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# **LIFE ENTREPRENEURS**

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**ORDINARY PEOPLE  
CREATING EXTRAORDINARY LIVES**

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(Stories and Strategies for Integrating Life, Work, and Purpose)

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A *Warren Bennis* BOOK

This PDF includes two excerpted chapters  
(chapters one and two) from the book,

**LIFE ENTREPRENEURS:**  
**Ordinary People Creating Extraordinary Lives**

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## CHAPTER ONE

# UNDERSTANDING LIFE ENTREPRENEURSHIP

*I would rather be a superb meteor, every atom of me  
in magnificent glow, than a sleepy and permanent  
planet. The proper function of man is to live, not to  
exist.*

—JACK LONDON

Some people don't just live; they *lead* a life. They don't sit around waiting for a lucky break; they create opportunities for themselves. They go after their dreams and bring them to life. Rather than bending to the status quo, they change it. Rather than being imprisoned by circumstance, they turn it to their advantage.

They assess their direction in life and determine whether it fits with who they are and what they want. They develop a vision of the good life, devise a plan for how to attain it, go for it, and check their progress along the way—all the while addressing, with creativity and flexibility, the inevitable obstacles that arise. As with any great effort, their work is never done but ever-evolving, and it is often inspiring to those around them.

Welcome to the territory of *life entrepreneurs*.

The word *entrepreneur* comes from the French word *entreprendre*, “to undertake.” The entrepreneur, then, is the acting person who recognizes an opportunity and then, compelled by an idea of how reality can be improved, takes action to produce a more valuable outcome. In the process, she assumes the attendant risks and reaps the rewards through ownership. By applying

creativity to a particular challenge or opportunity, entrepreneurs alter reality and expand our sense of what is possible.

In business literature, entrepreneurship is often broken into four defining components: creation, commitment, risk, and ownership. Entrepreneurs are also commonly thought of as being visionary, driven, innovative, intuitive, self-directed, confident, opportunistic, resourceful, and persistent.

## THE LIFE ENTREPRENEUR

That leads us to the *life entrepreneur*—one who creates a life of significance through opportunity recognition, innovation, and action. Rather than being driven by the opportunity to create an innovative enterprise, a life entrepreneur is driven by the chance to create a life of significance.

In many ways, life entrepreneurs use the same tools that a business or social entrepreneur uses to build a new enterprise, creatively applying the best of those start-up practices toward building a better life. But being a life entrepreneur is about developing an authentic, personal vision for our *life* and then going after it. It's about awakening to the opportunities around us and setting audacious goals. It's about building healthy support systems and marshaling resources. It's about taking action and making a difference. And it's about taking time out for reflection so we can renew ourselves for the road ahead.

A man from Boston once embodied this spirit. He had a difficult childhood, didn't attend much formal school, and ran away. As a young man, he worked hard and borrowed money to set himself up in the printing business. Then he became a father, ran a bookstore, earned enough money to buy and run a newspaper, wrote thought-provoking columns, dabbled in political cartoons, organized civic groups, published books, held elected office, served as an ambassador, helped launch environmental cleanup projects, and created a library, hospital, fire company, and insurance program.

He also verified the nature of electricity through an experiment with kites, helped to draft the Declaration of Independence, and signed the U.S. Constitution. His name, as you may have surmised, is Benjamin Franklin.

Most people know him as an American “founding father,” but he was also a classic life entrepreneur. His whole life comprised launching new enterprises in service of his community and country while also committing himself to self-improvement, discovery, reflection, and renewal. He is the one, after all, who admonished us: “God helps them that help themselves.” And “Drive thy Business, let not that drive thee.” And observed that “The noblest question in the world is, *What Good may I do in it?*”

Few of us approach our potential as fully and vigorously as Ben Franklin. There’s a big dividing line between ordinary lives and extraordinary ones, and many of us pass our time well short of that line. But one of time’s jealously guarded secrets is that the line is imaginary. It exists only in our heads. There is, it turns out, no limit to the number of extraordinary lives that can be realized, no quota on good lives to be claimed. Yet too many of us cling fiercely to imaginary limits we have set for ourselves or accepted from others.

In the pages ahead, we will learn from fifty-five different people from a wide array of backgrounds who have shed their imaginary limits. These are the stories of ordinary people who have had the imagination, courage, and resolve to integrate and enrich their lives in ways that are both extraordinary and instructive. We have much to learn from them, starting with how we can make our lives entrepreneurial in service of our dreams.

