

DO IT ANYWAY

Don't Wait! Act in Spite of Life's Challenges



BARON GRANT

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Do it Anyway Audiobook

BARON GRANT

MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA

Do it Anyway Audiobook **by Baron Grant**

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I dedicate this book to my beautiful wife Davina, who through this journey has inspired me. She has inspired me to never stop fighting, to never give up hope, no matter how challenging our situation might be, to enjoy every living moment and to have faith in good things to come.

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CORPORATE SPEAKING

Baron has spent a number of years working in the corporate world speaking on a variety of different topics. Baron's keynote presentations inspire participants to look at work and personal challenges in a different way. Embracing failure as just a step in the journey and not a life defining moment, encouraging them to continue to act in spite of life's challenges, to keep chasing after what they want.

Baron is an expert in using evidence based tools and practices to help people improve their own interpersonal behaviour. By doing this people who have attended Baron's training and have applied the lessons learned reported a significant improvement in their ability to connect and influence a far greater range of people, than they had previously.

Baron possesses an amazing ability to connect on a personal level with any audience. He tailors his messages to suit the needs of the business, focusing on the challenges the business is trying to overcome, at that moment.

Some of the topics that Baron frequently speaks on are:

- His personal journey
- Acting in spite of life's challenges
- Understanding and developing your personal WHY
- Increasing our level of resilience

In addition to Baron's keynote presentations he spends a great deal of time with large corporates helping their sales teams improve their skills in the way they sell their products and services. He does this through customised sales training and leadership development programs.

To book Baron for your next event or training, visit www.barongrant.com



TESTIMONIALS

"Baron was one of the most engaging speakers we have ever hired. His mastery of his content, and the sheer power in which he delivered it, was beyond amazing! The thousands in attendance at our annual convention were electrified as they were taken on a rollercoaster ride of emotion. We have never seen a corporate speaker move so many of people from belly-laughter to tears and back again with such skill. He exceeded our expectations at every turn."

Robert A. McFadden
Executive Vice President
Viridian International

I personally found the session with Baron extremely engaging. He is a master communicator with real life solutions for real life problems. I was able to immediately implement many of the strategies Baron taught across my sales team with almost instant results. I would highly recommend attending one of Baron's sessions to anyone that wants to master the art of influence.

Lee Lake
Chief Executive Officer
SUNENERGY

“Baron’s book, ‘Do it Anyway’ was so powerful. It moves you in ways you do not expect. We had heard from others that it was a do-not-miss. After reading it as a management team, we completely rewrote our corporate goals and initiatives. Something in the way Baron communicates moves you to take an inventory of what you value and then move to immediate action to accomplish it.”

Tamara Lynn
Chief Strategy Officer
Aequity Partners

"Earlier this year I had the privilege of participating in a training session where Baron Grant was the guest presenter. From the very beginning of his training he challenged each of us to be completely honest with ourselves so that we could truly benefit from the training. I made a conscious choice in that moment to fully engage and commit to total honesty and allowed Baron to take me on the journey he had in store for us.

Not only is Baron a charismatic and engaging presenter, he has a genuine approach that makes you feel like he is invested in your personal development. He is not afraid to get raw and real and inspires everyone in the room to join him in that space.

One highlight of his presentation that will stay with me was when he had each of us write down personal fears and beliefs that were holding us back. We then had to screw the paper up into a ball and throw it away and scream at the top of our

lungs - symbolic of letting it all go and releasing the negative beliefs. I personally found this confronting as it raised many emotions. But the release that I felt as I symbolically threw away my fears was incredible. I felt vulnerable and empowered at the same time. It was one of those profound and poignant moments that alter your life course from that moment forward.

For any individual or organisation who wants to get to the real issues and the honest truths about how to face fears, live life more fully, and super charge yourself belief, Baron Grant is the man that can do that".

Julina King
Beyondblue Ambassador

FOREWARD

From the first time I heard of Baron and his journey, I was passionate about supporting all that he stands for. His determination to achieve, regardless of what was happening in his life is inspiring. Baron's personal journey of trials and tribulations will help you re-align your life, opening the door for you to make the personal change in your life that may be needed and instill a little perspective that we all need from time to time.

Baron has the ability to take you on a journey where you will change the outlook of your own life through hearing his. He will challenge you in a way that will help you to stop accepting the mediocre path that is easy and break down the excuses that are holding you back.

Challenges in life come in all shapes and sizes, but the one thing that is certain, we will all experience them at some point in our life. With my own experience being diagnosed with an incurable cancer at the age of 11 months, as well as battling the effects of a harsh experimental drug that killed 24 of the 25 of us that were subjected to it, I have learned to appreciate and understand, as Baron has, that it's not the adversity in your life that defines you, it's all about how you deal with it.

There are two types of people in this world, those who use their adversity as the justification behind why they fail and give up on life and there are those who use that same pain and suffering as the motivation to succeed. This is the path that Baron and his inspiring family have chosen.

Some of us are extremely lucky to have family and friends support us in challenging times. I was extremely lucky to have an amazing family, particularly my mother, to care for me whilst spending nearly quarter of my life in hospital. I am acutely aware of how lonely and scary it can be dealing with a life threatening illness. Baron's story will open not only your eyes but also your heart to the sometimes painful and scary experiences that people face when they are caring for a loved one. Not only that, you will see that no matter what challenges you face, be it financial, self-confidence or even in personal relationships, there is always a way forward.

Happiness is all around us. We need to look for it to actually find it.

Michael Crossland
Inspirational Speaker



INTRODUCTION



Sometimes life throws us a curveball. Heck, sometimes it throws us curveball after curveball. So much so that we start to believe that we're the only ones who have ever experienced major challenges. We ask ourselves questions like, "Does anyone understand?", "How will I ever get out of this situation?" These challenges may be so overwhelming that it feels like our whole world is crashing down around us. Like the whole universe is against us.

My wife Davina, our five beautiful children and I have experienced some of those really challenging times. Times that felt so horrible we thought we wouldn't come out the other side. But we did! No matter how challenging things may feel at the time, there's always a way out and a way to move on.

I will take you inside our journey as our lives went from charmed to challenged. Like many of you, we've experienced great times in life, and some sad and challenging ones as well. Through these experiences; the good, and the bad, I have learned a great deal. I will share with you my 5 key steps to achieving your dreams, even in the darkest, most challenging times.

My story is simply that: my story. You may have far more challenging experiences to deal with in your life but my hope is that as you join my family on our journey, you'll look at some of your own challenges in a different way. In a way that won't stop you from taking the chances you need to take to reach your dreams.

Just because challenges are placed in our way on this journey we call life, doesn't mean we should hold back, and be so scared of failing, that we don't have a chance. When we take chances and go after our dreams, no matter the situation we find ourselves in, we experience the best life has to offer.

Experiences are what cause us to change, and some experiences change us deep down, in a way that means we'll never be the same again. This is exactly what has happened to our family. Some changes we consciously made, and others were thrust upon us. No matter what changes come, how we respond is the most important thing. When the challenges come, do we allow them to stop our progress towards our goal? Do we allow that challenge to define who we are? Or do we find a way around it, under it, over it or just run straight through the damn thing?

Once we decide what we want to achieve in life, we should go after it with all the energy of our soul. It isn't enough to dream about something; we have to chase it! It's in the process of chasing our dreams that we feel happiness, simply

because if we want to be happy, we need to be always progressing. We need to be moving forward, even if the moving is only a little bit at a time.

Life is to be lived, to be experienced. We're not here to watch other people have experiences. I've been successful at many things in life, and I've failed at a number of things as well. If we live our lives worrying about failing, we'll never do anything. Without failure or big challenges along the way, success will never feel as great as it can.

As you read, I want you to examine your own life. Is your life where you want it to be? Are you achieving what you want to achieve? Are you actually trying? I want you to really assess if you're moving forward. Are you are living life on your terms, or the terms set out by someone else? Are you making excuses for standing still because your circumstances are hard, because you have challenges in your life that you think are too heavy to bear?

What is your dream? What do you want to achieve? The only thing that's stopping you from achieving what you want to achieve is YOU.

Take a long hard look at your current situation, all your challenges, all your frustrations, all your day-to-day issues. Stare them down and say, "I'm going to DO IT ANYWAY!"

CHAPTER ONE

THE PICKET FENCE



Out the front of our home with the picket fence. Life was picture perfect.

In my mid-twenties, I was living the dream. No one's life could have been better. Well, that's what I thought anyway.

Let me set the scene for you. In early 2009, I was living in the outer southeast suburbs of Melbourne with my beautiful wife, Davina (I always call her Dee), and my four amazing children, Katie, Baron III, Jacob and Mitchell. We lived in a small three-bedroom home with well-kept gardens and a big

backyard so the kids could play outside as much as possible. To top it all off, we even had a white picket fence!

I was also progressing well in my career working at Sensis, the company that produces the Yellow pages and the White pages advertising directories. I'd been working there for a number of years, and I finally felt like I was climbing the corporate ladder. After a few years working in different sales roles, I moved into the sales training department, and I spent a few years working as a sales trainer, perfecting my craft. My primary responsibility was to train new staff on all things sales when entering the business. I really enjoyed doing this job and it gave me great satisfaction to see people improve their skills over a short period of time. After a few years as a sales trainer, I began managing a team of sales trainers, something I'd wanted to do for a long time, and I was earning more money than I had ever earned in my life. I thought I was a bit of a hot shot!

Our life was simple, though busy. It was filled with work, family activities, church activities and, as my kids grew older, the constant travelling to children's sports increased. We even managed to take the odd family holiday interstate, as well as overseas. We were blessed to have Dee care for our children on a full time basis and with four children in tow she had a busier fulltime job than I did. Dee loves her role as a mother. She finds great joy in the simple pleasures of playing with and teaching our children.

Life was ticking along beautifully. So beautifully that when my wife and I looked at other people, we couldn't understand why they made life so hard. Dee and I lived such a blessed life, we just assumed other people's lives ticked along the same way ours did. I don't think we had any concept of some of the real challenges that some of our friends were

experiencing. We were just living in a bubble of sorts, believing that if people didn't feel the way we did about life, they must be doing something wrong. We weren't trying to be arrogant or unsympathetic. Things just seemed easy for us, and if it was easy for us, surely it could be easy for anyone.

One example of how things worked perfectly in our lives was the way in which I earned promotions, moving up through different positions at Sensis like clockwork. Interestingly, each promotion coincided with us having a baby. Seriously, for all four of our children, it went like this: Dee got pregnant; I got a promotion while she was pregnant. It wasn't long before I was telling Dee, "We should just have heaps of kids! We'll never have to worry about money!" We both love having children, but I'm not sure this was a great plan for self-sufficiency. At the same time, I was extremely grateful to always have what we needed, when we needed it.

Let's get back to the picket fence. Dee and I didn't actually build the fence, but we did paint it. In fact, we did a great deal of work on our house, planning on staying there a long time. We redid the kitchen, the floors and revamped everything else. The house was looking great, and we were comfortable, but there was one final touch: a little white (and red) picket fence out the front. Maybe it was our way making sure nothing bad could come in and spoil our small piece of heaven.

After the fence was built, we thought it would be nice to have a couple of friends over to help us paint. Surely they had nothing better to do! As we were painting, our friend Catherine commented on how things always worked out for us. Her comment was not something I was expecting to hear, and I was taken aback. "Baron," she said, "it's like you say a prayer and ask God for what you want, and the heavens open

and go AHHHHHHHHHHHHH! (angels singing), and you're given everything you could ever want and need."

I can't remember what I said in response, but I must say, I kind of agreed with her. We were very blessed. Things did seem to work out each time we decided we were going to do something, though we hadn't taken many risks at this point. Not yet, at least.

Even though we put a lot of work into our house and planned on staying there a long time, with four children and one bathroom, it was starting to get a little tight. A change was coming, and it was going to be a big change, a big risk. Dee and I sat down with our two choices: we could either make our house bigger, or move to a new house.

The decision seemed simple enough. Why would we want to leave our little piece of heaven?

We decided to go with option one. We would add an extra bedroom on the end, along with a master retreat and bathroom. Over the next few months we had the plans drawn up and were almost ready to go. We were so excited! A larger master bedroom AND an ensuite. You know what that means when you have four kids? PRIVACY!

Just as we were planning the expansion, things started changing in our neighbourhood. The family that lived over the road built what can only be described as the ULTIMATE MAN CAVE attached to the side of their house. I am not talking about a little room out the back. I am talking about an UGLY double garage-sized shed. It was built about the same time their son turned 18 and got his licence. The man cave quickly became the go-to spot for every party, night after night. The more they drank, the more people arrived, and things grew out of control.

We no longer needed to travel to experience the power of the V8 Supercars, because we had Bathurst outside our front door. They tore burnout after burnout, night and day, waking our children and filling our house with smoke. Deciding to take matters into our own hands, Dee and I went over and talked with both the offenders and the owner of the house. Dee decided to speak to one of the offenders when they were in the middle of doing a burnout.

Like a mother lion protecting her cubs, Dee marched out and got the young man's attention while his tyres were screeching and smoke was billowing everywhere. Upon seeing Dee, he promptly stopped the burnout. Dee gave him a fair old talking to, letting him know that his behaviour was not acceptable at all. The young man did apologise, and said he would clean up the skid marks. I wasn't sure how he was going to do that, but he at least seemed apologetic.

As courageous as Dee was, her altercation with the young man made no difference. The next day resumed the same as the ones before, more burnouts and speeding down our street. This time I decided to head over and speak to them myself, man to man. I waited until the home owner was home and a couple of the young men were there as well. I carried my youngest child over with me to make a greater impact. I spoke to all of them about the dangerous driving and how it was not safe. They proceeded to defend themselves by blaming their mates, assuring me that they would never do such a thing. The owner of the house brushed it off as kids just being kids. He said all this as he downed another beer. I thought to myself, what hope do I have here? If this was the example the teenagers were learning from, it wasn't a battle I was going to win. No matter what we said, the burnouts, drinking, swearing and loud music resumed. In fact, their frequency just increased.

Deep down, I think we knew something like this was going to happen. The standard in our neighbourhood had been dropping rapidly, and we were waiting for the final straw that would break the camel's back. One night, that moment arrived. We had just returned from a night out with some friends (the same ones who'd helped us paint the fence), when we heard yelling and screaming outside our front door. We ran out to see what was going on, and were horrified to discover a fight with no less than 30 people literally beating the snot out of each other. It was total carnage. Our decision to move house had been made for us. Quite shaken, we called the police and waited for everything to calm down.

A few days later, a street sign was installed by the local council, announcing, "CCTV cameras operate in this area." How devastating! Our little piece of heaven was no longer heaven at all. I was not going to allow my kids to grow up in an environment like that. With renewed vigour, we shelved the plans to expand our home, and the hunt for a new home began.

I know we're not the first family to experience this type of violence in a neighbourhood, and we won't be the last. I know a lot of people who live in rough areas. What I cannot understand is why they choose to stay in those areas. Too often we are scared to make a change. We sit and think, *better the devil you know than the devil you don't*. What a stupid quote – it has such a negative outlook, like things can't be better than what they are right now.

Up until this point we had continued to hope that the environment would get better, that it would somehow suddenly improve. I realise now that we were living in fantasy land. I was waiting for someone else to fix the situation that I was in. Everything had come so easy for us,

surely these people would just move and things would be fixed.

Finding the right place to live was important to us. Yes, we lived in a bubble, but that bubble was not something that I wanted to burst. Having my children grow up in a clean, comfortable and safe environment was really important. I wanted my kids and my wife to be protected from the filth that's in the world. I know we can't stay away from everything that's bad, but I wasn't willing to have them exposed to constant foul language and behaviour on a day-to-day basis, directly across the road. I couldn't control the way the people over the road lived, but I could control whether we remained in a place where we had to experience it. We wanted to future-proof ourselves from anything like what we were moving from. How could we know for sure a new place wouldn't be like the one we were leaving? There was one tell-tale sign I knew to keep an eye out for. Burnouts! In my mind, burnouts mean bogans. Not the type of people I wanted to live next to all over again.

We searched everywhere. The problem was, most of the areas in our price range were blessed with plenty of burnout marks. That was, until we found a quiet area, tucked away at the back of the beautiful south-eastern Melbourne suburb of Berwick. When we came upon the tree-lined cul-de-sac, we knew this was the place for our growing family. However, even though there were no burnout marks, there was also no house!

Making the decision to really make a change was daunting. At this point in time, my extended family basically lived in the same suburb. We were so close, it felt like if we left, we would break an unofficial family rule. We also knew we were going to be stretching ourselves financially. To top it off, we'd never built a house before. It was like a big adventure; it

was kind of exciting, but scary, too. What if it didn't go right? What if I lost my job? What if we didn't make new friends in the area? *What if?*

Up until this point, we had always played in this space: *What if something bad happens?! Let's do nothing so we don't get hurt. Let's not take a risk, because we might fail.* And it was a limiting way to live our lives. Even though it was scary, this was one of the most exciting moments we'd experienced together. The real fun was just about to begin. Time to GO, and not look back!

CHAPTER TWO

THE HOUSE



The new house mid-way through construction.

Ok, so here we go! We'd just bought the most challenging block of land on one of the best streets we could afford. The street was beautiful, with big, majestic houses sweeping up the side of a steep hill, making the whole effect look even more dramatic.

Looking back at the photos of our lot, I sometimes wonder what we were thinking. The block had 11 metres of fall from the back to the front, with a retaining wall at the front that was far taller than me. But this wasn't all; the block was almost 100% granite rock with a sprinkling of dirt over the top.

Were we crazy, courageous or just naïve? Or maybe a little bit of everything? Up until this point, everything we'd decided to do worked out for us. We always thought it wasn't IF things would work out for us, it was WHEN.

Now that we had our cliff, it was time to find a builder. Builder after builder came, looked at our block, and laughed. They thought we were crazy and weren't even interested in giving us a quote. There were many moments when we wondered the same thing. Were we crazy? What were we doing? I did wonder who had built all the other houses on this street. It wasn't like we were the first house on this hill. The builders weren't the only ones who told us we were crazy. A number of friends said the same thing. We never actually asked the neighbours who'd built their homes (seems like an oversight now), we just figured that someone must have done it, so we kept asking new builders, thinking someone would say yes eventually. Deep down, we knew it was going to be challenging, but our blind enthusiasm and determination prevented us from really identifying the situation we'd gotten ourselves into.

There were a couple of builders who finally humoured us with quotes, though they weren't promising. Their quotes were ridiculously expensive; a sign they clearly weren't eager to do the job. After plenty of searching, it was clear there was no way we could afford a builder. It was time for drastic measures, and possibly the only option left.

A friend of mine built his house as an owner-builder years prior, and I remembered that he'd saved a bunch of money in the process. Without wasting any time, we had the plans drawn up and calculated savings over \$200,000 by doing the project as owner-builders. Sure, the extent of my DIY experience was helping my dad change a window I'd smashed with a cricket ball when I was younger, but if other people could do it, why couldn't I? We were only building our own home on the side of a cliff in the middle of winter. What could possibly go wrong?

We started. It would be fair to say that Dee managed the project and I was the labourer. I could help by picking things up and putting them down. We made sure we worked to our strengths, complimenting each other in the process.

The day the excavation began, our excitement at starting on our dream home quickly dissipated when we heard the excavator smash into the granite. The driver hit it again, and again, and again. Over the next couple of weeks, this was our unwelcome lullaby. We could move the position of the retaining wall to accommodate the granite, but unfortunately we couldn't move the position of the house. We got a bigger excavator to break the rock with a massive jackhammer, sure it was going to fix the problem. But when the excavator driver came to us and said, "the jack hammer bit is melting on the granite. You need to get explosives in here, or you'll have to buy a new jack hammer for this excavator," we knew we were in trouble. The excavator wasn't enough. It was time to get some dynamite.

