of selling and of the art of the deal. From that point on I was always looking for ways to learn—determined to never stop learning and I also realized that I could actually never learn enough.

And because of these managers I also learned the value of being aware of a situation, of being mindful enough to know the value of learning from those two half gurus. Of knowing that different people have different skills that are well worth emulating.

Those two jobs also introduced me to a key sales concept I think applies to a lot of things other than sales: rejection.

Today, I actually go to work thinking, “I wonder how many rejections I am going to get today?” Really. Think about it: the more rejections you get means the more you are trying. It means I made more calls. And along the way, I learned to not take a “no” personally. Someone could be having a bad day, maybe they just spilled a cup of coffee in their lap or their car didn’t start. You have to get used to it and know to not take it personally. Know that three days later you could make the same call and get a “yes.”

The trick is knowing your numbers. Today I’d say that I’m good with 13 or 15 rejections a day. I’m fine with it. Especially when I think about those days when I’d get 40 rejections. Just know your stats.

So what did all this training do for me?

After being thrown to the wolves in those first two sales jobs, I realized it was time to move into what, courtesy of my Dad, I really wanted to do: real estate. As I have mentioned he had been in real estate since I was a kid, and he loved it. And I loved watching him work and the rewards it brought—to him and to our family.

And he had told me over and over again that there will always be a need for housing and people will always be looking to buy. Maybe when the economy is not doing so well there won't be as many potential sales, but there will always be some. It sounded good to me and I never forgot it.

I started taking courses real estate courses at night to prepare for the state licensing exam, and I got mine at age 23.

My first venture into the real estate industry was as a mortgage broker. I had taken a class on mortgage lending when I was studying for my license and it intrigued me. I followed up on it—which is always a good instinct—and ended up with a job helping realtors arrange financing. It proved to be very hectic, very stressful, and better than anything else, very educational. I realize now it was one more step on my way to knowing as much as I could about the real estate business. And I made a lot of contacts that still prove useful to me today.

It proved, as life often does, that nothing is certain and that sometimes things happened in life that force your hand—that prompt you to make a decision you might have been putting off.

In my case, the mortgage broker I was working so hard and being so productive for went bankrupt after I was on the job for just over two years.

I rolled with it. Sometimes these unexpected and seemingly disastrous events can prove fruitful.

For me, I was OK with it and I read the writing on the wall, which was pretty clear. It was time for a change.

I got out of the mortgage business in 2000 and I have never looked back. That's when I went into a frenzy—I don't think there is a better word for it—of self-improvement, or personal development. But that time I had stopped drinking for good and I was crazy with energy. I had had my own epiphany: I had proved to myself and my colleagues that I was not only capable of being good at my chosen profession, I was actually very good at it.

In 2007 I bought my father's company—and he still works for me now in semiretirement.

How cool is that?

Here's another thing I fully and truly believe these days. Don't rest on your laurels. Don't stop. Keep moving up. It's not that difficult because you've got momentum on your side. You're already on the upswing. Use that upward inertia.

Today I'm a student of the industry. I follow trends, I blog, I read blogs and I look for things others might not see. And the result: people look to me for advice, they actually seek me out. And that keeps me going in that positive direction; it fuels me.

And I am not prepared to disappoint them.

Chapter Eight: Avoid the Energy Vampires

We all know them.

Maybe we've worked with them or even lived with them, or been on a team or in a club with them.

They're known by various terms but their purpose is universal: No matter what is going on, good or bad or even just-run-of-the-mill everyday average, these are the people who love to make things worse.

Having a bad day at work? One of these characters will seek you out and make it worse. They love to live in the negative. They wallow in it like happy hogs. They seem to get great joy in finding someone more miserable than them.

Feeling sad about something? They can make you even sadder.

Just feeling mediocre, blah, apathetic? They will latch onto your numbness and malaise and put you in a stupor of inactivity.

The German's have the concept of *schadenfreude*, which is defined as, "delighting in others' misfortune"—the idea that when people around us have bad luck, we look better to ourselves. Some researchers have found that people with low self-esteem are more likely to feel *schadenfreude* than are people who have high self-esteem.

J.K. Rowling, in her incredibly popular Harry Potter series, created Dementors, dark creatures who feed off of human happiness. In other words, the Dementors seek out happy humans and suck away whatever is positive, thus causing depression and despair.

I like to call them Energy Vampires.