## AN INTEGRATED LIFE

In college, Stacey Boyd discovered a passion for education reform. Writing her senior thesis on different ways to design and run effective schools and school systems, she became enthralled by the Japanese system of education. So she moved to Japan, taught middle school for a year, and immersed herself in the Japanese learning culture. She returned to the United States to work for a start-up company called the Edison Project that led a massive effort to redesign public schools to make them more effective.

In business school, she had what she calls a “lightning bolt” idea of starting a school based on what she had learned. She had always thought it would be twenty years before she started her own school, but one day she wondered, *What am I waiting for?*

At age twenty-six and just two weeks after graduating, Stacey founded the Academy of the Pacific Rim, a charter public school dedicated to providing inner-city Boston students with a world-class education that married the best of the East—high standards, discipline, and character education—with the best of the West—individualism, creativity, and diversity.

As “PacRim” developed a sterling reputation nationally, Stacey was confronted with a major challenge: too much was happening inside the school that she, as principal, couldn’t keep track of. She envisioned a technology system that would help principals, teachers, and parents all do their job better through systematic sharing of information about how students were doing.

Late at night after long days at school, she found herself developing a technology platform to do just that. Once finished, it became a tremendous asset to the school staff and parents. Word got around, and people started visiting the academy from far and wide to observe the technology in action. Soon she was invited to speak at conferences, and foundations approached her about deploying the system in other schools. She knew she was on to something. And so Project Achieve was born, a start-up company whose comprehensive information management system was eventually made available to 15 percent of U.S. public schools through a partnership with the U.S. Department of Education.

In the meantime, Stacey had fallen in love with a fellow education reformer named Scott Hamilton, and they settled in San Francisco. During a trip together in Botswana, Stacey started thinking “how exciting it would be if we were able to take what we had done in the U.S. and apply that to the developing world.” So she started Global Learning Ventures, an education technology consultancy, and found herself jetting across the globe, working day and night.

When she became pregnant, she was forced to reevaluate. The entrepreneurial path she was on didn’t leave much time for other pursuits, much less raising a family. “It was really Gracie’s birth that made me take a step back,” she recalls, “because the last thing I wanted to do was board a plane to Libya. I was a lot more excited about wandering up the steps to the nursery.”

Her priorities changed yet again when Scott was struck by a car while riding his motor scooter in San Francisco. His skull

fractured as the helmet cracked open. At first, the doctors didn't know if he would make it. Then, they didn't know if he would regain consciousness, proper brain functioning, or his memory. Eventually, he astonished everyone by making a full recovery. Through that harrowing ordeal, Scott and Stacey gained new perspective and urgency about their life together.

Settling back into family life, Stacey began searching for preschools for Gracie. She was surprised to learn that there was no independent consumer rating service to help parents navigate the maze of choices. Recognizing a very personal need and feeling her entrepreneurial instincts kick back into gear, she seized the moment and launched the Savvy Source for Parents, an information hub and network for parents looking for quality educational options.

As she launched the company, she was cognizant of the fact that her previous start-ups had been all-consuming. This time, she was committed to having an integrated life and a job with a reasonable and flexible schedule. Wrestling with that dilemma, she had a breakthrough. Stacey built a virtual company comprising one hundred part-time working moms across the country, with all employees and contractors working from home. Together, they created a family-friendly company that produces a web-based guide to nearly all the preschools in the United States. It is now expanding into providing consumer ratings for camps, classes, educational books and toys, learning activities, and more.

She recounts, "I feel like I have found a way to lead a really entrepreneurial company that is growing in leaps and bounds, but also to be a good mom and be with Gracie more or less every waking hour. . . . At Savvy, we all have young children and they are our number one priority. Work is important but not the preeminent part of our lives. Running this organization is radically different. I would say 95 percent of our work is done in the morning before the kids wake up, in the afternoon when they take naps, and at night when they go to bed. I'm telling you, everything gets done faster and better. It's extraordinary. . . ."

Last year, Stacey and Scott decided to move to Jackson Hole, Wyoming, a place where they had always imagined retiring. Their rationale was simple: *Why wait?* After Scott's accident, she started asking herself: "Am I doing things that allow me to live the way



I want, serve the way I want, and be the parent I want to be? The last thing we wanted to do was live in a way that was talking about tomorrow instead of living it today.”