We hired an explosives guy named Barry. Barry was in his 70's, tough as old boots, and skin like leather from years of working in the sun. Barry worked like a beast, drilling holes by hand, packing them with dynamite and cracking the giant

pieces of granite, piece by piece. After each rock was packed with dynamite, we would go and hide behind a mound of dirt, and Barry let the kids wind the charge and press the detonator button. The earth shook beneath us, and the rock split in two. The kids weren't the only ones enthralled.

Barry had the best old-school work mentality, and grew frustrated by the work ethic of the excavator driver who, as Barry said, "Sat in his air-conditioned comfort, and knocked off at three!" Barry worked from sun up to sun down. No matter how hard the job was, whether it was cold, hot, raining or sunny, he just worked. Dee and I were amazed when we learned Barry had cancer and was due to go into surgery the Monday after completing our job. No whining, no complaining. He just worked until the job was done. Barry's work ethic has stuck with me ever since, and has served me well in a variety of circumstances that required hard, consistent work. Success doesn't come unless we're willing to work like hell.

TIME TO BUILD

Digging, explosives and excavating finally done, it was time to build the house. Strip footings were the first port of call. Remember our challenge finding a builder in the first place? Well, that didn't change when we needed to find a concreter to do the formwork and build the strip footings. Tradies came, they saw and they laughed. At this stage the only person who'd actually agreed to work on our home was Chris, the bricklayer. Chris and his team had built our brick retaining wall. He could see we were having trouble finding a tradie to do the work, so he asked if we wanted him and his team to do the formwork and pour the concrete. He was quick to tell us he'd never actually done it before, but felt like he'd seen

enough examples. He showed us his plan and we decided to let him give it a go. Everyone needs someone willing to give them their first chance. We backed him.

Chris and his team went to work, taking meticulous care with each piece of timber as they formed it over the top of the granite that made up our block of land. On completion of the formwork, we were required to have an inspection before the concrete was poured to ensure the work met code standards. The inspector took a lot of time scrutinizing each footing. We all stood and watched, nervously awaiting the verdict, realising that if they'd done a bad job, not only would we have to get it fixed, but we would've lost a great deal of time and money. At the conclusion of a detailed inspection, the inspector turned to us and asked, "Who did your formwork?" Chris sheepishly stepped forward. "This is master work!" the inspector said. We all exhaled. Chris had done it, likely working harder than any experienced man because he really wanted to get it right, and we were given the green light to carry on building our house.

Over the coming months, experiences like this seemed to repeat: being in over our heads and somehow finding a way, and the right people, to complete each task. Nothing happened in the traditional way, mainly because of the challenge our land presented. For example, when the 15,500 bricks arrived, they were dropped at the bottom of the 26 metre, super-steep driveway. How would we get them up? Once again, we were met with a generous team of helpers and we carried them – all 15,500 – by hand. We created human chains, used brick carriers, loaded the back of a car, you name it, we tried it. We learned not only to be resourceful, but to be creative, too. There was no instruction manual. It was all about trial and error, about testing all the ways in which we

could imagine accomplishing a task. It wasn't easy, or simple, but it taught us the power of flexibility and innovation.

The entire building project took nine months. To say it was a tough experience would be an understatement. The rewards have since far outweighed the efforts, but it would be a while before we'd find ease again. In fact, things were about to become significantly more challenging for our family.

TOO MUCH PRESSURE

Sensis was losing an enormous amount of money as more and more people started shopping online. Sensis was being left behind and had to go through a fundamental shift to stay afloat. My role was expanded to manage a large group of contract workers, in addition to the team I was already managing. I found myself in back-to-back meetings from 9:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m., after which I went home only to do more work, followed by tiling, painting and generally continuing to work on the house. I felt like my plate was becoming full; so full that I knew something had to change.

As Sensis was a large company, we were blessed with many employee benefits, one of which was access to counselling. At one point, I felt so overwhelmed with what was going on, I decided to speak to a counsellor. I shared the pressure I was feeling; that I didn't feel like I was achieving anything; that I was running around in circles at a million miles an hour. I was spending less and less time with my kids due to the building project and work, which made me feel like I wasn't doing a good job at home. I was stretched so thin at work, I felt like I was barely treading water. The counsellor told me that too much pressure can cause feelings like this, and that it

was completely normal. Talking to someone really helped me keep things in perspective.

I think almost all of us have moments in our lives when we feel like we are being stretched in too many directions all at once. Before this point in my life I thought that I was weak or pathetic to acknowledge it. However, a simple chat with someone helped me to see that pressure does strange things to our minds and bodies. Just like our body gets tired from exercise, our mind gets tired from pressure. Having someone put things back into perspective for me and helping me see that things were not as bad as I was seeing them, was extremely helpful.

REMEMBERING I HAD A DREAM

A number of years prior, I'd completed schooling to become a personal trainer, and it was my dream to leave the corporate world and become a professional personal trainer. I'd always been interested in fitness, and actually wanted to become a personal trainer when I'd completed my course, but I didn't have the courage to jump out of my well-paying job. Over the next few years, I all but forgot about becoming a Personal Trainer, as I focused my energy on climbing the corporate ladder. If I'm honest with myself, it's funny how each time I got a promotion, I was only happy with it for a few months before I started looking for the next one. I lived this cycle over and over again as I progressed through the ranks. I couple of times I wondered, *why am I doing this?*

I remember sitting in a meeting one day at Sensis. It was a long day of continuous meetings. We were discussing the new computer system that was to be implemented across the business, and I became distracted, staring out the window. I

really didn't care in any way shape or form about what this lady was talking about. At that moment I realised I was done with Sensis. My drive had dwindled. The time had come to chase a new adventure.

Fortunately, I was in a position at Sensis to walk away with a redundancy package. This redundancy package gave me the capital I needed to start my personal training business. With our house not quite finished, it also gave me extra time to wrap up all the finishing details. It seemed like a dream: leaving the corporate world for a better life, more time with my family, finalizing our dream-home and being my own boss. Here we were again: the Grants were landing on their feet and everything was working out. Well, that's what I thought, anyway.

RIISING UP FITNESS WAS BORN

Rising Up Fitness was the name of my personal training business. It was inspired by the first words in "Eye of the Tiger," the Rocky movies' theme song, and it was exactly the inspiration I needed to go out and hunt for new clients. My experience with personal trainers over the years was that they were generally (not all) pretty keen on themselves. I had seen too many looking at themselves in the mirror more than they were looking at the person paying them to be trained. The fitness industry had more ego in it than any other industry I'd worked in, which was part of the reason I decided to join. I wanted to make a difference in the way people experienced personal trainers by providing a non-judgemental, ego-free environment in which people felt comfortable.

After a few months working as a mobile personal trainer, I realised there were a few things standing in my way of

revolutionising the fitness industry. One of those things was clients. I simply was unable to get enough clients to make a steady income. I'm sure there were a number of different reasons for this. One thing in particular was that I didn't have a consistent place to train clients. We would train at people's homes, in the park, in halls, football grounds, anywhere. If the weather was bad, in most cases we'd cancel, thus reducing my income significantly. I realised very early on that this wasn't going to be easy. Almost immediately, I gained a new found respect for small business owners. I realised that success in business isn't because of luck, but hard work.

Fast Forward to May 2012. We were a year into our journey as business owners, and we'd come to a crossroads. The options were: continue working as a personal trainer (which was barely making enough for us to eat), go back and get a "real job," or buy a gym.

Our financial strain was multi-faceted. Not only had I started a new personal training business, but we'd just completed our big majestic home, a home that happened to come with a massive mortgage. Oh, and our four kids. They were still around, too. The money I was making wasn't enough, nor was my current position allowing me to have as large an impact as I wanted. Another major decision had to be made. The prospect of making such a large change was scary, and the stakes were raised because the decision needed to be made fast. We couldn't continue living on my income much longer.

The prospect of going back and working for someone else wasn't something that interested me at all. I felt that I had made a statement by going out on my own. I had told everyone I could do it. Friends had warned me about the challenges small businesses face, and I saw this as one of those challenges. What was I going to do? Admitting that I'd

failed was too bitter a pill to swallow. I didn't want people telling me, "I told you so." But it wasn't just my desire to prove people wrong that drove me to my next decision. For the past 12 months, I'd experienced the freedom of working my own hours, picking up and dropping off my kids at school, attending important events during the day, amongst other things. Reporting to someone again would have been so disappointing. With all of this in mind, we decided to take the most risky option. We decided to buy a gym.

CHAPTER THREE

THE GYM



Our new gym after the re-branding.

We purchased Beach House Fitness Centre on the 30th of April 2012. The first few months were fairly uneventful. Only ever working as a personal trainer for myself, the inside workings of a gym were quite foreign to me. Dee and I sat on the sidelines, relying on the current staff to teach us what we needed to know.

The first few months were a mix of emotions. We were extremely excited and nervous at the same time. We knew that we needed to put our own stamp on things, but we didn't want to change too much before we had time to survey the current situation. We felt that if we made too many changes too fast, we would upset both the members and the staff. We didn't want to start off on the wrong foot as we began our journey. We wanted the team to feel like they were included in the major decisions. So we stuck to our plan: watch and learn.

It was pretty evident after a few months that Beach House Fitness was a bit tired, both in the way the business was run and in the equipment. It would be fair to say the previous owners didn't give the gym a lot of love. They hadn't made any improvements to the building or the equipment for a number of years, leaving the members frustrated and looking for other gyms in the area that would provide what they wanted. The place just needed a bit of a spruce up, things like painting and cleaning and new equipment. We actually felt that it needed all of those things, and something else as well. It needed a new name.

Six months in, we decided to change the name of the business and go through a complete re-branding process. Beach House Fitness became Rising Up Fitness. The brand I had created was now on the side of a building, in the newspaper, on the Internet and around town. I saw this as the first step in my fitness global empire and we were off to a good start; we re-painted and updated tired equipment. The previous members seemed happy, and our new membership was growing. Once again, life was working out for Dee, our beautiful kids and me. Make no mistake, it was hard work, but it was so rewarding because we were building something that was ours, something over which we had total control. We

alone were responsible for our success or failure. It was completely exhilarating!

We felt like we were getting into a rhythm. Dee worked set shifts, and I was doing most of the behind-the-scenes work. Dee changed our processes at the front desk, ensuring our customer services operated more smoothly. I built our marketing plan and had begun implementing my ideas. We made changes to our group fitness classes to make them more personal and inviting, and we even added new classes that weren't offered in other local gyms. We felt like we were really starting to make our mark as owners. It was really exciting to see the business grow because of things we'd done.

Unfortunately, this feeling of excitement was short lived. We started to hear rumours from our members that a new, larger gym was coming to the same shopping centre complex we were in. I decided to contact my retail manager from Westfield. He confirmed the news I was dreading. Fenix Health Clubs (soon to be taken over by Goodlife Health Clubs) was moving in over the road in the same complex.

Goodlife Health Clubs are the biggest health clubs in Australia. They were moving into a space over twice the size of our gym and launching with a five million dollar fit out. The very moment they started their membership pre-sales prior to opening, we knew we were in big trouble. I never actually went over to look inside the new gym. I think it was a combination of reasons. For one, I didn't want to see this amazing gym, only to come back to mine and become disappointed. And two, I didn't want any of my members who'd moved to Goodlife to see me over there. Maybe they'd think I was conceding that the new place was better.

Goodlife didn't waste any time setting up shop to pre-sell memberships, and their location was strategic: almost directly across from our business. People would literally leave a class at our gym and walk over the road to sign up with Goodlife. It was David vs. Goliath. Dee and I were still learning our trade, running a fairly home-grown operation. These guys were the real deal. Not that I would ever show anyone, but deep down I wondered if we even stood a chance.

It was at this very moment that I started asking myself a lot of questions, questions that I would ask over and over again for the next four years. Did I make a mistake buying the gym? Were we going to survive? How could I get out of this situation? I was angry at Westfield for letting another gym come into the same centre. Not only that, I was deeply embarrassed. I was embarrassed because so many people told me that buying a gym was a bad idea, and there was no way that we would survive. This kind of talk only intensified when it was announced that Goodlife was coming into the centre. Those same people said things like, "I give him six months" and "It will never work". I forged ahead and told them I was going to be fine, that everything would work out. But really, right at this moment, I knew that at some point in the future I would need to speak to those same people and hear them say, "I told you so". Thinking about that ate me up inside.

Goodlife's grand opening came with so much fanfare you would have thought Elvis had come back from the dead. We started losing members left, right and centre. Before Goodlife, our membership was sitting around 1,100. Over the next few months, we lost over 400 members specifically to Goodlife. Each morning we would come in to another 10 membership cancellations from the night before. No matter what we did to try and keep these members, they just kept leaving. Loyalty, it seemed, didn't exist in business, especially not when

competing with the perceived value of what money can buy: newness, shininess and a feeling of luxury and status. Without innovation, creativity, and quality service, people will find themselves staring out the window of their office, just like me, contemplating something bigger, better and more satisfying.

It was time to step up our game. In order to survive, we had to offer something Goodlife didn't have, which was challenging, considering they seemed to have everything. We brainstormed, but none of our ideas cut it, or they were too expensive for us to implement. That is, until we had a discussion with Westfield. I was talking to the leasing department about what we could do to improve our situation. During the discussion, a crazy idea came up. We could become a 24-hour gym. It seemed like a cool idea, but my brain quickly followed up with all the small details involved in such an undertaking. We'd have to install cameras to protect our assets and the front desk, automatic lights throughout the whole facility, along with the additional cost of running electricity all night, and a hundred other small details that quickened my pulse. But it certainly had me thinking; so much so that over the next couple of weeks, I decided we should go for it!

We made a plan to become a 24-hour gym at an affordable price and kept it quiet from the members. We didn't want them getting excited, just in case something went wrong. But it didn't, and we made the announcement, really pinning all our hopes on this change to save our business. I remember the first day after we made the switch; we didn't want to leave the gym. Even though we had cameras installed, we were still nervous something would get stolen. Dee actually dreamed she woke up in the middle of the night and saw someone on our security cameras walking out the front door carrying a

treadmill. I promise you, those treadmills are damn heavy, and there's no way someone could walk it out the door. But that didn't stop us from literally watching the cameras for hours after we left, terrified something would be broken or stolen.

The improvement in our membership sales was remarkable. Finally, we had something Goodlife didn't have, and it was working well for us. We felt like we were back on an even playing field, and even though our numbers weren't back to what we needed, at least we were in the fight.

But it wasn't over. The gym industry is extremely cut-throat. Even with a spike in sales, it was time for us to get to work, head down, bum up. We decided our next step was to work like Barry. No amount of whining or complaining was actually going to change anything, but putting in time and effort was. No one at Goodlife cared as much about Goodlife as we cared about Rising Up Fitness. We had good reason to care as well, considering our house was mortgaged to the business, and if the business failed financially, we failed personally. When you're in a deep hole, you fight for your life to get out, which is exactly how we felt. We were in so deep we had no option but to fight as hard as we could.

For months, we fought. We would pick the kids up from school and go straight back to the gym, working almost until closing time, with the kids in the office. The poor kids lived in the gym. It was fun for them at the start, but it soon became a real frustration. All they wanted to do was go home, but they had to be at the gym with us. To be honest, the kids were amazing. Most of the time they were really patient with us. When I think about it now, we asked a lot of our children, especially our eldest child, Katie. Katie is an amazing daughter, very obedient and loving. At 10 years old, she was

taking care of her three younger brothers in the back room, trying to keep them quiet and out of trouble for hours on end, which was no easy feat. We could see that it was taking a toll on her, and Katie felt like she always had to tell the boys what to do, even when we were at home. She was becoming a little mum way too soon. Owning the gym and the pursuit to keep the business alive had taken over almost every aspect of our lives, and was taxing us emotionally, physically and mentally. Not only me and Dee, but the kids, too. This wasn't OK. The Westfield rent alone was around \$27,000 per month at that time. Just thinking about paying that every month was brutal. But as much as we cared, and fought and worked, it still looked like our ship was going down, and we were running out of ideas and resources fast.

When your plate is full, you would think adding more would be a bad idea, right? I already felt like one of those guys at the circus spinning plates on top of sticks, running back and forth, trying to keep them from falling and breaking. But even with his challenge, he continues adding more plates to his act.

It was time to add another plate to ours. So many emotions went around my head when we found out Dee was pregnant. It was overwhelming. I was grateful we had the sacred opportunity to have another sweet baby born into our family, and at the same time, I was completely petrified knowing Dee wouldn't be able to work at the gym once the baby was born. That meant more staff, more wages and more superannuation. Dee was also the best sales person we had, which meant less sales and less profit.



Olivia Eden Grant, just under 2 weeks old. Looking as perfect as can be.

On the 12th of November 2013, a healthy, 8-pound 10 oz baby joined the Grant family: Olivia Eden Grant. We were equally excited and frightened. As with many things, Olivia's timing was perfect, though we didn't know it yet. She would be one of the biggest gifts during the greatest tragedy our family would ever face, which was fast approaching.

The challenge of not having Dee at the gym was exactly as I expected. Everything cost more to run, and we lost a level of organisation that Dee provided. We did, however, have an amazing team that rose to the challenge. Over the next nine months or so, Dee came in periodically, but it was clear we needed a manager to fill her place. Rachel filled the position and did an amazing job.

Things were okay, but that was it. Just okay. We weren't getting ahead, just battling day to day. The hours I worked continued to increase, and my time at home grew more and more limited. We really had no plan, no way ahead, not much to look forward to from a business perspective. We'd signed a five-year lease with Westfield, and there was no way out. We simply had to last until the end of the five-year period. The trouble was, it was an expensive lease. Westfield has a standard 5% year-on-year compounding interest increase for

the rent. This meant our costs continued to go up while our total revenue decreased, certainly not the way you want to be running a business. Like I mentioned, our rent at this point was about \$27,000 per month. When you're turning over about \$650,000 per year, that's a very large percentage.

I have spent a lot of time since wondering why I chose to buy the gym in the first place, especially given the rent was high from the start. Living in regret is never a good idea, but we've all had those moments. We look at the decisions we've made and question whether or not they were the right calls. Thinking about it now, all the figures matched up, the profits for the business looked good and I did my due diligence researching the space. With all of these things taken into account, I feel like I made the best decision I could have made at the time. There's nothing wrong with taking a risk. Sometimes we spend so much time researching that we never have the courage to actually make a decision.

As challenging as the situation was, we feel like we had created an environment for our members that didn't have judgement or ego. We realised pretty early on that we were probably not going to be the global empire we wanted to be, and that was ok. It was ok because the small community we had created was so welcoming and encouraging that we still felt like we were making a real difference in people's lives.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE WIFE

The date was Friday September 26th 2014. It started like any other day. I rose at 5:00 a.m. and went to the gym to lead my morning class that started at 6:00 a.m. After teaching, I decided to come straight home, which was unusual. Usually, I would stay at the gym and workout, but today I felt like I should go home. The funny thing was, I went straight back to bed and lay next to my wife. It was school holidays, so there was no rush to get the kids up and ready for school, and we were enjoying the easier morning. Dee got up while I was still being lazy and went to the bathroom to shower. A short time after, I heard her call out, “Baron, I don’t feel very good.” I rushed out of bed and into the bathroom.