There are people all around us who bring joy and lightness into our lives, sometimes unexpectedly. You can almost reach out and touch their energy. And then there are others who can leave us feeling totally whacked out and stressed, maybe even guilty about some undefined things we didn't even do. You might know someone who is an eternal victim, always suffering because of some perceived wrong, or someone who constantly feels the world is totally and irrevocable against them. Or the people who need to always be the center of attention, or those who wallow in blaming everyone but themselves, or the drama queen, who can make a burned-out light bulb an international crisis.

There was a point, long ago thankfully, that I played right into the concept. I was feeling poorly enough about myself and some negative things going on around me—things that I had caused, of course—that I actually sought out these people. If I really think about it, there was a brief time when I was one of them.

It was a weird and almost paradoxical phenomenon. I felt negatively about things, so I sought out others in the same state of mind so I would feel better about myself.

As I said, it didn't last long. And, boy, am I grateful for that.

And once I got back on the right track, once I started my work on improving myself and keep my side of the street clean, of making the right decisions, calmly and sensibly, I realized this:

Stick with the winners; stick with people who are grateful for what they have, the small things and the big. That sense of positivity is contagious.

It's about energy. And changing your energy is very possible, very doable. Just as your inertia to be negative, to live on the dark side is a path that is easy to follow, your inertia of think positively can also be an easy path.

But like everything else, you have to work at it. Be aware of your thinking, know when you are going down the wrong path.

You can change your energy.

Have you ever walked into a room and felt the tension in the air? What happens? You begin to feel tense. It's a pretty common occurrence.

But the other side of that coin is walking into a room where people are laughing and cheerful and joking and light. What happens? You begin to feel upbeat and happy. That is a fairly common occurrence as well.

Everyone has the ability to affect not only their own energy, but that of the people around you.

As I said, stick with the winners. Be a winner. I guarantee it will take a lot less effort once you cross over to the positive side. And on the positive side, you can be creative, maybe even vibrant. You can be inspirational, and you can turn people's heads.

I truly believe that negative beliefs consume energy and turn the bright into negative thoughts and words and actions.

I have gone through times when I was depressed about circumstances, not in the clinical sense, but just down about the way things were happening. And I mentioned

earlier my childhood bouts of anxiety. These kinds of negative emotions can really take hold if you are not paying attention to how you are feeling.

But I learned that all around me were life-sustaining and energizing things that could break the hold of those negative emotions. For me, it was so many things: the security of my Boro childhood, the inspirations of my father and Dave Liniger, the growth of my business and the recognition of my talents for sales.

I will tell you this, clearly and emphatically: Tapping into those reserves, the reserves that at one point I didn't even know I had, was a lot easier than feeding into self-pity and negativity.

I just had to break those old and trying habits and mold some new ones. I had to ask myself, Was I leading an efficient and positive life? Or was I just getting by? I had to change my energy.

And once I got into the habit, I developed certain sensibilities. I knew how to recognize when I was being drained by an energy vampire—and I knew when it was time to take a deep breath and walk away. I developed a sense of knowing to catch myself starting to go down that easy and paved path of negativity.

If I couldn't find the winner, at least I knew enough to stay away from the Energy Vampires. And just by doing that one simple thing, disengaging, I could and still do feel the tension drift away.

I developed a sense of when to take a step back and away.

For me, that works every single time. I know that if I accept an invitation by an Energy Vampire to step into the chaos, I'm looking for trouble—and I will find it.

But I also know now that if I step back I'll find the serenity of simple everything things waiting for me.

Chapter Nine: From Decisions to a Higher Level

Think about this: Pick up a newspaper or listen to a television news report and we can hear every day about bad decisions and their results.

Not to be an alarmist, but there are reported to be something like 50,000 deaths per year caused by medical mistakes--each rooted in a flawed decision. We can also hear or read about bad decisions by business leaders and politicians who are tempted by insider information and backroom deals to make some quick money. And don't get me started on the steady stream of celebrity news, where bad decisions seem to ruin careers and families every day. All too often these truly sad and sometimes wrenching results are prompted by addiction, emotion, and unbridled out-of-control spontaneity that will cloud judgment when a more reasoned and calm reaction is needed.

We make hundreds of thousands of decisions in a lifetime. Most of them are actually small, not that significant. They don't put our lifestyles in jeopardy. But on the other side of it, there are very important decisions that we are typically not equipped to make: Decisions about marriage, children, careers, medical treatment, and those maybe whacky, scary decisions about going skydiving or investments. What, exactly, do you need to get through all of these decisions, big and small?

Given where I am these days, I think a lot about decisions. Today I'm owner of a prosperous, fulfilling business that I love and can't wait to jump into every morning. And

I think about where I was at one point—a prisoner of alcohol and powerless to do anything about it--or at least I thought I was--carrying all the unwanted, depressing baggage that goes along with it. Then of course I often think about the path that got me here, in the light, in a good place. It has been a magical ride along that path, which included some mistakes and some hard work and some difficult lessons and decisions.