## ANSWERING A CALL

Like Stacey, David Gray has also struggled with adversity and competing demands. His achievement in life has sometimes been a mixed blessing. Through each life chapter, he has succeeded through a combination of talent, hard work, and meticulous preparation—from national speech championships in high school, to on-campus leadership at Yale, to the marketing fast track at Procter & Gamble, a dual master’s degree, and senior policy roles in the U.S. Senate and U.S. Department of Labor. Through it all, he maintained his easygoing nature, sense of humor, and uncanny ability to connect with people.

Long ago, he “rejected the notion of having one career for your entire life.” That freed him up to explore a variety of paths, but it also led to what he calls a “tortured process” of decision making about his next career moves. Sometimes he got stuck, feeling overwhelmed by a parade of options—having so many interests that it was hard to choose one and forgo the others. And with success came inertia. The catch-22 was that the more successful he was, the harder it would be to start over and try something new.

Meanwhile, something was missing in his life. While he was in college, his younger sister had died in a tragic car accident in Britain. By going through that suffering, he found what he calls “a maturity that comes from loss.” It moved him to tap more deeply into his spiritual core. He was powerfully affected by the ministry he received as he grieved, not only from family and friends but also from clergy. He says, “You talk to anyone who’s suffered some blow to the stomach and you learn more from your challenges than you do from your successes. It helps you relate to the fullness of life, with all its ups and downs.” Finding strength and stability in faith, he decided to enter divinity school. He continued in various high-ranking government jobs as he pursued ministry and volunteered in the local hospital.

Then one day he was offered a significant policy position at the White House. To many, the decision to accept would be a no-brainer, but David wasn't so sure. With that job, he knew he would rarely see his new wife, Bridget, and he would have to put off his ordination as a minister. He was also looking for some downtime after an intense two years of working hard while taking classes at night and writing a book. "I wanted to detox from my work in government," he says. "My identity was wrapped up in government, with an unhealthy amount of focus." But the allure of the job offer was not lost on him. After a few long days of wrestling with the decision and consulting with his family and friends, he respectfully declined the White House offer.

It was a shock to many. How could he walk away from such a prestigious job?

The decision was difficult, but in the end his rationale was clear and firm: he was committed to the path he was on—prioritizing his marriage, starting a family, finishing his divinity studies, and becoming ordained—answering a call that he could no longer ignore. "The things that I'm most proud of," he recalls, "have to do with touching people's lives at particular times, many of them very difficult times in their lives."

Today, Reverend Gray is working as a minister in a variety of contexts, including a church and college campus. He's even bringing that perspective to his work at a think tank in its "Healthy Families Initiative." Instead of approaching ministry as a "political guy," he is approaching his life and work from the perspective of his values of faith, family, and service.

Time will tell how he pieces it all together, but there is no doubt that he has crossed a threshold. When faced with one of his life's biggest decisions yet, he stopped and listened to his heart.

## PUTTING *LIFE* BACK INTO OUR LIVES

These days there are many people who, like Stacey and David, are rethinking what they want from life, seizing control of the tiller, and becoming captains of their fate. In his book, *Free Agent Nation*, Daniel Pink points out that, counting temporary workers, microbusinesses, and freelancers or "soloists," there are over

thirty-three million free agents in the U.S. workforce today—more than 25 percent of the total. Every year, seventeen million Americans change their jobs. These trends are now going global. Pink describes the dream of today's young people: "Not to climb through an organization, or even to accept a job at one, but to create their own gig on their own terms."<sup>1</sup>

What is going on here? Either we have a serious case of professional attention deficit disorder or we are not finding what we are looking for in the usual places. Of course, many of these employment changes are externally imposed. The pressures of a competitive global economy rife with outsourcing have led to widespread layoffs and diminished job security in many industries. So these trends are being driven externally by economic and social forces as well as internally by individual motivations and choices.

Today, there is a burgeoning interest in forging a new path in life that includes rewarding work that is also consistent with one's values. Here we arrive at a dilemma. On the one hand, people are looking for opportunity, challenge, and the chance to develop their talents, achieve success, and have an impact. On the other hand, they are looking for a happy home life, rewarding friendships, active lifestyle, close-knit community, and time to pursue other interests. In the meantime, we are being squeezed with practical obligations and financial pressures that sometimes present us with stark choices and painful trade-offs.