I remember this moment so vividly. As soon as I got to the shower, Dee looked up at me, extremely pale, fear in her eyes like I’d never seen before. Time slowed down. She grabbed hold of me, then collapsed like a stone. I tried to hold onto her as I eased her down to the shower floor. My heart pounded as

I tried to rouse her. I had no idea what was happening, but I knew something was very wrong.

No amount of tapping her face, rubbing her hands or talking into her ears helped. She just lay there, unconscious on the shower floor for what seemed like an eternity. Finally, her eyes burst open and she stared at me in total fear. Her right arm was shaking. She tried to move and I insisted she stay on the floor. I called the ambulance while sitting with her, watching her every movement to ensure she was ok. The shaking, I thought, was a side effect of passing out. I didn't consider it indicated something far more sinister.

After I called the ambulance and ensured that Dee was comfortable enough with a gown laid over her, I got our eldest boy, Baron (who was 10 years old at the time), to come in and sit with his mum while I went next door and asked our neighbours to watch our kids while I went to the hospital with Dee. Little Baron was so brave. With tears rolling down his cheeks he sat on the tiles next to his mum, rubbed her leg and repeatedly told her that everything was going to be ok, that she was going to be alright. It didn't matter that he was sad or scared. He was being strong for his mum. I was so proud of him.

When the ambulance arrived, Dee was extremely embarrassed to be found lying naked on the shower floor. The paramedics were amazing, treating her right where she lay. Not long after that, Dee was loaded into the ambulance and taken to the hospital. When we arrived, she had a number of tests performed on her to try and assess what was happening in her body.

However, all the results came back normal. Part of me felt relieved, but another part of me was frustrated. Not that I wanted something to be wrong; far from it. I just wanted to

know why Dee had collapsed; I wanted to make sure that whatever it was could be fixed. Not knowing what it was presented its own challenge.

After coming home from the hospital, Dee and I tried to figure out why she'd collapsed, given the doctors gave us no answers. We decided it was due to the painkillers Dee had taken the previous night, as they contained codeine. It seemed like a good enough reason, until she collapsed again the next day. It didn't seem right, but we wanted to trust the doctors who told us at the hospital that nothing was wrong. We are taught from a very young age to trust what our doctor says without ever questioning their reason or logic.

The next few weeks were challenging to say the least. The shake I'd noticed in Dee's arm came back more and more each day. Not only that, but Dee started having seizures, mostly at night. She would throw off the covers her whole body would spasm, including her mouth and face. She would shake and her speech would slur for what seemed like hours, but was only a minute or so. Things weren't right, and we went back to the doctor. She believed the shaking in Dee's right arm was what they called an "essential tremor." The doctor went on to say they can come and go for no reason, and they could last for years, even a lifetime.

Even though we weren't happy with her answer, we decided to trust her and assume it was nothing. With our heads held high, we decided to carry on with life as normal. Deep down, I knew something was very wrong with Dee. I was fighting the urge to scream at this doctor when she told us there was nothing to worry about. Yes, Dee had a tremor in her arm, but what about the seizures? She gave no explanation for that, and to be honest, it drove me insane. I felt like we were being

brushed aside because it was all a bit too hard to definitively figure out.

Shortly thereafter, I knew that blindly following the counsel of doctors was the wrong course of action. I needed to trust my gut instinct. This isn't to say I no longer trust doctors; that's simply not true. I have a great respect for doctors and continue to trust them on a regular basis. But in Dee's case, it was different. She was visibly sick, and for whatever reason it seemed like no one was willing to help us.

Things only got worse. One day I was teaching a class at the gym and Dee was participating. She always supported me by attending most of my classes, and loved not only the exercise, but the social interaction the classes provided for her. In this particular class, we were running on the treadmill, and Dee suddenly felt poorly. She stepped off the treadmill and walked to the front desk. I heard one of my staff call out to me that Dee was in trouble. I ran over to find Dee slumped in a chair, having her biggest seizure yet. Her body was in a complete spasm, her arms drooped by her side her head turned to the side. I actually thought she was having a stroke. She tried to communicate with me but she couldn't speak. It was like her tongue didn't work, or she simply had no control over it. She just looked at me with that same fear in her eyes from when she collapsed in the shower. Watching her, I felt like my heart would break.

We immediately called the ambulance. After Dee's seizure was over, we discussed what had been happening with the paramedics. Given all of her normal test results, Dee was starting to believe this was all in her head. She would say things like, "Am I crazy?" and, "I feel like I'm losing my mind." For the last few weeks, Dee had convinced herself that this was purely stress-related, and that she was somehow

creating these physical responses in her body by not effectively being able to control her mind.

We asked the paramedics if her seizures and shaking could be stress-related. They told us the body doesn't respond that way to stress. "Dee," they said, "there's something very wrong, and we don't know what it is, but you have to find out, because this isn't right". They were really supportive, and told us to ignore what the doctors were saying. We had to keep pushing to find out what was wrong, and if no one would help, we'd have to do it on our own.

Up until this point, we hadn't really told anybody that Dee was unwell. We knew something was wrong, but until the doctors could confirm and diagnose her condition, we second-guessed ourselves and didn't want to alarm everyone. That day at the gym changed everything. Now, Dee's health became a topic of conversation with members of the gym and the staff. Even though these were caring people, our instinct was to keep the situation private. Dee's body was changing in unpredictable, frightening, and for her, embarrassing ways. We weren't ready to let people into this vulnerable experience, but that was no longer a choice.

The paramedics gave me a gift. I decided we wouldn't stand for ambiguity any longer. I needed to find out what was wrong with Dee. I started researching her symptoms. I found a lot of different diseases, but nothing seemed to fit with her experience. One day, after a particularly bad few days, I took her directly to a private hospital and asked them to check her for everything. They did scans, x-rays and a myriad of other tests. Our hopes were dashed again when they gave us the same response: nothing appeared wrong.

As the weeks passed, Dee's health declined in significant, scary ways. Her speech became so heavily impaired she

struggled to hold a conversation. She sounded like she was intoxicated; which was strange because neither Dee nor myself ever had a drop of alcohol in our lives, though we've been around plenty of drunk people. Dee knew the words she wanted to say in her mind, but it was like her tongue couldn't form them.

This was the most embarrassing part of it for her. Before she got sick, Dee was confident, articulate and always positive, no matter the situation. She was the life of the party. The drastic changes in her speech were so embarrassing she hid away from everyone. Not that she was able to be out and about much anyway – she was drained of energy – but she deliberately avoided situations where she would have to speak with people.

One story Dee told me really highlights her experience. She was at our local shop one day with our son, Baron, when she ran into one of the boys' teachers from school. Dee and I have always been heavily involved at our kid's school, and we know most of the teachers really well. With Dee's outgoing personality, it was quickly noticed that she'd been missing in action, as I was doing all the school runs, meeting with teachers, etc. When Dee saw Matt, she was nervous because she knew she wouldn't be able to avoid speaking with him. People were really concerned to know how she was – he was clearly going to come over and say something.

Dee felt like she was in a nightmare. She could barely form any words, and as she tried to talk to Matt, some words worked and others didn't. She kept trying until she started to cry. Matt touched her arm, looked her in the eyes and said, "Davina, it's ok, I know you." That was exactly what she needed to hear. Dee was so concerned that people only saw her the way she was now. Did they remember her the way she

was before? Of course they did, and she was starting to learn that she didn't need to hide away from her friends. They loved her no matter what. We would both learn very soon just how much our friends and family loved us, and how generous they could be.

After getting no answers from GP's and emergency departments, we decided to go and see a neurologist. After performing a physical examination, he said, "Davina, you have a number of symptoms related to motor neuron disease, Parkinson's disease and multiple sclerosis. But I'm really sorry though - you don't fit into any one box I can address. I can't help you."

I was infuriated and devastated. If he could see she was sick, why wasn't he willing to do the work required to understand what was going on and help her? For Dee, being turned away by a specialist that we felt confident could illuminate this frightening situation for us was even more crushing.

The negative test results didn't mean Dee got better. In fact, it was the opposite. Over the next couple of weeks Dee's speech, shake, memory, energy and strength continued to decline until she was barely able to function. I was petrified and felt alone. I didn't know what it would take for someone to help us. Even worse, no one seemed willing, though it wasn't from lack of trying on our end. It wasn't like her symptoms were invisible; everyone could see something was wrong, and it was driving me crazy.

It was about six weeks since Dee collapsed. One Monday morning, I walked into work, haggard from trying to find a cure for my wife, keep my business afloat and be with my children. Two of my staff members came up to me independently and shared a TV programme they'd seen the previous night. "Hey Baron, did you see that show about

Lyme disease last night? I think that's what Dee has." I hadn't, but my interest was piqued. I couldn't wait until I got home to watch it, so I sat in my office at the gym and I watched the programme. The woman on the programme relayed symptom after symptom, all of which matched Dee's experience. The seizures, the shaking, the slurring, it was uncanny how closely her symptoms aligned with Dee's.

I was amazed to finally see someone who knew what we were going through and could shed light on the situation, answering the question that had been eating away at us for months. Part of me knew almost immediately we'd identified Dee's illness, not because I wanted her to have Lyme disease, but I wanted to work towards getting her better. The other part of me was in denial. This was a TV show, after all. Who was I to diagnose my wife from a TV show when I still wanted to believe a doctor would figure it out? It seemed ridiculous.

That night Dee and I watched the same programme together. Her response was similar to mine. Suddenly, there was hope, but at the same time she didn't want to let herself believe we'd actually found what was wrong. She didn't want to be disappointed again, and it seemed like a better plan to not get her hopes up in the first place.

I decided to contact the Lyme Disease Association of Australia, explaining the challenges we were facing and asking how we could get help. They were great and provided a list of doctors they referred to as "Lyme literate." At this point, I knew absolutely nothing about Lyme disease, the controversy or the frustration from patients and doctors with opposing views.

Lyme disease is a tick-borne illness. Ticks carry a variety of bacteria that are harmful to humans. One of the worst bacteria

they carry is called *Borrelia burgdorferi*, which is the main bacterium in Lyme disease. *Borrelia burgdorferi* is extremely hard to detect. Normal blood tests results aren't consistent, often leaving people carrying the bacteria undiagnosed.

It's also the general view of most medical professionals that Lyme disease is a Northern Hemisphere disease, as no ticks in Australia have been found carrying the bacteria. With this in mind, when a patient presents with symptoms related to Lyme disease, most doctors don't see it as a viable diagnosis, because they believe Lyme disease doesn't exist in Australia. What's not taken into account is that someone could have been bitten and infected while overseas.

The usual treatment protocol for someone who's actually diagnosed with Lyme disease is a course of antibiotics. This, however doesn't always work, due to the different stages of the illness. When someone is diagnosed a long time after the initial tick bite, an antibiotic treatment can take months or even years to make a lasting, positive difference in that person's health. Controversy aside, none of that mattered to me. All I knew was my wife was very sick, and I would do anything humanly possible to find a way to make her well again.

We booked an appointment with a "Lyme literate" doctor. Due to a work commitment, Dee had to attend this appointment on her own. Things didn't start off well. Dee waited two and a half hours past her appointment time because the doctor was so busy. Dee was frustrated even before she got in the room. Here she was, paying a lot of money to see this doctor, and she assumed he was going to tell her the same thing everyone else had. Was it really worth it?

When Dee finally got to see him, he spent the first half hour asking questions about her current health and her medical history, far more detailed than any other doctor before. He took an enormous amount of notes. Following the questions, he conducted a physical examination with some muscle testing. After he completed the test, Dee told me he dove into an explanation using loads of large words that she didn't understand, leaving Dee confused and overwhelmed. She stopped him mid-sentence, trying to make sense of it all, and asked, "So, in your opinion, you feel that I have Lyme Disease?"

His response was emphatic. "Yes, absolutely! And with all of your symptoms, the way they are going, this is really advanced. We need to get you started on treatment immediately." He went on to explain what prescription drugs Dee needed to start taking. He spoke really fast, explaining that because she was presenting these symptoms, she needed X drug; and because she was presenting those symptoms, she needed X drug. The list went on and on as he explained that as she would kill a certain bacterium with one drug, she would then need a different drug to fix the consequences of the first drug.

Dee was bamboozled. The doctor spoke so fast, and used so many new terms, all while explaining everything that could go wrong. The combined total of all the drugs Dee would be required to take was going to cost \$1,500 every three weeks. To top it off, this wasn't a short-term plan. The doctor said Dee would need to take this medication for a minimum of six months, but more than likely, it would be up to two years, with no guarantee she would even get better. But it was our only shot.

At this point, Dee was almost in shock. It breaks my heart to know how hard it was for her to hear this diagnosis, and it kills me that I wasn't there with her. Even though she was advised to commence the new medication immediately, she didn't. She was frightened by the cost. Instead, she came home and explained what had happened. Dee tells me I was really calm as I listened, which was helpful to her. I certainly didn't feel calm. Inside I was freaking out. How were we going to afford \$1,500 every three weeks for the next two years? My business was battling, we were barely taking a wage, how was I going to afford it?

I often hear people say you can't put a price on your health. Right at that time, there was a very real price on Dee's health, and it was a high price. We were scared. We spent a lot of time that afternoon talking about our options. After all the discussion, I realised there really wasn't anything else we could do. This doctor was our only way forward. He was the only one who'd provided us with any hope of healing. Even with the cost of all of this medication, it wasn't an option to choose whether or not we were going to do it. We would find the money, no matter what.

Shortly after the doctor made his clinical diagnosis, we sent Dee's blood to a testing facility in the United States for \$1,200. Given the United States is in the Northern Hemisphere, they're familiar with testing blood samples for Lyme disease. Our doctor said the main reason for the test was to send the information to the health department in Australia, letting them know the reality of Lyme disease and the need to put more resources into identifying and treating the illness. By the time we received the results six weeks later, confirming the doctor's diagnosis, her treatment was already underway.

The treatment process wasn't as easy as I'd thought. The tablets were easy to take, but Dee also had to be attached to an IV a couple of times a week as a concoction of different antibiotics were pumped into her body. Additionally, I had to personally inject her with a penicillin shot twice a week. We returned to the doctor every few weeks, anxious because Dee was getting sicker. The doctor said this was normal, as the antibiotics were fighting the bacteria. He encouraged us to continue with the protocol.

I continued researching Lyme disease, and I was amazed by how poorly the government and medical practitioners were addressing the problem. I was angry that they were so fixated on determining whether or not Lyme disease was actually in Australia, rather than focusing on helping sick people get better. To me, it didn't matter if the disease was "officially here." My wife was sick and I wanted her to get better, and they were not helping.

As the weeks progressed, Dee grew sicker, and even though we had answers, I felt like we were running out of time. Through my ongoing research, I learned that some people don't respond well to the antibiotic treatment. Some people simply don't get better. It's a fine balance, determining the right amount of each drug for each person.

We ended up making contact with a couple of people who were also dealing with Lyme disease in Australia. One person in particular had been really proactive about getting better. He'd tried almost everything. We had him over to our home to ask what had worked and what hadn't. Paul had tried the same antibiotic treatment Dee was doing, with no success, spending tens of thousands of dollars in the process. He then spoke about a treatment he'd done in Germany. Because of it,



Dee and her little mate Olivia, sitting together in the chair that she received her intravenous antibiotics in.

he was finally on the road to recovery. Over the course of three years, Paul had spent over \$100K on treatment. He said Germany was the turning point, and he recommended we look into it.

Dee barely left the house, as she was simply too weak and unwell. A friend from church came over every day to sit with her and help care for the kids, particularly Olivia, who was still a baby. She was so weak that she could barely pick Olivia up, which was extremely distressing for her. Her precious little baby was being taken care of by someone else.

Dee's sisters Julina and Eleasa would come to our home once a week and help around the house. They took care of Olivia, too, and put her to bed downstairs for her afternoon sleep. On one particular day, after putting Olivia to bed, Julina came back upstairs to find Dee crying. When she asked what was wrong, Dee said, "I would rather use all my energy taking Liv to bed and not be able to do anything else for the rest of the day. I'm her mum and I need to care for her." Dee went on to tell Julina how grateful that she was for all the help, but at the

same time she felt like the most precious moments of being a mum to her new baby were being taken away from her. It was literally breaking Dee's heart.

Olivia was one of the greatest blessings we could have asked for. For Dee, just looking at Olivia filled her with hope. Her body had the ability to create such a beautiful little human, surely it could heal from this horrible disease.

One day, my sisters decided to take Dee to the shops for the day. Dee was so sick she couldn't walk much further than 10 to 15 meters without having a rest, so my sisters found a wheelchair. As a strong, fiercely independent woman, this broke my wife.

After completing some work at the gym, I met them the shops, excited to see Dee out and about. What was meant to be an uplifting moment took a drastic turn when I came upon her in the wheelchair. When I saw my beautiful wife, once so full of life, broken and slumped in a wheelchair, my heart broke. I tried not to show my emotion and made a joke to keep the mood light. As I pushed her around the shops, I held back the tears. I always tried to keep my emotions in check when I was with her; I didn't want her to see me upset, because I knew it would make her upset as well. I was filled with despair. My wife was dying, and there was nothing I could do to stop it.

My lunch break was over and I needed to head back to work. I put on a brave face while I gave her a kiss and a hug, then left. I didn't make it far. Once I got out of the shopping centre and into my car, I fell to pieces. I was overwhelmed. I felt like the world around me was closing in. My business was dying and I thought my wife was dying. It was as if my entire world was falling apart. What could I do? How could I fix what was going on?

I called my mate Dave and completely unloaded on him. Dave has always had the ability to turn things around for me in my head, and by the time I got off the phone, I was laughing at something stupid he'd said. Even though I'd been afraid to let people in and share all that was going on, I was so glad I did. Dave made no judgements; he never questioned me as to why I bought the gym, or anything like that. He just listened and offered support. Throughout this whole process, he was a stalwart for me. It was so important to know that support was there when I needed it.

The antibiotic treatment wasn't working. We had been back to see the doctor a number of times since Dee started her treatment. He kept telling us to be patient, but our patience was wearing thin. Dee was getting worse by the minute. I spoke to our doctor about the hyperthermia treatment in Germany. He said it was a waste of time, and we should stay the course. I, on the other hand, wasn't going to stand by and watch my wife die because he'd said this was the best option.

Frantically trying to figure out what to do, I called my brothers and asked them to come over one night. We were sitting in the lounge room when my brother asked me what the next step was. "I don't know," I said. "I found this treatment in Germany and they're getting good results." My brother's response was so simple: Then go to Germany! It sounded easy, but in my head it seemed so hard. We simply didn't have the money to go and get this intensive treatment, and we weren't even sure if it would work.

In my research, I'd discovered that in southern Germany, in a small town called Bad Aibling, they were treating people with Lyme disease using hyperthermia. Hyperthermia is a treatment that essentially cooks your body using heaters. In a very controlled environment, they increase the core tempera-

ture of your body to over 41.6° Celsius. In their preliminary research, they found that at 41.6° Celsius, the main Lyme disease bacteria, *Borrelia burgdorferi*, dies. The treatment would cost about \$35,000.

My brother Adam said we could fundraise to get the money. I told him I wasn't comfortable with that. In my mind I thought this was our problem, nobody else's, and it wasn't anybody else's responsibility to care for my wife but mine. In hindsight this was a stupid approach, but it was the way I was feeling at the time. My brother turned to me and said, "Baron, I don't give a stuff what you think. We love her and we're going to help."