I'm not Pollyanna, and I recognize that there are a lot of things I can't control.

But then there are things I can.

But the difference between the dark days that now seem so long ago, and the bright ones I'm soaking in now, is that today I am mindful. I am mindful of trying—and the emphasis is on trying, trying every single day—to live my life on a higher level in which every decision I make is thought-out and done without stress or anger or irritation. Think about it, have you ever made a good decision when your emotions were out of whack?

When I think about it, many if not most of the truly bad decisions I've made—and there have been a few—came hand-in-hand with the stress, anxiety, and tension I'd been going through. Some even came when I had been eating poorly and not taking care of myself physically.

All of these things can contribute to bad decisions.

Every day I practice and think about eliminating the stress and being aware of what's going on around me.

Again, don't get me wrong, I'm not above or immune to fits of temper or impulsiveness.

But what I have learned to do is recognize where I am, what I'm doing, where I'm going

and how I'm feeling. It takes effort and practice. I am far from flawless in this process. But it works for me every single day.

I try to start each day being calmly aware of what's going on, how I feel, and what I'm going to try to do and how I'm going to try to do it. I don't make judgments or imagine what's going to happen before it does. I know people who actually imagine entire mental arguments with someone before they actually happen. For example, a heated discussion with a boss's criticism over a report they haven't even turned in. And usually these arguments never materialize. That is a colossal waste of time.

Calm practiced thought and knowing that every decision is important is what has gotten me away from the self-absorption and selfishness and self-pitying of alcoholism and into the brightness of making clear, conscious decisions--and having a fairly good idea of what the result will be.

I work very hard on avoiding the impulsiveness that often painted me in a corner, unable to either move forward or backward.

From the moment I get up to the time my head hits the pillow that night, I keep things simple. It's not dramatic, it's not complicated.

I think about an article I read on people who have lived beyond 100 years old. The study found certain common traits in all the centenarians they studied over a 25-year period: each had a positive but realistic attitude, a love of life, a sense of humor, a spirituality of some kind, courage, and a remarkable ability to accept the losses that come with age but not be stopped by them.

I think from time to time of the old story of the butterfly off the coast of Africa flapping its wings and starting a chain reaction that results in a Caribbean hurricane weeks later. I believe it is called “the butterfly principle.” But what it means to me is how a bad decision, a simple bad decision made in a small moment of pique or frustration can lead to monumental consequences.

This is hypothetical, but for me, say that because I’m angry at a client for something he said I decide to not follow up on something I told him I would do. Say, then that he decided what I did was unprofessional and he cuts our potential deal off and starts a campaign of insults and rumors that in the end hurts my business even more than the loss of the deal we both were working toward.

That’s just an example, and hurtful decisions don’t have to be just about money or financial security. They could affect relationships, and reputations and health and so much more.

I’ve spoken frankly about my addiction to alcohol and how I came to recognize that addiction and how I learned to deal with it—to be mindful of it and how it could affect me. I don’t need to sit down and wonder if I should have a martini. I don’t need to wonder what would happen if I did. I know what would happen, I am very comfortable with knowing what would happen, and I simply and plainly don’t do it.

But there are other addictions people might have. Maybe they’re addicted to drama, or to taking foolish chances, or to living on the edge with relationships, or maybe even to anger. These are the sorts of hidden compulsions that will wreak havoc on decisions. But simple decisions can have a great impact. For me maybe it was picking up a drink when I knew I shouldn’t. But it’s about more than simple being addicted to a substance

or a chemical. You could be addicted to drama—so you decide to say something that will annoy a coworker; or you could be addicted to jumping from one relationship to another, you just can't help yourself, or addicted to the spotlight--so you have to do things that draw attention to yourself even when you probably should stay back offstage.

And if they are not recognized they will keep the chaos coming, in spades.

So the small everyday decision can become big. It's like the game we played as kids, lining up rows of dominoes, then flicking the first one over and watching everything fall. I learned that the hard way, the painful way. My daily goal now is to live my life on a daily basis in a way that my small decisions never become big out of control decision. I get up every day with the goal of keeping my side of the street clean. If I take care of myself, then I know that my tomorrow is going to have a chance to be a lot better. And lot smoother and less crazy. Because I don't make those small decision in small moment of stress and haste. And I don't worry now about something I'm going to do today coming back to bite me next year, or ten years from now.

I like that.