It is the life entrepreneur who is able to thread the needle, preserving quality of life while thriving in his chosen context. And it is the forward-thinking organization that attracts and retains talented workers by creating dynamic and intrapreneurial<sup>2</sup> opportunities that can flex with the priorities and schedules of today's go-getters while maintaining (or even increasing) productivity. As Jeanie Duck of the Boston Consulting Group says, "It's a myth that companies are filled with highly capable people that are willing to work 24/7. It's not true. The companies that crack this will have their pick of talented people."<sup>3</sup> Today, we see more and more examples of organizations addressing these trends, including the Business Talent Group in Los Angeles and Mind Farm in Washington, D.C. We detect an urgency to all of this, but

it is fair to assume that the world is not going to decelerate as we figure it all out.

## YOUR OWN “SECRET OFFICE”

Max Israel is someone who is addressing this issue for both himself and others. In college he launched an export company that did business in developing countries. For ten years he traveled to every corner of the globe and grew the company. Back home in Seattle, Washington, his family was also growing. After a while the trade-off was becoming clear: run a great company taking him to faraway places or be a great husband and father. The competing demands were too much at odds.

With child number three on the way, he and his wife decided to change direction and acquire and run a collection of local child-care franchises together. A new world opened up, giving Max the space to reconnect with his family, community, and passions. These changes inspired him to set a personal goal:

“Each year, I try to take twenty-five workweek days and spend them hiking, biking, or on the water someplace. It’s like having your own secret office with the world’s best views. These aren’t bank holidays or the days between Christmas and New Year’s. They’re midweek days right in the heart of the year when everyone else is at their desk. My best creative thinking is on these days. The places I go are inspiring, and exercise tends to calm my mind and help me see the big picture. Following these days, I try to resist the urge to catch up on e-mails at night. Instead I’ll write or think about what occupied my mind that day.”

In that “secret office,” Max hatched a plan to expand nationally with a software system he had built for his franchises. With that, he sees an opportunity to help others lead an integrated life as well. As we write, he is establishing a network of dynamic salespeople who want to develop and own their sales territory while maintaining balance in their lives. Max relates, “We want people who will value their investment in us not only because it makes money, but because it allows them to lead fuller lives.” He believes those people will do a better job over the long haul

and that they can build something of great value together—a true win-win.

## PATTERNS OF LIVING

Part of what makes Max a life entrepreneur is that he has ample amounts of both drive and direction. In many ways, how we approach drive and direction in our lives determines whether we lead a life of limits or one of unfettered fulfillment. As we will see, strength in one does not compensate for weakness in another. They must work in concert. Life entrepreneurship is a lifelong process of deploying both drive and direction to create an extraordinary life.

### DRIVE

Drive is the motivation or desire to go for it. Those of us with drive have a passion to commit ourselves to something—often something much bigger than ourselves. This breathes life into everything we do and fuels our motivation to take risks and act.

Karen Albrechtsen had her drive tested in her early thirties. After a rocky breakup with her husband in Toronto, she was in search of a fresh start. She had always dreamed of starting her own restaurant. Against the advice of her family and friends, she packed up a U-Haul truck and aimed her life in a new direction: cooking school in Chicago. As the Sears Tower came into view, she “saw the page close on a chapter, with a whole new wide chapter ahead of me.”

Her plan was to study at a top culinary school while immersing herself in the restaurant trade as a waitress. It all made sense on paper, but after three months she squared off against self-doubt: *What have I done?* She was far from home, alone, and working crazy hours, slogging through long days in school followed by nights in the restaurant working for next to nothing. With no time to make friends, loneliness set in. This was her big test. Though tempted to pack it up and head back north, she summoned the drive to stay the course and persist in her new life direction.

“Those were dark days,” Karen remembers. “To get by, I focused on why I was there and the end goal.” She also searched mightily for people to support her dream. She hit the jackpot when she cold-called a respected restaurant consultant in Boston who agreed to help her, and then again in finding a dynamic new business partner who shared her passion and embraced the vision of creating a funky new Asian-fusion restaurant. In 1999, her persistent drive paid off: she moved to Boston and opened Betty’s Wok & Noodle Diner across the street from Symphony Hall. It has since become a mainstay for hungry students and young professionals flocking to its healthy dishes and cocktail concoctions (especially the sake martinis and mojitos).