It was at that moment that I decided I no longer cared what anyone else thought. Based on my research, this was the best option to help Dee, and we were going to do it. It wasn't just one doctor who said we should not go for this "radical treatment." Plenty of other people said the same thing. It didn't matter anymore. The risks were too high, the price, too much. What was the alternative? Sit back and watch Dee and our family live out our worst nightmare or do something about it? In the hope of making it better? What people said didn't matter anymore, my mind was made up, and I was going to Do It Anyway.

In the blink of an eye, a fundraising committee was formed. They even created a Facebook group called "Dee's Dash" and invited hundreds of people to come along for the journey. The time for hiding Dee's illness from the world was over. This was not a fight we could win on our own. We needed all the help that we could get. Dee's very private battle had just become very public, and even though it was challenging, we don't regret it for one second.

Over the next couple of months, I had some the most humbling experiences of my life. People came from everywhere to give us money for this treatment, including local family, friends and strangers. People even donated from interstate and overseas. Never once did I ask for any money, but it just kept coming. People we barely knew knocked on our door to give us hundreds of dollars. I didn't know what to say. I didn't even know how to accept it, so we often just cried together. I remember one of the mums from school who I didn't know very well at the time just turned up and handed us a card with \$300 in it. This type of thing became a common occurrence over the next six weeks. Each time, our reaction was the same: we felt completely overwhelmed. It was never about how much was given. It was more about the fact that someone was willing to give what they had to help us. It was unbelievable.

There are a few moments that really stood out to me. A few days after the fundraising committee was started, a good friend of ours and committee member, Danie, contacted a good friend that used to work for us who was now working at a Telstra store. Her name is Gabby. She asked Gabby if Telstra would be willing to provide some items to be auctioned off as part of the fundraiser. Gabby said, "Yeah, I can do that, but I think I can go one better."

An hour and a half later, I got a phone call from Gabby. She said, "Baron, my regional manager wants to meet with you. Can you meet with him in an hour?" Not sure what to expect, I agreed and went to meet this man. His name was Mo. We sat and discussed Dee's condition, and Mo shared with me his own challenges with his child's illness and subsequent recovery.

“Baron, we have really generous people in our business,” he said. “I’m going to put it out to them to donate to your fundraiser. Every dollar they raise we’ll match, dollar for dollar.”

To say I was totally blown away is an understatement. I couldn’t believe a man I’d just met was being so generous. Mo’s business was a small Telstra franchise, not some mega corporation. True to his word, he sent an email to his whole team. Over the next few days we began getting letters from Mo’s employees, donating \$200, \$500, \$50, \$1,000, and wishing us all the best as we worked to help Dee heal. I’d never met these people, and yet they gave so freely.

In one week, these employees donated \$9,000. I met with Mo again, and he let me know they would match the amount, just like he said, dollar for dollar. A couple of weeks later, Dee and I were invited to their regional meeting and were presented with a cheque for \$18,000. To stand in front of such a generous group of people was one of the most amazing experiences I’d ever had. We were completely overwhelmed and humbled. Even though Dee couldn’t speak, I have no doubt they felt our love. Words could not have expressed what we were feeling that night, anyway.

Fast forward a little; it was now almost Christmas. We were sitting at home one night watching TV as a family. There was a knock on the door. When I opened it, a group of ladies from our church all wearing Santa hats asked if they could come in and sing us Christmas carols. We were delighted. Cuddled up on the couch, we relished in their beautiful singing, like angels from heaven. After their last song, I walked outside with them, Dee still inside, as it was too taxing for her to move. They turned and handed me a bag with money in it before leaving, telling me they’d spent the last couple of

hours at the shopping centre singing carols and raising money for Dee. The bag contained \$1,100. They simply gave it to me, wished us a merry Christmas, and left. When I went back inside, I was crying even more than when they were singing to us. I explained to Dee what had just happened. She didn't say much; her tears were enough. We sat quietly for a while and just appreciated the amazing people we have in our lives. People are good!

In addition to all of this, we also had online donations coming in through a Go Fund Me page. The fundraising committee were the driving force behind everything. They spent most of their time planning a large event auctioning off donated items to the highest bidder. During the weeks leading up to the event, the committee spent hours and hours finding businesses to donate to our cause. They were able to secure a number of large items worth thousands of dollars to auction off.

The day of the fundraiser arrived. We were nervous. Family and friends came from many miles away to say hello and support us. Lots of people told Dee she didn't need to come, that she should have stayed at home and rested, but Dee was having none of it. I remember my sister Ruth, who happens to be a hairdresser, came over to do Dee's hair, just to help her feel prettier. I really appreciated that.

As Ruth was curling her hair, Dee's mum, Kaye, arrived from interstate. Kaye knew that Dee was really sick, but this was the first time she was seeing her face to face. Kaye said she was shocked to see her daughter in such a state, and when she witnessed Dee shaking and unable to speak, they both just cried together. Kaye silently wondered if Dee was going to die, and if this would be the last time she would see her daughter.

Hundreds of people attended the fundraiser that night, and against everyone's orders, Dee came, but didn't talk too much. She spent most of her time sitting and watching in awe of the kindness and generosity of human beings. Kaye made sure she sat next to Dee the whole night like a lioness protecting her cub. Dee was particularly sick that night, but still wanted to hug and kiss almost every person in the room. Typical Dee, the life of the party.

As the items auctioned off for ridiculous prices, Dee and I were once again overwhelmed. The event raised over \$20,000 that night. One man in particular, named Tim, donated over \$6,000. We'd never met him before. On the last item of the night, a set of golf clubs, Tim organised for another person to bid with him, assuring the other person he'd finally buy the item. Tim wanted this last item to be sold at top dollar. He was effectively bidding against himself, and we were astounded when the golf clubs sold for \$3,000. To be given that kind of money from a person we'd never met still brings tears to my eyes.

As the night drew to a close, Dee insisted that she speak to everyone and share her thanks. I've spoken in front of a lot of groups before, but this was the most challenging public speaking I'd ever done. We slowly moved to the front of the room. The room fell silent. Dee spoke first. Her right arm was shaking so badly, she swapped the microphone to her left arm and hid her right arm behind her. It took her a long time to start speaking; she was both overwhelmed and struggling to get her words out. She slurred heavily as she spoke. Dee took about two minutes to say the following:

"I can't talk very well, so unlike me. Did you get that? Thank you so much, I don't have the words, even if I could speak. That was another joke! But we feel so overwhelmed at the

love that we feel from all of you. One more thing, I feel honoured to be able to call you my friends. Thank you very much.”

Even through the hardest time in her life, Dee still kept her sense of humour. I love that. I had to speak after Dee and explain what we would use the funds for. I searched the group for anyone who wasn't crying in an attempt to keep it together. It was futile. Everyone was feeling deeply. It was powerful beyond description, and I felt touched to be among such amazing people.

The next day, Julina came over to spend time with Dee. Julina had done a lot for the fundraising, and hadn't really allowed herself to think about how sick Dee was. Everything changed that day. Julina relates her experience this way: “As I stood quietly looking at my beautiful sister laying on the bed in front of me I suddenly realised how sick she really was. My blood ran cold and I was overcome by emotion. There she was my beautiful sister, so very broken, tears streaming down her face, unable to speak, so thin, so ravaged from this horrible disease. I wanted to just hold her and tell her that everything was going to be ok, just cradle her in my arms, somehow stop her from slipping further. Not knowing what else to do at that moment, I lay next to her and simply removed the hair clips from her hair left in from the night before. I could not take the pain away, but I could just do something for her that she could not do for herself.”

Over the course of six weeks, the fundraising committee raised over \$50,000. Now that we had the money, we didn't waste any time booking the treatment in Germany, getting on the plane and taking off.

Although the main focus of our lives was Dee's health, we also had five children to take care of, and Dee's parents were

amazing. They offered to come to Melbourne from Adelaide to care for the kids over the couple of weeks we would be gone for. In true Davina style, Dee prepared 16 gifts for the kids to open - one for each day we were away. She wanted to make sure they had something to look forward to. This was a really sad time for them. When I asked the kids how they felt when we left, they said, “We thought mum was going to die,” and “We didn’t think you were coming back.” As a parent, I thought that because I kept telling them their mum was going to be ok, they wouldn’t think about her actually dying, or never getting better.

When the day finally arrived to go to Germany, it was a huge mix of emotions. The kids were very brave through their tears. Dee’s mum describes it the best when she said, “As we waved good bye and watched your car drive away, my heart broke into pieces, and I wondered, would I see my girl again?”

The trip to Germany was a long one. We considered buying business class seats for Dee, but struggled with the idea of travelling in that type of comfort when other people had paid for our trip. We felt it was best to stick with economy. Dee was not in great shape when we arrived, but I must say, being sick while travelling does have some benefits, like jumping to the front of each queue. The plane staff were amazing.

Upon arriving in Munich, we ordered a taxi and travelled to Bad Aibling, about an hour and thirty minutes from the Munich airport. We drove directly to the clinic, and when we arrived, we were greeted by a wonderful man named John. He was a friend of our friends, and an indispensable ally to have when navigating a new country. We came in later than John expected, leaving him waiting at the clinic for seven hours. We didn’t know he’d be there, and we felt horrible once we’d

heard how long he'd been waiting. He didn't mind; he was just happy to help. It was great having him there that day, as he was able to translate for us so we could get checked in and start the treatment.

Our trip to Germany lasted just over two weeks. There were approximately 20 people in the centre receiving a similar type of treatment. This clinic actually specialises in treating cancer with hyperthermia, and many years earlier had accidentally discovered that the same treatment killed the *Borrelia* bacteria. Interestingly, most of the patients were from Australia. This was both comforting and concerning. Why did people have to travel all the way across the world to get treated for a disease? It wasn't like Australia was a Third World country. I couldn't understand why we didn't have appropriate treatment methods, and how the government wasn't facing this problem.

This concerned me so greatly, that I sent a letter from the clinic to the Prime Minister expressing my frustration and anger, and my desire to see change. Interestingly, I actually received a response a few weeks later from the office of the Prime Minister, informing me that Prime Minister Tony Abbott was unable to meet with me personally, but he wanted us to meet with one of his medical advisors. I was very impressed by this response, and eagerly awaited our meeting. A few weeks after returning home, we met with his advisor, who was a very kind man, and generously listened to all our concerns. I was grateful that I could help him understand some of the challenges people with this disease faced, and I was equally grateful for the effort he was putting in to help make challenges like ours easier.

Back in Germany, treatment was intense, including extensive preparation before Dee received the main hyperthermia

treatment. I really appreciated Germany's holistic approach. Instead of pumping Dee full of antibiotics, they pumped her full of vitamins, including large amounts of Vitamin C. The clinic ran like a finely tuned machine. Everyone was on time, everything happened according to the plan and there was no waiting.

Some of the things Dee endured during her treatment were pretty embarrassing, to say the least. From cleansing of her colon, to enemas, catheters, even a massive thermometer inserted in places you don't want to think about. The thermometer was to monitor her core temperature, making sure it rose above 41.6° Celsius. She literally felt like she was being cooked like a turkey.

Dee was "lucky" enough to get two treatments of full-body hyperthermia, conducted a week apart, lasting seven hours each. Each time, they raised her core temperature slowly until it hit 41.8° Celsius. She was held at that temperature for two hours before they lowered it back down to normal. When Dee came out of the treatment, she was white as a ghost, unable to speak and swollen from head to toe. If it wasn't so serious, it would've been funny. She wasn't with it at all. She was so groggy she didn't even know where she was. Dee rested immediately afterwards, allowing her body to recover from the traumatic experience. It took about two to three days before she started to feel a little normal again, whatever normal was.

What was amazing and exciting for us was, in the three days that followed the first hyperthermia treatment, Dee didn't shake or slur even once. We genuinely thought she was healed, though we were hesitant to share it with everyone. The miracle was short-lived, as the shaking returned a few days later, but that didn't dampen our spirits. We knew

something had changed inside her body. Finally, there was hope.

Over the next week or so, Dee continued her treatment. But she wasn't the only one. I had to be treated as well. Based on the structure of the Lyme disease bacteria, studies show the disease can be sexually transmitted, so it was important for me to be treated as well, as I may have been a carrier. I underwent the same hyperthermia treatment, including the colon cleansing, enemas, catheters, and the wonder of that big, long thermometer. It would be fair to say Dee was far more patient when enduring these uncomfortable processes, having things put where they don't belong. I, on the other hand, moaned like a baby.

Once my own horrendous experience was out of the way, and I was given the all clear, it was time for the focus to be back on Dee. The final week of her treatment was particularly challenging. Her body had already endured so much from the first hyperthermia treatment, and she had to do it all over again. But Dee is tough as nails, and she went through the whole process again without complaining.

A few days after her second round of treatment, the doctor came to our room to talk through what the next six months would look like for Dee. We were excited to hear the *Borrelia* bacteria had officially been destroyed. All of our questioning, all of our fears were finally behind us. Dee was cured. Still, there was a long road ahead. Because her body had been so weak for so long, co-infections had taken a hold as well. It would be months until she fully recovered, with no guarantee she would ever return to her normal functioning. The bacteria damaged her neurological system, and we'd have to wait and see what could be restored. After making it this far, we weren't about to give up. With the treatment done and a plan

for the next six months, it was time to go home and work on healing Dee's body.

The concoction of vitamins and supplements Dee was supposed to take when we returned home was amazing. Back in Australia, we went to the chemist to buy one of those tablet holders that separates each pill by the day of the week. Interestingly enough, these weren't even close to being big enough. So off we go to Spotlight where we purchase some craft boxes to fit her daily vitamins and supplements. For the next six months, Dee took 32 different tablets each day, in addition to a cream she had to rub on her body, drops she had to put under her tongue and supplements for her drinks. It was a lot, but we were happy to know the protocol was building her body back up, not sterilizing it with antibiotics.

Even though we were optimistic, Dee's recovery proved far more challenging than we expected. The shaking and speaking difficulties continued, along with tiredness and physical weakness, but there were some days when her symptoms disappeared, only to return a little later. On the flipside, Dee would often talk about how she felt different inside her body. Before Germany, Dee told me she felt like she was shaking deep inside her body. After the hyperthermia treatment, she no longer had that internal shaking. That was such an encouraging sign for all of us, and gave us hope in a good outcome.

With the overnight success we saw in Germany after the first hyperthermia treatment, we expected a really fast recovery back home. After three or four months, we realised this was going to be a long, slow process back to normal life. But the small, daily improvements kept us going. After we hit the six-month mark, Dee's strength and capacity to complete day-to-day activities had improved greatly. It may not have

looked impressive from the outside, but the smallest things amazed us. Dee was able to hold conversations, take the kids to and from school, and about eight months since returning from Germany, she could do almost everything she could before, though she tired much faster. Around 7 or 8 o'clock in the evening, Dee needed to rest, and the shaking and slurring returned.

Dee still has a lot of challenges with her health. She has bad days and good days. We know this is something that will never completely leave her body, so she has learnt to manage it, resting when she needs to. Her sister Eleasa mentioned to me that she is now very aware of how Dee is feeling when she's around her. She said, "I find myself very aware of her shaky hand or her slurring speech. I can see when she's struggling because she slows her walk; she becomes quieter and avoids conversation. I watch her more, making sure she's always ok". She, and so many others, really try and protect Dee now, ensuring she's not doing more than she should.

I can hardly convey how challenging Dee's sickness was for all of us. Although it might sound strange, even in the midst of the greatest challenge, it was also one of the most inspiring experiences of my life. Even though we were tested and pushed in ways we'd never known, never once did Dee complain. She took it all in stride. When she was really struggling to speak, I would look at her, trying to understand what she was saying. "Are you doing okay?" I'd ask. She'd simply smile and shrug, as if to say, "I'm doing okay." Eleasa calls it her "grateful smile." She says Dee would use it all the time when she was around helping clean our home. Eleasa told me she loved seeing Dee sitting quietly in my chair in the lounge room. She would sit in that chair because she wanted to be around everyone, not shut away in her bedroom. Dee

would give the “grateful smile,” and everyone knew what she was saying.

Some people possess an innate resilience, never quitting or playing the victim. Dee had that in spades. Even when she was at her most limited and most vulnerable, she wasn't willing to give up and let the disease beat her. When she felt horrible, she prioritized getting out of bed and doing something small around the house, like cooking or cleaning, even if it was just a little. It was her way of telling the disease it wasn't the boss, she was. She had something to fight for, and she wasn't about to stop.

Everything in life comes down to a person's purpose. Dee's purpose was being a mother, a friend and a wife. Her family gave her a reason to keep fighting. We all have our moments when we sit around and complain, because that's the easy way. Getting up and working towards our purpose can be hard and scary. And yet, it is always worth it. No one has ever achieved anything worthwhile without a reason or a purpose that makes the work worth it.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE GYM – AGAIN!

It really felt like the world stopped for the 12 months Dee was really sick. We didn't make any major changes at the gym, as I was only there for as long as necessary. We just existed, knowing that at some point, we'd need to focus on growing the business again. Due to the changes in Dee's body, and the fact that we still had a one-year-old child, we decided Dee would no longer work. Our kids needed their mum around more than ever, and for me, I had a new perspective on what was important and what wasn't.

I must say, after we made that decision, things really changed in our business. For the next couple of years, I continued working hard as we tried to turn the ship around and grow our membership. We tried almost everything we possibly could: we spent more money on advertising, we ran “buy one get one free” specials, and no joining fee. Deep down, I knew we were on a sinking ship, but that didn't stop me from working as hard as I could. The difference now was I didn't have my partner in crime working with me. When Dee was really sick, my life was so full of work, kids and her illness, that I never really had time to stop and think about her not being there.

However, returning into full swing again after Dee's treatment, I knew she wasn't coming back to work. This was a dream we'd started together. Trying to build it without her there just wasn't the same. It was a lonely road.

We continued investing in the business and realised we needed to add a little bit more life to the gym. Goodlife had come in with all the bells and whistles: fancy equipment, loads more group fitness classes, new bathrooms, equipped with the newest hair straighteners. Our equipment on the other hand was looking tired, almost like our business was stuck in the 90's. We had white equipment with green upholstery, which was great if you have no style or taste and even with the lick of paint we gave it a couple of years earlier, we still needed to give our gym a facelift. It needed to look new and shiny, in order to compete with the attraction of Goodlife.

So, the search for new equipment began. I quickly learned that buying equipment in Australia or buying Australian-made was extremely expensive. I was not happy that I had to make a decision between buying Australian made or buying from overseas. Being a die-hard Aussie that I am, the thought of buying from overseas didn't sit right with me at all. However, at the end of the day price became the deciding factor. The Australian made quality was fantastic, but it was far more than triple the price for the same equipment I could directly import from China. "Almost everything's built in China, anyway, right?" I reasoned, so surely it would be okay.

Shortly after starting my search, I placed an order with a company in China for about \$30,000 of equipment that would have cost me about \$70,000 in Australia. Especially given our financial strain, I thought I had made the world's greatest

purchase. I felt like I had beaten the equipment importers at their own game. We'd finally be able to compete with Goodlife's façade, and at less than half the price!

Twelve weeks later, the shipment arrived. Everything was in pieces; teeny, tiny pieces. Nothing was pre-assembled. We bought 30 commercial pieces of gym equipment and we had only the 2 days we had closed the gym for to put it all together. Our friends and family came to our rescue, again, spending hours helping me assemble the machines based on some of the worst instructions that have ever been written. Two days later, we finished the monumental task. All the machines were assembled and the gym looked amazing – like a new, shiny gym – one that surely would attract new customers now.