Karen has reinvented her life, moving from heartbreak to new adventures and relationships and, with it, gaining newfound confidence. With her inner drive firing, she is now turning her attention toward new entrepreneurial directions.

## DIRECTION

Direction is drive’s companion, the harnessing force that channels our drive toward a desired destination. Our direction comes from our core identity and gives us a sense of where we should be heading. Those with a strong sense of direction in life are able to develop an aspirational vision for what their future can hold. When new opportunities arise, they can assess them in the context of that direction.

For Randy Komisar, direction is more of a wide swath on the horizon to head toward than a specific port. Once CEO of LucasArts Entertainment, he reinvented himself as a “virtual CEO” serving a number of start-ups in Silicon Valley and then again as a partner at renowned venture capital firm Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers. Though he has changed careers several times, “My life is not adrift,” he explains. “There is no road map, but there is a horizon that I’m moving towards. That horizon is broad, but it is informed by what I believe. . . . The keel to your boat needs to be your values, your principles, your beliefs, and some sense of purpose, but that needs to be aimed at a horizon, not a point of latitude and longitude, because that point may turn out to be irrelevant.”

## FOUR PATTERNS OF LIVING

These elements—drive and direction—reveal four common patterns of living that most of us fall into. It turns out that we can assess our drive and direction to help gauge our current life circumstance. In so doing, we can identify what elements are missing and then go do something about it. At any point in our lives, we are likely to be in one of four possible life patterns: we can be low in both direction and drive (what we call *drifters*); high in direction but low in drive (*passengers*); high in drive but low in direction (*seekers*); or high in both drive and direction (*captains*) (see Figure 1.1).

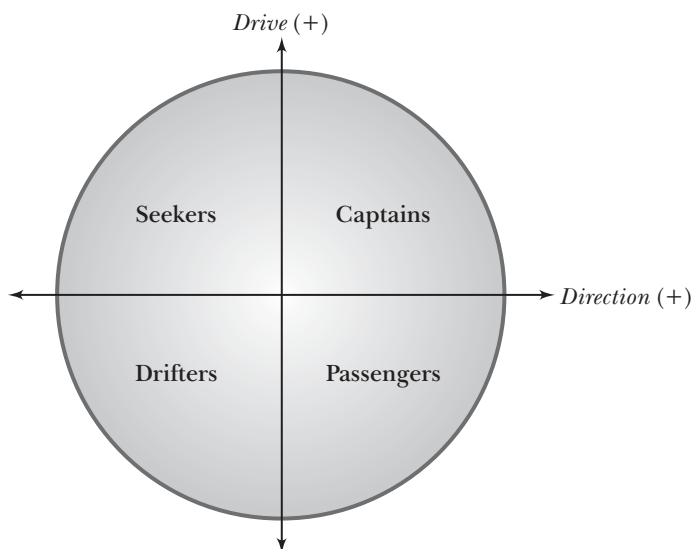
*Note: To take an assessment and plot yourself on this matrix, please go to [www.lifeentrepreneurs.com](http://www.lifeentrepreneurs.com).*

In this section we address each of these four patterns with a brief vignette showing how it plays out in dynamic fashion.

### *Drifters*

Drifters are on a raft letting the wind and waves take them out to sea. They go with the flow, without a sense of where they are

FIGURE 1.1. PATTERNS OF LIVING.



going or the drive to figure it out. With luck, their voyage can lead to interesting adventures and learning experiences that they can draw on later.

Mary Cutrufello is a Yale graduate turned rock star. She is a dynamic and explosive singer, songwriter, and guitar-playing virtuoso, with a unique blend of rock, blues, funk, and honky-tonk. In the course of her notable musical career, she released several albums and toured the world, but was suddenly stricken with a case of infected lymph nodes in her neck that caused her to lose her voice. Banished from her dream world of music, she started to drift in life, adjusting to her new reality and yearning to recapture her drive and direction.

Says Cutrufello, "I'm sort of in that castaway mode right now. Things happen. It's not anybody's fault. But it shouldn't change who you are or how you approach what you're doing. . . . I'm working towards getting back onto my path. The things that happen, they don't define you unless you let them." Since we spoke, her voice has healed and her drive and direction have come roaring back; she has just completed a new album and is starting to tour again. But during that healing time, her travails caused her to go deeper and get acquainted with who she is when she wasn't at one with her Fender Telecaster guitar.

### *Passengers*

Passengers know where they want to go in life but haven't yet summoned, or have somehow lost, the drive to get there. Passengers often lose their drive through circumstance—such as an illness, death of a loved one, or professional crisis. Sometimes they lose it through compromise, such as the common rationalization that they will chase their dreams later—or that it is better to take an existing trail than blaze a new one.

In their twenties, Beth and Devon Santa were both making a living at office jobs that paid well but left them flat. After they met and fell in love, everything changed. They discovered they had a common passion (friends call it an obsession) for sailing and adventure, coupled with an independent spirit. So they sold off most of their worldly goods and struck out on a seafaring adventure: starting a business that moved sailboats from port to port for races and regattas, allowing them to be out on the sea for much of



the year. They have since expanded the business to include other services at local marinas and have started a family. Today, they are still madly in love, happy to have ocean waves beneath their floating office, and grateful to have reignited the drive behind their shared direction.

### *Seekers*

Seekers have drive but haven't yet discovered the horizon they want to sail toward. They have an itch to see new lands and find themselves wandering. They are yearning for direction, not yet sure where they want to end up.

Growing up in southern California, Chip Conley had no shortage of drive. As a boy, he started a restaurant in his parents' dining room, launched a neighborhood newspaper, and even organized an "annual Olympics" for the kids on his street. "I was the one who was going to be president by the time I was thirty-five," he muses. In college, he was a star athlete. He got into the real estate business through his Uncle Bruce, a maverick developer. He recalls, "I was surrounded mostly by guys who were complete testosterone junkies. It was a 'good old boy' network." It was a "habitat," as he calls it, where he didn't feel at home.

By his senior year in college, Chip had started a real estate consulting firm with a fraternity brother but soon decided that it wasn't for him. He was seeking. He enrolled in business school right after college and interned at Morgan Stanley in New York City. "Here I was in New York," he recalls. "I was twenty-two, wearing suspenders, smoking cigars, hanging out with the guys, doing deals. And I was coming out as a gay man."

Chip recounts, "I was dying inside. I was so possessed by trying to make you love me for my achievements that I was actually creating this identity that was disconnected from myself. I wanted people to love me for the hologram I created of myself. . . . When I told my dad I was gay, it really wiped the slate clean in terms of what I wanted to do."

Starting over, he found his direction. On his twenty-sixth birthday, he finished writing a business plan for an avant-garde hotel based on a spirited rock 'n' roll theme. It was a transformative moment. "Within two months," he says, "I not only found the property but bought it with investors' money and was off to the races."

Today, this onetime seeker is the largest boutique hotel operator in California. All thirty of his hotels have creative designs and motifs. He says, “I actually called the company ‘Joie de Vivre’ for myself first and foremost—it was a reminder to me that this is why I am doing this. Today, I’ve created a habitat where I can actually dare to be myself.” He also wrote a book called *The Rebel Rules: Daring to Be Yourself in Business*. For Chip, becoming himself meant channeling his strong drive into a direction that was aligned with who he was becoming.

### *Captains*

Captains know where they want to go in life and have the drive to get there, actively steering in that direction. They assume command of their lives, perhaps out of instinct or conviction, taking the helm of their ships and steering purposefully toward a horizon that intrigues them.

Take Kevin Johnson. During his twelve-year National Basketball Association career, “KJ” was a three-time NBA All-Star and one of only four players to average at least twenty points and ten assists per game over three seasons. Since retiring from basketball, he has focused his legendary drive in a new direction. That includes founding and working with a number of community organizations in his native hometown of Sacramento, California: the St. Hope community revitalization project, St. Hope Public Schools (a public charter school district serving two thousand students), St. Hope Neighborhood Corps (training young people to be community leaders), St. Hope Development Company (a real estate company that has developed an estimated \$15 million worth of projects in the community), and an art gallery. His focus is on bringing lasting hope to his hometown, particularly through quality education. From captain of his team to captain of these community service efforts, Kevin embodies the better qualities of life entrepreneurship.<sup>4</sup>

This picture of drifters, passengers, seekers, and captains is not static. These are general patterns that we move in and out of over time. And of course our lives are not one-dimensional: different parts of our lives may contain higher drive or direction than others. A young professional in Tokyo’s financial district may be directed professionally but less so in her personal or romantic life.