Monday rolled around, and we expected an excited buzz. We were surprised when the reaction was completely the opposite. "Where's this machine gone?" members asked. "This machine's broken! It doesn't work properly." "I don't know what you paid for these new machines, but they're junk!" The complaints kept coming in, day after day. With buyer's remorse now firmly entrenched in my gut, I decided the way forward was to fix as much as I could. For the next few months, I spent hours almost everyday fixing these *Amazing!, New!, Such a great find!* machines. I would sum it up in one word: *Nightmare*. No matter what I did, the machines kept breaking. They were so poorly made. For example, one of the cables on the strength machines would frequently snap. I was concerned about the safety problem this presented. I even had nightmares about customers getting injured. Even with all the money we'd just spent on them, we couldn't keep operating like that. Something needed to change/something had to be done.

There was only one option. We'd have to buy new equipment. Again. I put it off until one day, the decision was made for me. One of my staff members, Gary, was doing a workout and was using the seated row. He was lifting about 80 kg when half-way through a repetition, the cable snapped and he flew off the back of the machine. He literally landed about two meters away! Fortunately, he wasn't injured, but it was clear the time had come. My dad used to say, "The poor man always pays twice." It wasn't until this experience that I finally understood what he meant. In our attempt to skimp and save, we bought a lower quality product that simply wasn't up to standard. It's safe to say I learned my lesson, a mistake I would not make again, given it cost me about \$30,000 and countless hours of repair work.

We purchased our second round of new equipment and sold off the old for almost nothing. Our new equipment came from Australia and was simply amazing, I didn't have to assemble anything – it was fully installed – and I didn't have to do any maintenance. To top it off, all the equipment worked.

Despite the trying experience, I don't regret how things unfolded. I became an expert at fixing machines. I learned how to be a better problem-solver and knew what to look for when I purchased new equipment again. Not something I could have learned from getting it right the first time. I also learned another valuable lesson, one that challenged my previous beliefs; people don't buy a gym membership because of the fancy equipment. People buy and continue to use a membership because of the environment and the experience they have each time they come into the gym. The people and the community are far more important than the appearance. Our membership didn't have a massive upturn because of new equipment. It was never really about that. We were providing more for our members, more than a good looking

location to workout in. We were creating a setting that felt like home.

The viability of the gym grew even more challenged over the next few months. As much as I appreciated the lessons I learned, the equipment fiasco set us back even further financially. My time away taking care of Dee had really taken its toll on the business; so much so that we wouldn't be able to last much longer. We had a pretty serious choice to make. We could either sell the business or move to a new facility. With much cheaper rent and get out of our sticky situation.

We debated for a long time on the best course of action. So many things had to be taken into account. First, we had to finish the lease. Westfield wasn't going to let us out of our lease without paying exorbitant break costs. At the same time, there was no possible way we could afford to stay in the same location on the completion of our lease. Selling the business seemed like the best option, but when you're not profitable, it's not a very attractive offer for potential buyers. So we decided to look for a new facility and move our gym. We searched for months and months to find a new location, also realizing that given our current membership base, a move was very risky. To top it off, even if we did find the perfect location, we finally accepted we didn't have the capital available to orchestrate the move.

We were stuck. As if we needed more stress and pressure in our lives! I took comfort in the lyrics of a song I love: "It's darkest just before the dawn." It certainly felt like we'd hit our darkest hour. It looked like we were about to lose everything – our business, our house, our income, and of course, Dee was still recovering from being deathly ill. Was our dawn getting ready to break?

Out of the blue, I received a phone call from the owner of another independent gym around the corner. “I hear you’re closing your gym,” he said. We certainly didn’t want to, I told him, but we didn’t know what else to do. Two days later, I met with this man and we agreed on terms for him to purchase my membership base and for our gyms to merge. I couldn’t believe it. In one day, in one conversation, a solution arose. One of our biggest concerns had been our members, we didn’t want them to be disadvantaged at all. The community we’d created at Rising Up Fitness was so tight and caring, and they loved being able to work out together each day. There were a lot of sad people the day we announced our closure, but the agreement we had made allowed us to move everyone over together, maintaining that sense of community that we had come to value.

After years of struggling, I never thought the solution would be so simple. The closing of the gym may have been simple, but it certainly wasn’t easy. The day we closed the gym was extremely emotional. We knew that we’d truly created a family when a group of our members came to the gym just as we were closing the doors for the last time. They wanted to be with us and support us on the last part of the Rising Up Fitness journey. That did make it easier, but it was heart wrenching. The sense of failure cut very deep.

The journey of Rising Up Fitness as a gym had come to an end, but Rising Up still had a sting left in her tail. Due to our long-time financial struggle, we carried a large debt associated with the original business purchase five years prior. In fact, we basically had paid nothing off the loan. Our debt was massive, and our options to quickly pay it back were limited. After a few months, we decided the best option was to sell our home and pay off the debt. If we thought closing the gym was hard, selling our home was another level.



The moment that we closed the gym. Everyone else was gone, it was heartbreaking. Without us knowing, one of our boys caught the moment on camera

This was the place we'd built with our own hands, with our blood, sweat and tears. But there was a silver lining. Selling the house meant we no longer had the pressure of massive debt hanging over our heads. Knowing that they were just walls put things into perspective for us. The memories created are held in our hearts, not in the walls of our home, and we could create a home anywhere.



After we built our house, our first night was a sleep over all in 1 room (because not much else was finished). We decided that we should spend our last night in our home the same way, a sleepover all together in 1 room.

When we sold our house, we seriously felt free. Given the experience with Dee's illness and her continued health struggles, we now had a whole new focus in life. Let me tell you - it's not stuff! Before our business and personal lives took a dramatic turn, I was focused on building a global empire. For what? To what end? Since then, I've learned that it's far more important to enjoy the journey - enjoy the moments - rather than do something you don't enjoy just for the sake of earning money. The moments with my wife and my kids playing games, singing like rock stars to the radio in the car, or wrestling in the lounge room are the moments that really matter. I used to think that once I got this job, or this amount of money in my bank account, then I could finally be happy. It was total crap. We can be happy while we're on our way to reaching our goals as well.

I never would have seen this point of view had it not been for the experiences detailed in this book. Had I stayed in my same job, doing the same things, I wouldn't be where I am today. I would not have learned what I have learned. I would not have formed the friendships that I have or gained the deep understanding of what is actually important in life.

So many people miss the experiences life has to offer because they're too scared to do anything. Too scared to go outside of their comfort zone, fearing that something bad might happen. You know what? Something bad might happen, but something good might happen as well. What do you think is the worst possible thing that could happen to you financially? Most would say losing their home. I promise you, it's not the worst thing that can happen. As humans, we fear the unknown, avoiding risks because we think the consequences of failing are too great. I promise you, no matter what happens, the sun will still rise in the morning. The world won't end because your business fails, or you lose your job, or, heaven

forbid, you lose your home. All it means is that it's time to go in a different direction than you originally thought; experience something new, something exciting, something different.

Now, let me be very clear: I'm not saying that everyone should go out and sell their home so they can have a deep, life-changing experience. I'm saying don't let the pursuit of buying stuff (this includes a house) be the sole driving force in your life. Don't let the desire for more money override your desire to do things you love, or to chase the life course you really want.

When something bad happens, when we fail at something, it's an opportunity to learn. So many of us decide it's time to play it safe, time to put the cue in the rack. We need failure. It drives us to go back out and do better the next time. When we fail, two things happen. First, we learn something that will help us improve the next time, and second, we realise that failing didn't end our lives. In fact, we find that the experience of failing wasn't nearly as bad or as devastating as we thought it would be and that other opportunities open up to us that we had previously been blind to.

Dee and I have had some massive challenges along the way so far, like many of you. Everyone has their own set of challenges throughout life. Mine aren't any harder than yours; they're simply different. It doesn't matter what circumstances we find ourselves in. Where we put our attention – the things that are important to us – is what matters, when our focus is right, happiness and joy will follow. Where's your focus? Just because your situation is challenging doesn't mean that you should stop going after your dreams. You should chase them harder. Remember, "It is darkest just before the dawn."

In the remaining part of the book, I have outlined five key principles that I choose to live by. Not only have they helped

me though this particularly challenging time, but they've also provided me with a formula to ensure my focus is right for the rest of my life. I don't believe we have been put on this earth to go through the motions; we're here to have experience and to learn.

My five key principles are:

- Chase your dreams
- Know you can win
- Ready, fire, aim
- Work like hell
- Don't look back

As we break each of these principles down, you will have some work to do, it is one thing to listen to someone else's story, it is another thing to take control of your own. Over the next 5 chapters I encourage you to really invest in yourself by completing the exercises, where you will assess your own life and decide what is important and what dream you are going to chase. You'll see how much control you have over your own life and the happiness you feel each day. Don't give away your personal responsibility to live a happy life to anyone else. It's yours. Take it. Own it. Run with it.

I've had the opportunity to speak to many different groups, both here in Australia and overseas, and I'm constantly amazed by people's response when they take some time to stop and analyse their lives. To realign what they're doing and focus on what their dreams really are. I remember speaking at an event in Washington when a lady came up to me, emotion thick in her voice. She told me, "What you said, has changed my life." Now, I don't believe for one second that it was anything I said. What I believe is that she had taken the time to realign her focus. She was reenergizing

herself, to chase her dreams and focus on what was important. That's why I love speaking. I love seeing that spark in people's eyes when they suddenly realise they can achieve almost anything they want.

CHAPTER SIX

CHASE YOUR DREAMS

“Once upon a time.” It’s a phrase we heard over and over again as children. We knew it was the start of a story, an adventure. We could listen to our parents tell us stories for hours. Maybe it was because we pictured ourselves in those stories, having those adventures, chasing those dreams. The maid with nothing, except two ugly stepsisters and a stepmother, ends up becoming a princess. A mermaid falls in love with a man (who just happens to be prince) and ends up getting the legs she needs to become a human.

Fast-forward 20 years and where are you? Are you where you want to be? Are you doing what you want to be doing? Are you achieving all you set out to achieve? Are you achieving your purpose? Or have you jumped on the treadmill of life, running in place, not achieving any of your dreams? It’s so important to take stock from time to time and see where our lives are really headed. What happened to us between childhood and adulthood that stifled our dreams?

Too often we give our control and power over to other people, other entities or other things. We fall into the trap of placing

blame and abdicating responsibility. Nobody wants to feel like they failed. The big problem with giving our responsibility away is the person or thing to which we give it now has our control. When we do this, we lose our power - our power to make decisions and our power to own the outcome of our actions, whether it's good or bad. If we want to chase our dreams, to change our lives in the direction we want, we must take personal responsibility for everything that happens.

How often have we played a game of football and blamed our loss on the umpires? We say things like, "That decision cost us the game!" or "We would have scored if that guy didn't foul me". Why do we do that? Because when we shield ourselves from blame, the failure doesn't hurt as much. The big problem with this approach is, although it may be less painful in the immediate situation, it decreases the belief we have in ourselves. Over time, we start to think that we need other people to make the right decisions, or to be successful.

For the longest time, I blamed Westfield for Rising Up Fitness's challenges. I blamed Westfield because our rent was too high. I blamed Westfield because they brought another gym into the shopping centre. I blamed Westfield because they took my sign down in the car park. No matter how small or large the problem, I blamed Westfield. How did that help me make my business stronger? It didn't!

I love the quote from Henry Ford:

"Don't find fault, find a remedy. Anybody can complain".

I was the one who made the decision to open the gym at Westfield. I was the one who accepted the lease agreement

with a 5% year on year increase. But this didn't stop me blaming them, growing bitter and grumpy in the process. There's no value in blaming other people for things only you can work to improve.

When I finally accepted that everything that was happening in my life was my fault and my responsibility, I felt powerful beyond measure! Nobody else had control. I did.

I want you to think for a second about the dreams you had when you were a child, maybe even as a teenager. Who did you want to be? What goals did you want to pursue? I'm sure you remember those dreams. I wanted to be the world's greatest drummer. I started playing drums at age 12 and it was all I wanted to do. The fact that you're reading my book instead of hearing my music on the radio will give you a good indication as to how my drumming career is progressing. Don't get me wrong, I'm grateful for the \$150 per gig I get playing in my covers band – The Medley Boys – but it wasn't exactly the dream I had. The fact that I've only spent 10 hours practising drums in the last 15 years may also have affected my earning potential.

Dreams are very interesting. If we're really honest with ourselves, our dreams were never about money or the acquisition of stuff. Commercialisation will try and convince you that the more you buy, the happier you'll be. If there's a gap in your life, buy something and it will be filled! Have a look around your home and make a mental note of all the stuff you bought in the last 12 months. How much of it have you actually used in the last month? Now, head to the garage. I really mean it, get up and look in your garage. How much stuff in your garage hasn't been used for the last year? I'm sure there's only one answer: PLENTY! We can continue to attempt to fill the gap of our dreams by buying more stuff, but

I promise you it won't adequately fill the gap. Achieving our dreams and the journey to get there is what gives us true happiness and peace. The excitement is in the CHASE. Happiness is about growth, improvement and working towards achieving our goals. Davina and I had some massive goals when we started our business. We wanted to be self-reliant, have more time with our family, make a change in the fitness industry, and provide a gym where people could feel comfortable. Chasing those goals was exciting. It gave us something to work towards.

So, what is your dream?

You may need to put your phone down, or get off your computer, at least for a few minutes, and think. We are so bombarded with worthless information and entertainment that we lose track or forget what we really want. Remember, it's in the pursuit and the achievement of our dreams that we gain true happiness, not surfing cat videos or updating Facebook every 10 minutes.

Now it's time to do a bit of work. Below, I'd like you to write down your dream. This dream may differ from the dream you had when you were a kid. It may have nothing to do with work or business. Maybe it's to become a volunteer fire fighter, maybe to lose weight. It's your dream, nobody else's. I've watched so many people give up on their dreams because they thought it was too late. It's never too late to start chasing your dreams.

List your dream here:

WHY do you want to achieve this?

Some people say that you're WHY must make you cry. I don't necessarily subscribe to that theory, but I do believe the reasons why we do things is at the core of who we are. Until we understand the deeper reasons as to why we want to achieve a goal or dream, we'll never have the inner strength to really put in the effort. When challenges inevitably arise on the journey to reaching our goal, without a WHY, we'll quit.

Our WHY gives us purpose. When an obstacle gets in our way, we find a way to climb over it, walk around it, crawl under it or flat out smash through it! We won't allow anything or anyone to stand in our way because we have a strong WHY.

Your WHY is the reason sitting underneath the story you tell everybody. Particularly as men, we don't really like to talk about our feelings. It doesn't seem very manly. When Dee got sick, my whole life, energy and thoughts were focused on finding a cure and fixing her. In my search for a cure, I hit roadblock after roadblock. Now, if my real reason had simply been, "I must find a cure," my journey wouldn't have been anywhere near as relentless or hard working as it was. I had to go against what doctors were saying, "experts" who told me

Australia didn't have Lyme disease and everyone else who told me there was nothing I could do. The reason I continued to push was because I was fighting for something far greater than finding a cure. I was fighting to keep my best friend and my beautiful wife alive. I was fighting because it made me so sad to see Dee debilitatingly sick. I was fighting because I wanted my children to have their mum around; I was fighting because if I didn't find a solution, Dee would be gone.

When we have a deep purpose, we fight so much harder, like nothing can stop us, like we're bulletproof. And we are, because with every obstacle that comes our way, we find a way to overcome it. Like a horse in a race, sometimes we need to wear blinders. If we can keep focused on the end game, the dream, the goal, the victory, we won't get distracted and fall over on our way there.

Our dreams change as we move through life. Remember my home with the white picket fence? What was my dream then? My dream was to raise my children in an area without endless amounts of swearing, fighting and excessive drinking. When we started looking for a new place to live, building a house wasn't something we'd even considered. We were simply trying to find the best area we could afford. Building our home ending up being the best option for achieving our dream. After we purchased the block of land, we encountered a few setbacks, including the absence of a builder willing to build on our block. We could have chosen to 'throw the baby out with the bath water', but instead, we chose to build it ourselves. We didn't realise the enormous challenge we were about to undertake. Secretly, I'm grateful we didn't. If I'd known how hard it would be, I never would've done it. But our dream was still alive; we just had to take a different path than what we originally planned.

Owning a gym provided us with a number of amazing learning experiences. For example, take our members' fitness goals. We saw so many people coming to a gym and leaving, never achieving their health goal or dream. I believe it was because they never really understood what their dream was in the first place. You see, so many people came into the gym and said they wanted to lose weight. The reality is, losing weight is nobody's dream. Losing weight is simply the journey to achieving your dream. Let's go a little deeper.

There's always a deeper reason as to why somebody wants to "lose weight." Maybe they were embarrassed by a photo they saw of themselves, maybe they ran out of breath the last time they walked up the stairs, maybe they can't keep up with their children any more, maybe they can't fit in an airplane seat, and the list goes on. After years of working with people trying to lose weight, the only ones who actually achieved what they set out to achieve were the ones who really understood why they wanted to lose the weight. It's not enough to put a dream or goal out there; we must understand why we want to achieve it. It all comes back to our WHY.

This is a journey. Never lose sight of that. Joy isn't found in the end result alone; you must take time to enjoy the journey. And knowing why you are on your particular journey and having something specific to work towards will make it that much more enjoyable.

CHAPTER SEVEN

KNOW YOU CAN WIN

Imagine a bucket full of crabs. One crab turns to the other and says, “Mate, if we stay in here, we’re getting eaten for sure. I’m getting out of here.” The other crab responds by saying, “Nah mate, we’ll be alright. There’s no way you can climb out this bucket anyway, the edges are too high and it’s way too slippery. Better stay here with us.”

The first crab is not having a bar of it. He starts his journey out of the bucket. Working extremely hard, he gets one claw over the edge. “I’m doing really well!” he tells himself. “In another minute or so I’ll be free!” At least, that’s what he thought. As he struggles to get his second claw out of the bucket, his three “mates” at the bottom of the bucket drag him back down. “What are you doing? It’s not safe out there! Stay with us.” We all know what happened next. The crabs in the bucket were eaten.

Every day you’ll encounter people just like those crabs at the bottom of the bucket. For whatever reason, they don’t want you to achieve your goals, or they simply don’t believe you can. Maybe it’s because they haven’t achieved their own

goals, or they want to play it safe. The naysayers are everywhere. Whatever the reason, Arnold Schwarzenegger said it best: “Ignore all the naysayers.” Sounds simple, but a lot of the time the naysayers are people you love. They’re your husband or your wife, your family members or your friends. And because we love these people, we value their opinions. At the same time, if these are the people stifling your dreams with their, “You can’t do it” attitude, you need to do exactly as Arnold said. Ignore them.

If you want to achieve anything of value in life, you must TRUST YOURSELF. Back yourself, first and foremost. Too frequently we worry about what everybody else thinks. We give away our power, allowing them to make the big decisions for us. Just as we need to focus our efforts on cultivating our self-trust, we need to block out the negativity of the naysayers.

As human beings, we’re blessed with a part of our brains that sends certain messages to our bodies, ensuring our protection against harm. It’s called the amygdala. The amygdala is a small part of the emotional centre in our brains, and it fires up when we face danger. The amygdala is keeping us alive. Say, for example, we’re camping in the woods and a bear comes over. Our amygdala fires up, sending adrenaline and other neurochemicals around our brains, enabling us to fight or take flight. The amygdala prepares us for battle. The problem is, we don’t actually spend much time in the woods with bears coming to eat us. Most of our time is spent in a workplace or home setting. And this type of reactionary, instinctive response isn’t quite appropriate when we’re at work or with our families.

Because the amygdala is all about protecting us, it views everything as a threat. Automatically, we view unfamiliar

things as negative, which is one of the reasons we're afraid to make big changes, or take big risks. The great thing about our brains is that we have another governing centre that's far more rational and collected. It's called the Pre-Frontal Cortex. With intention, awareness and practice, we can actually train our brains so the rational part is in charge, instead of the emotional amygdala, allowing us to make more sound decisions.

In order to trust and believe in ourselves, instead of acting out of fear encouraged by the amygdala and naysayers, we need to encourage more Pre-Frontal Cortex activation. Once we take all aspects of our dreams and goals into account, we can realize the journey is worth it, and actually make the decision to start.

When we bought our block of land, the naysayers came out of the woodwork. Sometimes it felt like they'd been saving up the negativity for this very moment to share it. Time and again we heard comments like, "There's no way you can build on this rock." "Are you crazy? You have a family to consider." "Excavation alone will cost you too much, you'll never be able to afford it." A lot of the naysayers were tradespeople. They didn't just tell me it couldn't be done. They wouldn't even quote the job, or provided me with a quote so high we'd never take it.

On occasion, the negativity really got to me. I found myself sitting on my half-built outdoor deck, looking at the stars, thinking, "Did I make the wrong call here?". It's not always easy to completely shut out what other people say. On the flip side, as bad as some of the naysayers are, you'll also come across people like my next door neighbour, Mark, who said to me early on in our building experience, "This'll be tough mate, building on this slope. But stick at it. You'll get there.

Keep on working.” That made all the difference. Because he’d already been there and done what we were trying to do, and he was already experiencing the beautiful end result. His words gave me courage to keep pushing through. Surround yourself with people like Mark who lift you up and help you reach your goals and dreams. The alternative option is to surround yourself with people who drag you down and suck the life out of you, like the Dementors in the Harry Potter series. The Dementors are evil spirits that suck all the joy and happiness from a person’s body. The problem is, Dementors are not just in the movies; they are all around you. You may have Dementors in your family, they may be work colleagues or neighbours. Dementors are everywhere. You know the people I’m talking about. The ones who, no matter what idea or creative thought you have, tell you all the things that could go wrong. They literally suck the life out of your body, leaving you feeling like your brilliant idea is worthless and stupid. We all have them. Have a think for a moment about who these people are in your life.

Who are your Dementors?

Dementors will destroy your dreams if you allow them to. They’ll activate your amygdala so you stop seeing the possibilities in your dreams, and you only see fear and threat. The more time you spend with the Dementors, the less chance you have of achieving your dreams. You may not be able to kick them completely out of your life, but I would recommend limiting the amount of contact you have with them, and limiting the amount of ideas and plans you share with them. They simply don’t deserve to hear them.

When Dee was diagnosed with Lyme disease, we decided to trust the Lyme literate doctor over all the others. However, after about two months of the antibiotic treatment, realising that Dee wasn't improving, we started looking at the treatment facility in Germany. When we spoke to our Lyme doctor about whether we should go, he said it was a waste of money and he didn't recommend it.

Once again, we had a decision to make. Should we trust the doctor, the only professional who seemed to want to help us, or trust ourselves? A Lyme disease journey is like a 'choose your own adventure' book. At every point, without any hard evidence to indicate one treatment was better than another, we needed to make a decision and choose a direction. We made sure we researched as much as we possibly could prior to each one of these decisions, but the choice we made to go to Germany was still the biggest risk yet. Even after we felt like we were as informed as we possibly could be, we still had to back ourselves because the only doctor we trusted told us it was a bad idea.

Decisions are a funny thing. Some decisions have little to no consequences, while others have long lasting effects. Had we not made the decision to go to Germany, I firmly believe that Dee would not be with us today. By the time we left for Germany, She couldn't swallow well at all, and she frequently choked on food, even water. We had to trust in ourselves, to fully back our decision. It was the best decision we ever made. It saved Dee's life. To have courage simply means facing something that frightens you and deciding to do it anyway; having the strength to lean into grief and pain instead of running from it. Making the decision to go to Germany took courage – it took courage because we were scared, scared of all the possible things that could go wrong.

Scared Dee might not come back, and we had no guarantee of a positive outcome. But we did it anyway.

Once we make a decision to pursue our goals and dreams, inevitably, trials will arise. Sometimes we think we've done all the hard work just by making the decision. It's an important first step, but the real test is in staying the course, even when the boat is rocked.

Let's return to the example of gym members trying to lose weight. They always started confidently. They would make the decision, and they were ready to go for it. Things would start well. For the first five weeks or so, they'd lose weight and feel encouraged by their progress. Then, through no fault of their own, one week they put on a bit of weight. It wasn't because they changed the way they ate, or because they stopped training. Their bodies simply responded that way over those seven days. So often, this point was a crossroads. Just because it didn't go the way they expected, no matter how hard they'd been working, most people saw that weight as a sign that what they were doing was never going to work. So they would give up.

When you start on a path towards change and something doesn't go as you planned, **DON'T LOSE HOPE!** Stay the course. Achieving our goals is like the stock market; there will be ups and downs. Some weeks, things will go our way, and other weeks they won't. Like the stock market, as long as the overall trajectory is heading up, you're on the right path. Keep a long-term vision, and keep believing!

As a professional speaker, I need to make sure I'm at the peak of my game for every presentation. I never want to do a bad job. In fact, my goal is to influence someone every time I speak, helping them change their life for the better. To make sure I'm in a place where I can deliver to the best of my

ability, I go through a bit of a ritual each time. Beforehand, I find a space backstage where I can be alone. I talk to myself while touching/slapping high up on the wall. I say things like, “This is my wall, this is my room, this is my stage, this is my crowd, this is going to be amazing, everyone wants to hear what I have to say!” Moving my hands around high above my head while saying positive things lifts my mood and attitude, preparing me for what I’m about to do.

I love a concept created by a friend of mine, Luke Ross, who is an exceptional organisational psychologist. He calls it the “Can Do Loop.”

Many of us are quick to explain why we can’t do something. Our reasons might sound logical. However, this kind of thinking puts us into a “Can’t Do Loop.” The “Can’t Do Loop” is a perfect self-fulfilling prophecy. It’s likely, when in the loop, we won’t even try to disprove it. If we don’t try, we’ll never see what’s possible, and we’ll miss out on the opportunity to grow and live a fulfilled life. This loop can also erode motivation, skill, self-confidence and resilience.

However, if we simply **decide** to think something is possible, we put ourselves into a “Can Do Loop.” We try, and often, we achieve. Even if we don’t succeed, we’ll learn and feel satisfied that we gave it a go. A “Can Do Loop” is a much healthier and happier place to be – the “Can Do Loop” builds motivation, skill, self-confidence and resilience.



(Belief + Motivation) x Skill = Performance

Imagine the things you could accomplish with this type of attitude.

Henry Ford said:

“Whether you think you can, or you think you can’t – you’re right”

MENTORS

If you only rely on yourself, life can be a lonely place. I am a big believer in building a great community around you that lifts you up to be your best self. The road to improvement doesn't need to be a lonely one. But, make sure you choose the right people with whom to surround yourself. Spend time with people who make you feel and do good.

Dementors are those people who, like I said earlier, literally suck the happiness and joy right out of your body. As bad as they can be, the shortened version of that same word provides us with people who are extremely important when it comes to our success: **Mentors**.

When we started building our home on the hill, we believed everything would work out fine based on our previous experiences. However, it would be fair to say the process of building our house tried our resilience in almost every way possible. We seemed to hit challenge after challenge as we attempted to put a roof over our heads. In hindsight, we really had no idea what we were doing, and we were making it up as we went along. But aren't we all doing that at some level?

Were it not for one key person we met during our building process, we may not have finished the project at all. We employed a man named Clayton to work as our carpenter. Clayton, however, became far more than our carpenter during the process. Without knowing it, he became our mentor, and a vital one at that. It simply started by us asking him questions about the order or process of things. Clayton basically laid out all the steps we needed to follow to get the house built. He provided encouragement and was always available for us to call and ask him questions even when working on another job. We never felt like we were bothering him. In fact, he seemed to really enjoy helping us work things out. Mentors may not come from a planned process of recruitment, they may come to you like Clayton came to us – slowly, as a relationship builds and the trust between two people grows.

Having the right mentors will help you immensely on your path to pursuing your dreams and goals. But there are some specific rules you should follow when finding the right mentor. You can't simply pick anyone to provide you with good advice and support. Here are my six key characteristics of a successful mentor.

1. Successful in the area you're trying to improve

Financial success is not the only determinant when deciding if someone would be a good mentor for you. More important than money, the first thing you should look at when choosing a mentor is their success in the area in which you're trying to improve. This may have nothing to do with money. In fact, in most cases, it probably won't.

My good friend, Craig, has been one of my mentors since Dee got sick. I actually don't know how financially secure Craig is, and to tell you the truth, I don't really care. I reached out to Craig for assistance when I was struggling with a sick wife and a failing small business. I looked to Craig because he'd been running a small business for a number of years, but more importantly, I looked to Craig because he always seemed in control. There were many times in that year when I didn't feel in control. My emotions were affecting my decision-making abilities, and Craig was measured, thoughtful and patient, even when he faced challenges. That's what I wanted in my life. I wanted stability and control over my own emotions and thoughts. Even if there weren't quick fixes for the challenges I was facing, I believed I could at least improve my mental state with help from someone like Craig.

If you want to learn how to become a better cricket player, you wouldn't go to a football player to get advice. But be aware that not everybody is cut out to be a mentor. Just because you have a good relationship with someone doesn't mean they would be a good mentor for you. What matters most is that your mentor is successful in the single area in which you want to improve.

2. Honesty

Because we like being told we're doing a good job, you may be tempted to pick a mentor who blows smoke up your bum and makes you feel like you're on top of the world. That's wonderful and great, but that approach isn't going to help you improve. Those who only provide you with positive encouragement have their place. They'll be the ones to assist in building your courage and help you believe in yourself. We all have these people in our lives, and we should keep them close. They're our cheer squad.

With that said, that's not what you want from a successful mentor. Having a mentor willing to provide both positive and negative feedback is not only important; it's vital. You need somebody who will challenge you, not accept mediocrity; somebody who's willing to be open and upfront about areas in which you can improve. But the task doesn't end there. You have to be willing to accept their honesty and hear their feedback, even if it seems rough. It's part of the journey to becoming the best version of yourself. None of us are perfect. We all need people who are willing to tell us how we can improve.

3. Approachable and available

We might think a CEO of a large company would be a great mentor. You want someone successful, right? Remember, being successful is only part of the puzzle when finding an effective mentor. Someone who is approachable and available are two others traits to consider. There's no point in having a mentor if you feel nervous calling or approaching them about certain topics. If your mentor is causing you angst, you have the wrong mentor. If you're nervous prior to your meeting

with them, you have the wrong mentor. They must be easy to talk to and they must be available.

Let's say you do have a CEO as a mentor. You're facing a challenging decision that needs to be made in the next few hours. The CEO is far too busy to take your call or call you back. Often, we reach out to our mentors when things are tough because we need another trusted point of view. If we're unable to get in contact with our mentor because they're frequently unavailable, it kind of defeats the purpose of having one. I'm certainly not saying you can't have a CEO as a mentor. That would be great, as long as they can be there for you. This doesn't mean you should contact your mentor every day for assistance, but when you do contact them, they need to be available.

Also, be very careful in also, choosing a mentor who isn't self-centred. You know those guys, the ones who tell you how good they are, or how successful they are. If you get caught with one of these guys, you'll leave your sessions feeling more inadequate than when you started. Your mentor needs to be focused on you. Your meetings aren't a forum for them to tell you how good they are. A good mentor will ask a lot of questions to help them better understand your situation. The questions they ask will illuminate things you've never considered before, and you will very likely be able to sort the situation out yourself, rather than them telling you what to do. Remember, a mentor shouldn't be making decisions for you. They should be helping you make decisions for yourself.

4. Clear Communicator

Your mentor must give clear advice, without you having to decipher what they're trying to say. Clarity eliminates

ambiguity and confusion. You want someone who is direct and to the point, not someone who talks in circles or around a topic. They need to be efficient in the way they communicate. You don't want to leave a session with your mentor feeling more unsure and confused than when you started.

The doctor that diagnosed Davina with Lyme disease had an unbelievable amount of knowledge about the disease itself, but struggled to provide us with clear information that we could understand. He used words we'd never heard before, and he spoke very fast. We would often leave an appointment with him feeling more confused and more lost than when we walked in.

When you are faced with big, important decisions, you need a mentor who communicates with you on your level. It doesn't matter how smart they are. Do you connect with them? Can you understand what they're saying? If the answer is no, find someone else.

5. Positive Attitude

We all have moments when we wallow in self-pity. Mentors can help us get out of this rut. Imagine you've got a great new mentor. You're having a rough day and feel stuck on a particular decision. You call your mentor for some advice. They answer with a surly, short response as to why one of your choices won't work. How do you feel getting off the phone? Pretty crappy, right? Don't pick a mentor who doesn't have an overwhelmingly positive attitude towards life. Why do I say overwhelmingly positive?

Everybody shows his or her best selves to the public. Just look at Facebook! Everyone's life on Facebook is amazing. If someone doesn't strike you as overwhelmingly positive when you spend time with them, imagine what they're like when they aren't putting on show in front of other people. It's fair to assume they'll be far more negative when they're alone, away from social obligation, and that's not the person you want guiding you.

6. Willingness to Share

A great mentor will be your sounding board as you formulate plans about business and life. Receiving advice from someone who's already been there and done that is extremely powerful. Now, some people are willing and eager to share their stories and assist you in making your decisions. But the opposite is also true. Some people feel like they'll lose their competitive advantage by sharing all of their "secrets" with you. I'm not saying your mentor needs to share all of their personal information, but if they don't have a willingness to share some aspects of their lives, there's no way you'll be able to build a relationship deep enough, one you can trust wholeheartedly.

Be very selective in choosing your mentor. They'll either lift you up and help you achieve new heights, or they'll stifle your creativity and dreams if you pick the wrong one.

Believing in yourself is so important, but believing in others is also incredibly important. We have to trust others in order to really move forward. Most things we can't do alone, and why would we want to? It's always more enjoyable working with someone else on a project. When we opened the gym on a 24-hour basis, we had to step into the darkness and trust our

members to treat our gym well. We don't give people enough credit. Most people are good, trying to do the right thing as they go through life. When we show that we trust someone, we are blessed with a greater degree of respect and loyalty.

READY, FIRE, AIM

It was the 1975 AFL (Aussie Rules) Grand Final, September 27th 1975. Hawthorn was playing North Melbourne. Hawthorn was trailing North Melbourne by 20 points at the halfway mark. To be down 20 points at halftime in a Grand Final is not a good place to be. Clearly frustrated, Hawthorn's legendary coach, John Kennedy, used all the energy he had to implore his team to try harder and give more. In his opinion, the players were spending too much time thinking about what to do next with the ball, rather than getting in and getting the ball in the first place. John Kennedy gave one of the most passionate, yet extremely simple speeches ever recorded by a coach. For him, it wasn't about being fancy or clever with the football; it was simply about doing something!

As you read what John said, imagine he is your coach. Maybe you've played a sport before and you had a coach implore you to work harder. If you have, I want you to imagine that coach speaking directly to you as you read what John Kennedy said.

If you haven't played a sport, I want you imagine John Kennedy is your personal life coach.

Below is an extract from his halftime address to the players:

"At least do something. Do! Don't think, don't hope. Do! At least you can come off and say, 'I did this, I shepherded, I played on. At least I did something for the sake of the side. Do! Act! Don't think, act! Eye on the ball. The contest is still the same. You must win the ball to win the match. And more than that, when you win the ball you must cooperate with fellas coming past. And you must be desperate enough to stick with me and do it. The crowd might laugh. It might go wrong. I'm game enough to tell you to do it. Are you game enough to back me up?"

When I listen to the audio, it gives me chills. The emotion with which he delivered the message was incredible. He has since explained how frustrated he was seeing his players holding back, not giving 100%. Think about your own life experiences. Are you giving 100%? Are you holding back? What is stopping you from doing something? If John Kennedy was staring directly at you during that halftime speech, would you be happy and content with your first half effort?

Early in my life as a gym owner, I had a really valuable mentor. His name was Travis. Travis owned a couple of successful gyms on the other side of Melbourne, and I would at times call him to get advice about promotions I was

running. For one particular promotion, I was sending a text message to my entire membership database. I had been crafting the message for a long time. I continued making changes to the text, and I kept running those changes by Travis. His help was invaluable to me, but this time he stopped me and said, “Baron, sometimes we spend so much time getting ready to do something, we go READY, AIM, AIM, AIM, AIM, and we never FIRE. We would be much better served to just go READY, FIRE, AIM!”

In that moment, I learned one of my greatest life lessons. More often than not, I felt like things had to be perfect before taking action, and to be honest, that is total crap. Everything doesn't need to be perfect. Sometimes it's just better to launch, it's better to go, it's better to start doing something rather than waiting and thinking and researching, never actually doing.

I now choose to live by the slogan READY, FIRE, AIM. You can always fix things or alter your course after you launch. Often we spend so much time analysing problems, that we actually fabricate them, or find issues that nobody was ever going to raise because they weren't a big deal. This applies to all aspects of life, both business and personal. Sometimes it's better to stop thinking and just DO SOMETHING.

“There is only one thing that makes a dream impossible to achieve: the fear of failure.”

-Paulo Coelho-

Why do we wait to take action? Are we really not ready, or are we just afraid to fail? Failure is inevitable. We'll start numerous projects, and we'll fail at some of them. That's totally okay. Today, as you read this book, I want you to create a different relationship with failure. If we continue to view failure as bad or life threatening, we'll never have the courage to make the decisions we need to make in order to create lasting, positive change in our lives.

Wouldn't it feel good to view failure differently? What if we owned our failures? I promise you, there's something amazing to be gleaned from every failure you've ever had. You may need to look to find it, but I promise you, it's there. Too often we let our failures define us.

One day, I was talking to a good friend of mine, Robert. Robert is a successful businessman who's endured plenty of challenges on his journey. One day I asked him whether he would stop taking chances, as his risks were really high-stakes. His response has always stuck with me as a metaphor for how I want to live my life. He looked at me and simply said, "I'm gonna keep swinging for the fences, no matter what." Some people would say his approach is foolish, but I think it's courageous, because you will never really experience life if you always play it safe and do the same things every day. The exciting parts of life don't come from doing the mundane and boring. The exciting parts come when we choose to step outside the mundane and boring, when we choose to chase our dreams. Jim Carey quoted his father in a speech when he said,

"You can fail at what you don't want, so you might as well take a chance on doing what you love."

Think about your own current work situation. What is holding you back? What are you constantly preparing for, but are never quite ready to fire? Maybe it's even a confrontational meeting you need to have with another employee, but are scared of the consequences, so you're waiting for the 'perfect' time. Will there ever be a perfect time? And waiting only creates angst and frustration, the feeling of being stuck and unable to move forward. And sometimes we're scared to make a decision because we don't know what the outcome will be. It's dark ahead. If we knew what would happen, of course we'd make the choice to move forward. But for now, we'll stay in the light, thank you very much.

There's a story I heard as a child related to this. Imagine you're walking through a thick forest. It's dark and stormy. You've been out for hours by yourself, and you're a little lost. At home, dinner is waiting in the oven and it's warm and cosy inside. Suddenly, lightning strikes, briefly illuminating the way. It lights your path just long enough for you to see where you need to go, but not quite long enough to see all the bushes and branches that line the path. You now know the way, but there's a chance you'll trip and hurt yourself, or get scratched by the branches. You have a choice.