The point is not to resign ourselves to one of these quadrants or berate ourselves for not being a captain all the time but rather to use these tools as a catalyst for change. We should also recognize that there are seasons in life—times to drift a little and enjoy the ride, times to seek deeper meaning and greater self-awareness through purposeful reflection. Without those periods in our life, we sacrifice a bit of our humanity. Life's winds can change unexpectedly, requiring us to navigate in and out of these quadrants through reflection, renewal, and reinvention.

The good news for those of us not satisfied with our lives is that we can change where we stand. Movement along new avenues is always possible, but much is required of those who seek to change. The question quickly arises: Change toward what? That is, what are we aiming toward? That's no small question. As we begin to address it and seek a proper repository for our aspirations, we start to catch glimpses of "the good life."

## CREATING THE GOOD LIFE

*What then shall I do this morning? How we spend  
our days is, of course, how we spend our lives. . . .  
There is no shortage of good days. It is good lives  
that are hard to come by.*

—ANNIE DILLARD

Life entrepreneurship can help us realize what Aristotle called "the good life." He believed that in the good life we find happiness—not in the contemporary sense of a pleasurable (and often fleeting) feeling of contentment, but in the ancient sense of *eudaimonia*, meaning happiness through virtuous action, habits of moral excellence, and a full flourishing of self. The good life is achieved by putting into practice what we believe, fulfilling our very nature, and attaining excellence as people and citizens—the very best of us.<sup>5</sup>

Creating the good life is about pursuing our potential in a deliberate and purposeful way. According to psychologist Carl Rogers, "The good life is a process, not a state of being. It is a direction, not a destination." For increasing numbers of people, an entrepreneurial life is a promising path to the good life.

Of course, not everyone will choose it, but it is an increasingly attractive choice, especially among rising generations. And it doesn't have to be a complicated endeavor.

Authors Richard Leider and David Shapiro define the good life simply as "living in the place you belong, with the people you love, doing the right work, on purpose. . . . Designing the good life becomes, then, 'a simple matter' of finding and keeping adequate space for love, place, and work in your life. In other words, reaching for and holding on to what really matters in your life and letting go of the responsibilities and commitments that do not."<sup>6</sup>

Still, creating the good life entails substantial risk. It can mean starting over and relinquishing degrees of financial and emotional security. It can mean shedding layers of a safe, stable, and predictable existence. It can mean the possibility of failure by conventional measures. It can mean disappointing people who expect us to continue along the same road. It is much easier to walk along prescribed paths than to blaze our own trail. But how much do we forgo when we retreat to safety and conformity?

A hunger for the good life lies deep within us all. But it requires an honest evaluation of who we are and how we are living. Some manage to avoid these hard questions for years, or even for a whole lifetime—diligently going with each year's flow without pausing to imagine other possible destinations. With the passing of years, our childhood dreams are pierced by reality. Our daily lives are filled with obligations and pressures. As we grow older, we drift away from "what could be" toward a life shaped not by personal vision or calling but by circumstance and compromise.

But occasionally we catch glimpses of what the future could hold in store—our own personal vision of the good life—and an inner restlessness is rekindled. That restlessness needs an outlet for all its stored energy. It needs a path for channeling it in a worthy direction.

## THE PATH OF THE LIFE ENTREPRENEUR

The path of the life entrepreneur is just such a thing. Here we introduce that path, first by describing its specific features, then by addressing how we should prepare ourselves to walk it, and finally by outlining the major steps to take along the way.

## EXHIBIT 1.1. THE WINDING PATH.



## THE PATH IS WINDING

The pages ahead offer a logical framework for taking big life ideas and putting them into action. We want to emphasize at the outset, though, that the life entrepreneur's path is decidedly nonlinear (see Exhibit 1.1). This winding path can cut back on itself, jump ahead, and zigzag unexpectedly. After all, this is life we are talking about. The steps on the path may look simple and straightforward on paper, but in reality they are far from it. Sometimes, they flow sequentially, but that is the exception. Often they double back, take us on scouting expeditions up new trails, or confront us all at once and threaten to overwhelm us. For some, the path makes sense only on looking back. The bottom line is that life entrepreneurship does have a natural

framework to follow, but it frequently requires improvisational choreography of order and disorder, resulting in a dance that is sometimes chaotic and always unique.

Each person's path to becoming a life entrepreneur is different. Some are meticulous in their planning before embarking; others leap right into it. Some are like chess players, thinking several moves ahead; others are like abstract artists, finding meaning and richness through a more spontaneous and playful process.