Your first option is to stop and wait for the next lightning bolt. It may come, it may not. But while you're sitting and waiting, something is guaranteed: you're not getting any closer to home. You would remain sitting in the rain, thinking about how tough and cold life is. The lightning bolt might be the next step towards your goals and dreams. Often, we get these great ideas. We stop and think, "Wow! That was a cool idea." And then we wait for the next lightning bolt to show us the way, to illuminate what we should do next, and show all the obstacles we need to avoid.

A good friend of mine, Rick, is very handy when it comes to building and creating things. He's frequently pulling things apart and putting them back together again. Years ago, Rick created a pulley system to help him with his bodyweight training. This pulley system attached to a tree, and he could use his bodyweight for pull-ups and a variety of other exercises. He came up with this idea all by himself because it filled a need for him. He would no longer need to carry weights in his car. He could just attach his pulley to a tree and do some weight training. Years later, the fitness industry emerged with a brand new contraption: the TRX. The TRX is remarkably like the device Rick created years before. Now, Rick makes no claims that anyone stole his idea, but he does have a tinge of regret that he didn't market his creation - the one that has since become a household name in fitness and worth millions of dollars. So, in hindsight, is there really much benefit to you stopping and waiting for the next bolt of lightning?

Back to the lost-in-the-woods scenario: Option two is you go for it. Keeping the image in your mind, you run towards home, inevitably you'll get scratched or trip over or have at least one small mishap. And, sure, you hope there's another lightning bolt to light the way a little, but you know this is your best opportunity. Sometimes you have to run into the darkness. It may be dark for a little while, but light will eventually come; be it another lightning bolt or the sunrise, light is coming. But if you choose to sit and wait, you may never feel the warmth of your home or that hot food filling your belly at the end of a cold night. I choose option two.

We can't wait for the next lightning bolt. If lightning strikes and your path is illuminated, even for a split second, run! If you don't, you might never get that opportunity again. I love Richard Branson's outlook. He said,

"If someone offers you an amazing opportunity, but you're not sure you can do it, say yes and learn how to do it later."

Maybe you've been given the opportunity to be promoted at work, or to work in a different area that's exciting to you. It doesn't matter what it is. Even if you're not sure you have the skills to do it, DO IT ANYWAY! Just because some people look more confident than you doesn't mean they know what they're doing. Let's be honest, we're all just making it up as we go, right? Don't be scared to do it anyway, and, as Richard said, work out how to do it later.

I want you to take a moment and write down the thing you're delaying. What is that thing you are NOT doing because you're afraid to fail, or you can't see far enough ahead? What are you putting off? You might think you are ready, but your actions continue to yell, "AIM, AIM, AIM..."

Because it's not enough to just say you're going to do something, you'll notice that I've included the date of implementation, too. It's time to get concrete with your goals.

What are you delaying?

Date of implementation

You'll never hit the target if you don't fire the shot!

Our brick layer, Chris, had never built strip footings before. He clearly needed the extra work, and he decided to go for it. Do you remember the results? Master work. If we spend too much time thinking about whether or not we can do something, we'll lose the opportunity to try. All we'll be left with is the feeling we missed out.

So much of why we delay is because we're scared to fail, like we spoke about. But not only that - we want to save face. It's so much easier to tell somebody, "I'm working on something," or, "I have this great idea". Once we actually start sharing it, we're going to get feedback, and that's a little scary. Whether it's good feedback or bad really is of no consequence, except for the value we attach to it. When we can be open to receiving feedback, understanding that it's not an attack on our personal character, the faster we'll be able to fire; the faster we'll be able to execute our ideas and plans. We live in a fast-paced world. If we stay in our same pattern of "Ready, Aim, Fire," we simply won't keep up with those around us, whether it's in business or in our personal lives.

Waiting kills dreams. If you stay in the light and don't plunge into the darkness, you'll never change. Step into the darkness and the light will come.

WORK LIKE HELL

"Sun up 'til sun down."

Those words still ring in my head whenever I think of Barry. There he was, a man in his 70's, about to have surgery for cancer and working like a Trojan. In his mind, there was a job that needed to be done, and he wasn't going to stop until he finished it.

By now you've decided what dream you're going to chase. You know you can win, and you're not going to waste time aiming. It can be any dream: weight loss, career change, taking control of your finances or your relationship. Anything. Whatever it is, making the decision is just the start. The real work is about to begin.

Making the decision is kind of sexy. You finally told everyone your dream, and you put on Facebook. "I'm going to lose 40 kg!" The first week or two are amazing. It's exciting and you can see your future-self looking great and

loving life. You start attending the gym every day and basically eat only steamed vegetables and grilled chicken. You're doing great!

In the first week you lose 2.5 kg! You gotta be happy with that. You'll meet your goal in no time. The next week, you start again: same food, same gym sessions. This week you lose 1.3 kg. You're happy, but not nearly as happy as you were the first week. Still, you push into the third week. You still stick with your 'on-point' eating and continue going to the gym every day. You get on the scales for your weekly weigh-in, and you're devastated to discover you've put on 1 kg.

The enthusiasm you had when you made your decision to lose weight vanishes. All you can see is the 1 kg gained. Disappointed, you continue to train hard and eat clean for most of the week. That is, until your friend asks you out to dinner. "I didn't lose any weight last week anyway," you think to yourself. "I may as well enjoy at least one meal." You remember reading somewhere that you should have a cheat meal every week anyway. The problem is, your one cheat meal turns into a cheat dessert, followed by a number of cheat meals the following week.

Weeks five, six, and seven follow a similar line. You're cheating most days now, but telling yourself you're working really hard. Finally, you decide this gym thing isn't for you, that this diet you're on doesn't work, and that you must not have it in you to lose the weight. You must have a medical condition, clearly that's why you're not losing weight. You convince yourself the double quarter pounder you ate on the way home from the gym yesterday wasn't the problem. It's your personal trainer who doesn't know how to train you correctly, because you've been working 'so hard'.

As a gym owner, this was a story I encountered frequently. Over and over again, I met people who felt like their diet or gym workout plan wasn't working. The reality of the situation, once we dug deeper in our discussions, was THEY weren't working.

In our hypothetical story, you had an 'external locus of control'.

When faced with situations like the one above, we have an opportunity to make a decision as to why things happened the way they did. Having an 'external locus of control' simply means you believe outcomes are outside of your control.

People who have an external locus of control give up large amounts of their power and personal responsibility, blaming other people or circumstances for their lack of success. In our weight loss example, there were a number of reasons as to why you weren't able to lose the 40 kg. Let's list them so you can see how ridiculous and illogical they were:

- My trainer doesn't know what he/she is doing
- Eating clean doesn't work for my body
- The gym wasn't good enough
- My McDonald's quarter pounder made no difference to my weight increase
- I didn't lose weight fast enough

As you've probably intuited, this example doesn't only apply to weight loss. Think about your own life. What was the dream you wrote earlier in the book? Why haven't you achieved it yet? Have you actually taken the steps to make it happen?

I love the quote by Lyn Fluckinger.

“Any excuse for non-performance, however valid, softens the character. It is a sedative against one’s own conscience. When a man uses an excuse, he attempts to convince both himself and others that unsatisfactory performance is somehow acceptable. He is, perhaps unconsciously, attempting to divert attention from performance - the only thing that counts - for his own wants for sympathy. The user is dishonest with himself as well as others. No matter how good or how valid, excuse never changes performance.

The world measures success in terms of performance alone. No man in history is ever remembered for what he would have accomplished, and history never asked how hard it was to do the job, nor considered the obstacles that had to be overcome. It counts only one thing - PERFORMANCE. No man ever performed a worthwhile task without consciously ignoring many a plausible excuse.

To use an excuse is a habit. We cannot have both the performance habit and the excuse habit. We all have a supply of excuses. The more we use them the lower our standards become, the poorer our performance!”

Here are some excuses I'm sure you've told yourself, or you've heard others say, as to why you can't achieve your dream. As you read them, think back and remember a time when you last said them or something similar.

"I don't have time."

"I'm too busy with my kids."

"I'm not smart enough."

"Someone else will do a better job than me."

"I don't have enough money."

"I'll do it eventually, when things quiet down."

And I am sure that you can add your own phrases to this list as well. Commit now to eliminating excuses from your vocabulary. They are holding you back!

Maybe your dream was to get a certain promotion at work. What have you done to achieve that promotion? Are you still leaving work at 5:00 p.m. on the dot because you have other things to do, or other commitments? If we want to see massive change, we need to put in massive effort. If you want a promotion, you need to work the hours required to be seen as someone going above and beyond. Too often we think promotions are a rite of passage simply because we've been at our business for a long time, doing a decent job. Isn't it frustrating when a young upstart grabs the promotion from right under your nose? Where is our locus of control in that situation? Did we say something like, "I can't believe he got the job. I've been here so long, worked so hard, I deserve that job!"

This is a classic example of someone who has an external locus of control. What you're saying to yourself may be correct, but is it helpful? Nobody deserves anything.

We all know these guys, the ones who sit around the smokers' bay or in the lunchroom and just complain about all aspects of

the business, the manager, the customers, they even complain about how hard life is, how things never seem to go their way. No matter what it is, they'll find a way to be negative. Make no mistake, these guys are also Dementors. They will suck every bit of joy and happiness out of your body, and their attitude will soon rub off on you if you aren't careful. These are the people who don't take responsibility for anything that is happening in their lives, they clearly have an external locus of control. Are we sometimes one of those people we are trying so desperately to avoid? Yes, we need to make sure that we avoid being around those people, but we also need to make sure that we are not being a Dementor to someone else who is trying to chase their own dreams.

When we have an external locus of control – and let's be honest, we all have at times – we go around hoping and wishing things will go 'our way'. If they don't, the world and the people in it are against us. We would be better served to shift our locus of control to internal. And become someone who understands that outcomes are within their control; that those outcomes are determined by their hard work and their own decisions, not by fate.

Back to the guy who's upset about not achieving a promotion, when we've deluded ourselves into this misguided thinking, the only way out is by confronting it. We have to stop, take a moment to reflect, and ask ourselves why we didn't get the promotion. We subscribe to an external locus of control because it's easier. It's easier to blame that which is outside us instead of looking inside. Only when we're brutally honest do we develop a true understanding of the gap between our actual self and our ideal self. Only then can we actually improve.

It's likely the man didn't get the promotion because the young upstart was better at some aspects of the job. Having the humility and the courage to accept that is so confronting and uncomfortable that most people don't bother doing it, and they slip back into giving others their control.

Contrary to popular belief, most people aren't actively working against us. The government is not actively working against us, your boss isn't, your family isn't, either. No one is trying to stop you from being successful. In the vast majority of cases, your boss or colleagues at work are not deliberately making life hard for you. People are far too busy with their own challenges to focus on destroying you.

Let's go back to failure for a moment. I want you to think of a time when you failed at something. It doesn't matter what it was – weight loss, missing a promotion, starting a business, a failed relationship, anything. Whatever it is, write it down.

WHAT DID YOU FAIL AT?

WHAT YOU HAVE BEEN BLAMING?

WHAT IS THE REAL REASON?

Identifying your failure and the reason behind it is the first step to achieving the massive, long-lasting change you're after. It's an important step, because without it, we'll continue

living with an external locus of control. Without it, we'll continue to argue that the world and everyone in it are preventing us from being the people we want to be. Looking for someone else to blame never leads to anything positive. Let's own our failure and use it to help us drive forward towards our next success.

You've identified your failure. Awesome! Remember that when you own your success as much as your failure, you're in the driver's seat. You're in control, nobody else. Now we can actually work towards our goals and dreams. The road ahead may be long, but nothing good comes without hard work. In fact, we need to work like hell – like Barry – sun up 'til sun down. Even though Barry was scheduled for surgery after finishing our job, there was no way he wasn't going to complete what he'd set out to do.

Whatever dream you're chasing, chase it! Don't just dip your toe in the water and think you're going to achieve it. You might have to work longer hours for the next three months. You might have to work a second job to earn the money you need to go on that holiday. Whatever your goal, dream or ambition is, go and get it! Don't make excuses for why you can't.

PAIN IS TEMPORARY

I love something Lance Armstrong said (Yes – he said and did some stupid things while he was in the limelight, but he also said a couple of cool things along the way):

"Pain is temporary, quitting is forever".

Just because it's hurting doesn't mean it's bad. It simply means it's hurting. As riders in the Tour de France climb mountain after mountain, they endure terrible pain. I'm sure the pain is so intense for them that the idea of quitting arises time and again. But they don't! They continue to push, knowing the top of the mountain will come as long as they don't stop. After struggling, all that way, I'm sure getting to the top tastes all the sweeter.

Picture this, it's stage 18 of the Tour de France, and the year is 2011. Cadel Evans has a chance to win, and would be the first Australian ever to do so. He's currently sitting in second place, but it's pretty tight among the leaders. The riders are now in the mountains, the most gruelling part of the race. In road racing, each team member supports only one among them to win the tour. That means, most people who race in the tour de France are not there for their own shot at the podium. They're enduring unimaginable pain for someone else, and for the glory of the team. Cadel Evans was the guy that everyone in his team was helping. Up until now, his teammates had been doing their part, pulling him along. But, by stage 18, the teammates have generally fallen away, and it's up to the leaders to take control of their own fate. It was Cadel's time to go for it.

The challenge for Cadel was that he wasn't just competing against all the other riders as individuals; he was competing against two brothers on the same team who were amazing athletes, Andy and Frank Schleck. Andy decided to break from the pack early with the hope of winning the stage by a long margin, thereby winning the tour. Frank didn't break with Andy. He stayed back to guard Cadel. After a while, Cadel decided to close the gap on Andy. The problem was, no one in Cadel's group was willing to help him. Usually when a small group pulls away together, they would take turns at the

front of the pack, where the workload was the hardest. In this moment, quite the opposite was the case. Frank wanted to make sure Cadel stayed as far back as possible from Andy, who was out in front. Not one rider offered to assist Cadel as they climbed the mountain, so he did it on his own. Cadel stayed at the front of this group and literally dragged the whole group up the mountain using his own steam. We literally witnessed a superhuman effort.

Not only did Cadel drag the entire group up the mountain, but he also closed the gap on Andy, bringing the time difference down from over four minutes to two minutes. Cadel's individual efforts in this stage effectively won him the Tour de France just a few days later.

No matter how painful his legs were feeling, Cadel didn't stop. In fact, the pain made him push harder. Right now, just like Cadel, you're climbing a mountain towards your dreams. How are your legs? Do they hurt? Are they burning? GOOD! That means you're making progress. If you aren't hurting, if it's not burning, you are not progressing, and that means you're not achieving your dreams. You've fallen off the back of the pack, thinking your job is done, or that it's too hard. Remember, the pain is only temporary. The rewards last a lifetime.

TIME IS PRECIOUS

In order to achieve what you really want in life, you need to structure each day in a way that you give the appropriate time to things that are most important. Now, I'm not going to bore you with ideas and structures for managing your time, because the truth is, none of that stuff will remedy your attitude. Here's the thing, if you don't have enough time to

achieve what you want, get up earlier and go to bed later! I love the words of Arnold Schwarzenegger. He said if we don't have time, we should simply "sleep faster". You can find any study you like to back up your excuses, like, "I read a study the other day that says we need nine hours sleep to work effectively." Whatever excuse you have, there's some rubbish that's been written by some psychologist somewhere to back up your excuse. Don't look for them, because what you seek you will find. The only way you'll achieve massive change is by taking massive action, including looking at your daily habits and routines.

If you want a promotion at work, work more, work smarter, attend night school. Whatever you need to do, work like hell to get it. CEO's of large companies or people in higher leadership positions didn't get there by clocking out exactly at 5:00 p.m. everyday. If you want something, you're going to get there through pure grit, determination and unrelenting work. People will tell you you're working too hard and that you should take a break. You can choose to listen to them, but while you're watching a movie and hanging out with those same people, someone else is working harder, trying to achieve the same thing you are. And, chances are, they'll be the ones who succeed.

Balance is important. But realistically, unless you work like hell to chase your dreams, it will always only be a dream. Where are you wasting time? Think about time you spent on Facebook for four hours on Saturday – was that helpful? Or the sitcom binge you watched the other night. It's all about what you really want. If your dream doesn't get you excited – excited enough to get off your bum and do something – it's not really your dream. If you're not willing to give up things that are a waste of time to pursue your dream, it's not your dream

Below are my four steps for improving your personal work output and effort.

1. Sleep Less

Eliminate from your vocabulary the words, "I'm too tired." I subscribe to the theory that sleep promotes sleep.

When we had our first baby, we had no idea what we were doing. I remember when we came home from the hospital and laid her in her rocker. We looked at each other and said, "What the heck do we do now?" We were pretty clueless, to say the least. For those who haven't had a child, you do get some help for the first few months from a maternal health nurse. Every few weeks, this nurse makes sure you're caring for the baby well enough, that the baby is healthy, and that you're coping with the change in your life. They were really helpful and provided Dee and I with some great advice.

When Katie was about six months old, we went to our monthly meeting with the nurse. She asked how the sleeping was going. Dee said, "She's doing good. She wakes up for a feed once or twice a night."

The nurse asked, "What do you do when she wakes up?"

Dee looked at the nurse a little strangely and said, "Um, I feed her." The nurse persisted, asking Dee why she fed her. Now Dee was thinking this woman is a little stupid. "Because she wants to be fed."

The response from the nurse was the wisest counsel we'd received as new parents. "Stop feeding her. If you keep feeding her when she wakes up, she'll keep waking up. If you

stop feeding her, she'll stop waking up." She also went on to teach us that sleep promotes sleep. The more we let Katie sleep, the more she wanted to sleep, and the more sleep we would get as parents. After three days, Katie stopped waking up in the night and slept like a champ after that, and she has been sleeping like a champ since.

The more we sleep, the more we want to sleep. Have a look at babies. The best sleeping babies are the ones that sleep during the day in addition to their usual night sleep. If we get into a routine of sleeping too long, our body will want more sleep. Sure, we can convince ourselves that we need 10 or 12 hours of sleep every night or else we can't function. But, when we do that, we're simply giving our power over to the number of hours we sleep in a night. This allows us to absolve ourselves of personal responsibility because we're "too tired". If you're feeling too tired, my recommendation would be to get up earlier and exercise more. Excessive sleep won't give you more energy. More exercise and clean food will give you the energy you need. In my opinion, six hours of sleep a night is plenty. Any more that, and we're wasting precious hours we could be using to do something constructive.

2. Stop Wasting time

Time is our most precious commodity. It's the only thing we can't buy, sell or replenish. It simply runs out. As people get closer to the end of their lives, the universal desire is for more time. Time with family, time with friends, more time for the things they care about. I want you to reflect for a moment on how you're using your time, both at home and at work. Are you doing the best you can with the time you're given?

How much time are you spending watching TV, playing on your phone or computer, surfing the Internet for no particular reason, updating or visiting social media? You may say to me, “Baron, I enjoy doing all of these things, I don't care what you say.” Of course you do, and there's a very good reason for that. A study conducted at Harvard University in 2012 showed that when we engage with social media, a pleasure sensation is activated in our brain. The same sensation that is associated with food, money and sex. When we go on Facebook and see that our status update has 147 likes, we get a hit of the chemical dopamine. It feels good doesn't it? Interestingly enough, when people take drugs, drink alcohol or get a hit from whatever addiction they have, they also get a surge of dopamine. Crazy, huh? We experience the same chemical reaction in our brains when we check Facebook as drug addicts do when they take ice!

How many times have you checked your phone today? The same neurochemical response happens when we get a text message. It feels good to know someone cares about us. Sometimes we even send a bunch of text messages out to our friends just so people text us back. As a society, we've become so addicted to our phones and other electronic devices that our interaction with other human beings is compromised. Our work is also compromised, as our focus and attention wain. I want you to think about the last conversation you had with someone. Did you pull your phone out or check your smart watch during the conversation? How many hours have disappeared because we were too ‘busy’ searching for our next hit of dopamine, instead of working towards our dreams?

Why do we do this? I see it as a never-ending cycle. Maybe we aren't spending enough time focusing on things that have real meaning. Maybe we aren't spending enough time chasing

after our WHY because it's too hard and takes too much effort to achieve. Is that why we chase these easy hits of dopamine on our computer or phone?

I've heard many people repeat the misconception that our lives are busier now than they were 30 years ago. In my opinion, it's just another excuse. I grew up with nine siblings – three older sisters and six younger brothers. To say my household was crazy would be an understatement. I think of what my parents did on a daily basis. It went something like this:

- Get up at 5:30 a.m. and take teenagers to seminary (religious instruction class)
- Get kids ready for school
- Dad goes to work, mum works around the home (not a small job with 10 kids)
- Pick kids up from school
- Take kids to sport, part-time jobs
- Make dinner
- Dad comes home
- Spend an hour or so doing stuff together
- Kids go to bed
- Two hours later, mum and dad go to bed

Amazingly, that looks no different from the lives many of us experience now as parents. There is, however, one main reason people *feel* busier now. Technology! Technology needs to be squeezed into an already full day. One hundred text messages, keeping up with Facebook, checking emails etc. Don't get me wrong, I love technology, and it certainly has its place, but I do believe that it has damaging effects when we allow it to control too much of our lives. The

constant chase of that little short-term dopamine hit deludes us into feeling like we're busier than we really are.

Be stronger than your phone. You don't need to look at it every few minutes. You've identified your dream; take some time away from your phone and social media and do things that are going to help you achieve your dream. Imagine the amount of time we could get back if we reduced the number of insignificant hours spent on devices. Just imagine the extreme hit of dopamine you will get when you achieve the dream you wrote down earlier.

3. Work like Barry

Sun up 'til sun down!

It's 6:30 a.m. and you're lying in bed. You've got a runny nose and a headache. You know if you get out of bed, have a shower, have some breakfast, and get ready for the day, you'll feel better. But instead, you choose to stay in bed for another 45 minutes, thinking about how sick you really are. Convinced you aren't well enough to go to work, you contact your manager by text message because you can't be bothered putting on the voice that sounds sicker than you really are. You're sick, make no mistake, but are you really sick enough to miss a day of work? Questionable.

When I worked at Sensis, I was entitled to an incredible amount of leave; personal leave, sick leave, parental leave, paternity leave, bereavement leave, jury duty leave, etc. I actually can't remember the others, but I'm sure there were more. There seemed to be more reasons not to be at work than there were reasons to be there. Employees in Australia are

blessed with an unbelievable law that ensures we're well taken care of in the workplace. It is a well-known fact that Australians take a large number sick days. And why wouldn't we? They expire at the end every year!

Something I've learned since working for myself is that the human body is amazing. I literally haven't had a sick day in about five years. I think the main reason for this is when I stand in front of the mirror and ask my boss for a day off, he says, "No, get to work." We can have the same attitude towards our dreams. We feel lethargic when we think about them – knowing how hard we have to work to achieve them, reasoning we can take this day off and work twice as hard the following day. Do we take the easy option, like Barry's mate the excavator, leaving at 3:00 p.m.? Or are we willing to knuckle down and do the work consistently, even when it feels hard?

I saw it often at the gym. Like we spoke about earlier, countless people joined, heavily overweight, wanting to do something about it. Generally, in their first month, they went through an experience like this:

- Join gym
- Do workout and feel sick
- Come to the gym a few more times in the next month
- Quit gym and tell me it didn't work

I pretty quickly came to learn that there was a pattern among people who consistently claimed the gym didn't work for them. Remember the cold hard truth? It wasn't the gym that didn't work, **they** were the ones who didn't work. These people would come to the gym and expect to lose all the weight they had 'worked' to put on for 20 years in a couple of weeks. The moment it got hard, they quit. If their dream was to lose

40 kg, it is only realistic they would need to work for at least a year or so to reach their goal. The consistency needed to achieve their dream was often overlooked. And so it is with us and our own dreams.

When someone would ask me how often they should come to the gym to achieve their weight loss goal, I'd tell them six days a week. They would look at me like I'd just stolen their lunch (which clearly would have upset them). Our conversation would turn to other areas of their lives they needed or wanted to change. I would advise them about clean eating. They would quiz me about things they could or couldn't eat. "Can I eat this? How about this?" Once again, I would tell them what they should and shouldn't eat, and I saw the resistance in their eyes. They wanted to find an easier way, a more comfortable way, a way that didn't involve changing what they were doing too much. As Albert Einstein is attributed for saying:

"The definition of insanity is to do the same thing over and over again, expecting different results".

One of the defence mechanisms these people had to avoid changing their eating habits was to lie. They would say, "Yeah that's pretty much what I already eat," or, "Baron, I just don't eat it often enough," or, "I think it's because I eat too late at night, not what I actually eat," or, "It must be because I'm skipping breakfast". I would be as diplomatic as I possibly could, but in reality, I wanted to scream and call them out for lying to me. Let me give you the tip, these

people were not 40 kg overweight because they were skipping breakfast!

Why did they feel the need to lie to me about their eating habits? Because the fear of humiliation is more painful than acknowledging the disconnect between our ideal self and our actual self. To accept you're 40 kg overweight is an extremely confronting realisation. Not only does it mean a long road ahead to fix the situation, it also means you've failed to take care of your body. None of us enjoy feeling like we've failed. So we do everything in our power to avoid the pain, even if it means blaming someone else or something else. The problem with this attitude is that it prevents us from moving forward. It keeps us from what we want to achieve.

In addition to the challenging situations I saw in the gym like these, I also saw some amazing transformations. These transformations were reserved for the hardest of workers. I remember one guy in particular named Hene, who actually lost 40 kg and ended up looking like a mini Arnold Schwarzenegger. He had a goal. He had a dream, and he went for it. He went to the gym sometimes twice a day, ran on the treadmill, lifted weights, even participated in group fitness classes. He was willing to do anything he could that was going to help him achieve his goal. Rain, hail or shine he was there. On the freezing cold mornings in winter and the boiling hot evenings in summer. Whatever the weather, and regardless of how he was feeling, he trained. Just like Barry, Hene had a dream and a timeframe, and he wasn't going to stop until he got there. Hene even participated in our "Biggest Loser" competition towards the end of his weight loss journey. He didn't only want to lose weight, he wanted to lose it in time to win the competition. The day prior to the last weigh-in, he took a spin bike into the steam room and rode for two hours! He lost 3 kg on the last day of competition.

Although I don't recommend taking a spin bike into the steam room to exercise, one can't doubt his determination and willingness to do the hard work required to achieve his goal.

Sometimes we just have to strap ourselves in for the ride, believing (sometimes blindly) that we'll reach our dream. If we considered all the things that could go wrong, we'd never start. We must chase our dreams by working like Barry, sun up 'til sun down.

4. Climb Like Cadel

Upon his return home after winning the Tour de France, Cadel Evans had a victory celebration with tens of thousands of supporters in Melbourne. He was interviewed by a journalist and was asked how life had changed since winning the Tour de France. Cadel responded:

"It still hurts riding uphill."

Such a simple perspective, when I'm sure the journalist was hoping for a more detailed answer. It always hurts climbing up the hill towards our dreams. We not only have to work to get there, we have to continue working, even when it hurts.

Anyone who has ridden a bike up a hill knows that the pain starts within about 30 seconds of pedalling (or maybe that's just me). Despite the pain Cadel endured climbing the hill to victory, he grit his teeth, and kept riding, and I have a sneak-

ing suspicion that the pain didn't alleviate until well after he passed the finish line and got off his bike.

You know those experiences - the ones when you had to grit your teeth and keep climbing, pushing through the pain, knowing you could have taken the easier option and quit? On the path to success, pain and discomfort are guaranteed, but we can't be distracted by them. We have to grit our teeth like Cadel, knowing it's going to hurt, and DO IT ANYWAY.

I remember a time when I was away with my wife for a couple of days visiting sunny Moreton Island, just off the coast of Brisbane. One morning we were enjoying a 'healthy' buffet breakfast. While I was standing waiting for my pancakes, I read a tattoo on the shoulder of a lady standing next to me, which said:

"Fall Down 7 Get Up 8".

Such a simple statement, but oh so powerful in its directive. It doesn't matter how often we fall; it only matters how often we get back up.

CHAPTER TEN

DON'T LOOK BACK

For a long time after Goodlife came into the Westfield shopping centre, I had the ultimate buyer's remorse. I had purchased the gym for over \$300,000. Now there was an enormous gym over the road, and we were certain it was going to destroy us. I wasted an enormous amount of time mulling over the decision I'd made to purchase the gym in the first place. Not only that, but it started affecting my decision-making in all other aspects of my life. I became gun-shy and far too cautious to even make another big decision, because I felt like I'd made one of the biggest mistakes of my life. Our financial situation was going to hell in a hand basket because of me, and I re-lived this over and over again.

I should probably spend more time listening to my younger brother's advice. Remember that night my brothers were over and Dee was in bed really sick? That same night, another one of my brothers, Adam, decided we would fundraise to help her get better. In that discussion I expressed my regret to my brothers, and told them I feared Dee was more sick due to the stress she was under because of our finances. I feared Dee's

health wasn't getting the attention it needed because I was so stressed about losing the business as well. My brother, Matthew, provided me with some wise counsel at that time. "Imagine if you were still working at Sensis," he said. "There's no way you could have been with Dee when she needed you, as you have been day in and day out." Matt went on to say if it weren't for the gym, I wouldn't have been able help at all. Instead of having remorse, I realised that I could actually be grateful. He also said, "If this is all the gym gave you, and you lose everything else, that's enough."

I was so caught up in wishing things were different and regretting my decisions that I missed the unbelievable blessing the gym was to us. Not only did owning the gym give me time flexibility, but the majority of the funds raised to get Dee better came directly from our gym members. If we look for the good, we'll find it.

REGRET IS A USELESS EMOTION

I have little children, which means I get to watch children's movies under the guise of watching them with the kids. Everybody loves a good Pixar or Disney movie. I'll be honest, I'm a huge fan of kid's movies. The most popular movie in our household right now is Frozen. It's not my favourite, but enjoyable nonetheless, and it has a powerful lesson. The movie follows two sisters, Elsa and Anna, who are princesses in a magical kingdom, Arendelle. When Elsa is young, she learns she has magical powers to freeze things and make it snow. The problem is, Elsa can't control her power. At one point she loses control and accidentally freezes her sister. Elsa locks herself in her room for years, afraid of hurting someone. In doing so, she isolates herself from the world and loses the beautiful relationship she had with Anna.

Years later, Elsa becomes queen, and a party is held at the palace. Elsa comes out of hiding for the first time in years and mingles with the guests. After a series of unfortunate events, Elsa once again loses control of her powers. This time she decides to run away. As all good Disney movies do, Elsa breaks into song as she powerfully accepts who she is and rids herself of all regret. The lyrics of the song tell a story we could all learn from.

*My power flurries through the air into the ground
 My soul is spiralling in frozen fractals all around
 And one thought crystallizes like an icy blast
 I'm never going back, the past is in the past
 Let it go, let it go
 Can't hold it back anymore
 Let it go, let it go
 Turn away and slam the door
 I don't care
 What they're going to say
 Let the storm rage on
 The cold never bothered me anyway*

The only reason we should look back is to learn. If looking back at your past prevents you from making more decisions for your future, stop looking. “Turn away and slam the door!” Just because you failed in the past, doesn’t mean you’ll fail in the future. Just because something didn’t go your way doesn’t mean you shouldn’t try again.

Staying on the theme of Disney movies, I love a short quote from one of my favourite Disney movies, *The Lion King*. Rafiki is teaching Simba (the future king) a bit about life. At one point, he smacks Simba on the head with a stick. Simba says, "Ouch! What was that for?" Rafiki responds, "It doesn't matter, it's in the past."

We waste so much time regretting the decisions we've made, simply because the outcomes weren't what we wanted. Still, it doesn't mean we shouldn't try again. In fact, it means we **should** try again, simply because we know so much more than we did before. As Rob said, keep swinging for the fences. There's nothing to be gained from hiding away like Elsa. Only regret and disappointment.

CHAPTER 11

THE END

My journey is no more impressive or harder than yours. What I've learned is that our experiences make us who we are. Failures and successes are equally important.

Remember, what you seek you will find. Failures simply allow us to see a different way forward, a different direction to head, new people to meet and new experiences to be had. When we are in the acute aftermath of a recent failure, it can be hard to see a way forward that is in any way appealing. It can seem that the world is closing in around us. We have to take a moment to imagine that we are flying in our own helicopter, lifting high above our struggles. When we lift above the ground we can see the bigger picture, and view from a new perspective what is beneath us. We will be able to see new things, new directions to head that are not visible from the ground.

You have an opportunity today to no longer accept your own excuses. I challenge you to no longer believe the excuses that

you have been feeding to yourself as to why you have not achieved what you want to achieve.

Remember that what you achieve is about you! You own every outcome in your life, whether you win or whether you lose. You have the power to change your own attitude and your situation. No one else has that power.

In the movie Rocky Balboa, Rocky is speaking to his son, Robert. At this point, Robert is not happy because his father is going to fight again. He believes that this will have a negative influence on his life, as he is trying to make a name for himself. Robert has always felt that he has lived in his father's shadow. After listening to his son complain about how hard his life is, Rocky responds with one of the most moving speeches you will ever see in a movie. Imagine Rocky with his unique voice passionately pleading with his son as you read the following:

"I'd hold you up to say to your mother, "This kid's gonna be the best kid in the world This kid's gonna be somebody better than anybody I ever knew." And you grew up good and wonderful. It was great just watching you, every day was like a privilege. Then the time came for you to be your own man and take on the world, and you did. But somewhere along the line, you changed. You stopped being you. You let people stick a finger in your face and tell you you're no good. And when things got hard, you started looking for something to blame, like a big shadow.

Let me tell you something you already know. The world ain't all sunshine and rainbows. It's a very mean and

nasty place, and I don't care how tough you are, it will beat you to your knees and keep you there permanently if you let it. You, me, or nobody is gonna hit as hard as life. But it ain't about how hard ya hit. It's about how hard you can get hit and keep moving forward. How much you can take and keep moving forward. That's how winning is done! Now if you know what you're worth, then go out and get what you're worth. But ya gotta be willing to take the hits, and not pointing fingers saying you ain't where you wanna be because of him, or her, or anybody! Cowards do that, and that ain't you! You're better than that!

I'm always gonna love you no matter what. No matter what happens. You're my son and you're my blood. You're the best thing in my life. But until you start believing in yourself, ya ain't gonna have a life."

Life will provide you with all manner of hits. Whether they be health hits, financial hits, relationships hits, I promise you they will come. Prepare yourself and be ready to take those hits and keep moving forward. Never let those hits stop you from progressing toward your dreams. Wherever you are in your journey of life, remember that you have the ability to act in spite of life's challenges.

You have the ability to achieve amazing things. Don't let anything or anybody stop you. Trust yourself, believe in yourself, chase your dream, never ever give up.

When someone says you can't do something, smile, take a deep breath and DO IT ANYWAY!

AFTERWORD

The Tick borne Diseases (TBD)/ Debilitating symptoms attributed to ticks (DSCAT)/ Lyme disease/Lyme like disease are some of the names bandied about for non-specific symptom, multi-systemic infectious syndrome contracted from blood sucking insects in Australia.

Controversy is embedded in the number of names used to describe it. Unfortunately, none of the above names describe these infections appropriately. Better terminology may be Arthropod borne infections.

Baron's wife, Davina, contracted these infections even though she does not recall a distinctive tick bite. We need to keep in mind that ticks release anaesthetics so the host would not feel a tick bite.

Her trials and tribulations during her illness transformed this young family from being 'charmed to being challenged'. In the process there were many life lessons to be learned. But Baron and his family took on the challenge and developed many crucial insights of survival when their entire life was crumbling in front of their eyes.

Serious diseases inflicting families, like cancer, can destroy the families or make family bonds stronger. However, with TBD inflicted families, it is more common for the family to fall apart as symptoms of the ill family member wax and wane. This creates doubt in the minds of family members whether the patient is really ill or faking it. Hence sometimes this infectious disease is called an invisible stealth illness.

Unlike others, Baron's family have managed to grow stronger bonds through their experience.

Renewed interest in Australia's TBD began with my husband, Karl McManus, who contracted this infectious disease while filming in Duffy's forest in Sydney. Karl was unfortunate to suffer from Neuroborreliosis. For 3 years we battled with the infection in his Central Nervous System. Because the infection spread slowly, the infectious nature of his condition was ignored. Instead he was diagnosed with neurodegenerative diseases, like motor neuron disease, multiple sclerosis etc. Having a diagnosis meant nothing to us. It was bad enough being seriously ill, but when you are battling the medical fraternity as well as the disease the task becomes humongous. Karl lost his battle in 2010. His death opened up the Pandora's box of vector borne diseases in Australia. While he was sick, we formed the Lyme Disease Association of Australia, and upon his passing, I formed the Karl McManus Foundation (KMF) in his memory.

The controversy and politics is evident from the undefined nature of this infectious syndrome. In my explorations, I realized that Australian TBD was more like a relapsing fever Borrelia infection than Lyme disease. In a short period, the term 'Lyme Disease' became a negative term that blocked communication between doctor and patient, resulting in the diagnosis of psychosomatic disorders. Continued branding of Lyme disease escalated the controversy. A disease is not a can of Coca Cola with an exact secret formula that can be branded. Scientific discovery determines the description of a disease. Uniting scientific evidence is needed to better define this disease, not the use of the term 'Lyme Disease'.

Research is pivotal in unravelling the mysteries of TBD's. The Karl McManus Foundation is the only charity funding

research into tick borne diseases in Australia. The Karl McManus Institute (KMI) has been formed to concentrate on tick borne diseases more intensely.

There is a lot of confusion over TBD's in Australia and globally. While discussion abounds, people who are ill are ignored by the medical fraternity or are misdiagnosed as having some other somatic disorder.

Tick borne diseases (TBD's) are one of the most debilitating diseases in the world, and they can be fatal for some. TBD's are also very misunderstood due to the idiosyncronicity of the infections, as they do not fit the classical mould of an infectious disease. Ticks are not the only vectors, not all ticks vector infections and not all tick bites are infectious.

Unlike other infectious diseases, the onset of symptoms for TBD can be delayed by weeks or months. Symptoms are usually non-specific, and each individual can have their own set of symptoms, which are multi-systemic, making a clinical diagnosis very difficult. Therefore, there is a high reliance on diagnostics. Unfortunately, laboratory tests are also unreliable, due to the high mutation rate of the bacteria and immune dysregulation. Furthermore, treatment can worsen the symptoms due to what is called a 'herxheimer reaction'.

There are many challenges in combatting these vector borne infectious diseases. If diagnosed early, before the immune system is dysregulated, treatment outcome is positive. However, if there is a delay in treatment, recovery can be very difficult.

A medical paradigm shift is required to address the unique properties of these infections, so that people like Davina, who are ill, can be diagnosed early and families don't break up.

For more information on the work that the Karl McManus Foundation does, please visit www.kmf.org.au.

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