## HOW TO WALK THE PATH

A follow-on point about the (winding) path of the life entrepreneur is that walking the path is only half the battle. *How* we walk the path is just as important. The mind-sets we adopt, approaches we take, and provisions we stuff into our rucksacks for the journey ahead are just as important as the steps themselves. It is this combination of the path and how we walk it that determines the quality and character of our lives.

Based on our research and observations, life entrepreneurs are best served when they summon and employ the following on their journey:

- *Authentic Integrity*: integration of all aspects of our lives in a way that coheres with our true nature, flowing from our core identity (purpose and values)
- *Deep Awareness*: being alert to who we are and the changing needs, challenges, and opportunities that surround us
- *Breakthrough Innovation*: game-changing, applied creativity that helps us transcend the boundaries of the present
- *Courage to Try*: an openness to act in spite of our fears and a predisposition toward going for it
- *Purposeful Spontaneity*: a willingness to let go, improvise, and seize new opportunities in a way that resonates with our deepest essence and reason for being
- *Adaptive Persistence*: tailoring our approach to the circumstances while persevering through adversity
- *Pervasive Service*: an ethic of contribution as a defining feature of our lives

Each of these themes will be drawn out in the chapters ahead. Each one is necessary. We may be able to hike for miles without one or another, but over the span of time we will need all of them.

## THE STEPS ON THE PATH

Here we arrive at the trailhead. There are several common steps on the path of the life entrepreneur that, when taken in conjunction with one another, greatly increase the chances of success and, ultimately, a life of significance. Not coincidentally, each of these steps headlines the ensuing chapters. Here is a preview:

### *The Path of the Life Entrepreneur*

1. Discovering Core Identity
2. Awakening to Opportunity
3. Envisioning the Future
4. Developing Goals and Strategies
5. Building Healthy Support Systems
6. Taking Action and Making a Difference
7. Embracing Renewal and Reinvention

#### *1. Discovering Core Identity*

This is our compass. At its heart are our values and purpose. These are informed by external factors such as our personal history, current circumstances, and relationships as well as internal factors such as our needs, strengths, and passions. Establishing an authentic orientation (a “true north”) is a lifelong project. Without a strong core identity, the steps that follow are likely to lead us astray.

#### *2. Awakening to Opportunity*

With deep self-awareness, we become more aware of opportunities around us that resonate with our core identity. This includes being “switched on” to the world around us, being able to assess opportunities as they arise, and figuring out how to translate these promising ideas into attractive and actionable opportunities.

#### *3. Envisioning the Future*

The notion of vision is commonly applied to an organization, but it can also be applied to our lives: What do we envision for who



we will be and what we will do with our lives? This is best imagined in long increments, such as a decade or even an entire lifetime. Our vision is unearthed from within even as it is informed by opportunity and circumstance, reflecting a nexus of internal and external elements. With vivid clarity, our vision should raise our sights, inspiring us to something audacious and worthy of pursuit.

#### *4. Developing Goals and Strategies*

Successful entrepreneurs will tell you that without a well-informed game plan an enterprise is likely to fall flat. The same can be true in life. Developing goals and strategies provides needed clarity and focus. Goals should be purposeful and prioritized, clear and measurable, and challenging but achievable. Once our goals are established, we can identify the gaps between our current reality and envisioned future and start planning to fill those gaps by leveraging existing resources and attracting new ones.

#### *5. Building Healthy Support Systems*

None of us can create a life of significance on our own. Having a robust support system infused with healthy, diverse relationships helps us achieve our life goals. It can also provide shelter from the inevitable storms that roll in. If we are doing right by others, this web of support can create what we call a *positive network effect*, enhancing our ability to make a difference in the world.

#### *6. Taking Action and Making a Difference*

The preceding steps are academic unless we assume risks and take action. The essential elements of taking action are having the courage to try, leaping through windows of opportunity, entering the arena, creatively finding ways to serve, adapting and persisting, and erasing limits. What's more, we must avoid the common pitfalls that trap many entrepreneurs and recognize the cost of *not* taking action.

#### *7. Embracing Renewal and Reinvention*

Sometimes renewal is necessary. At times we must step back and take a look around, assessing where we have come from and where we are going. It is vital to find regular times to reconnect



with our core identity and prepare to initiate a new set of adventures. We must be careful not to push ourselves back into “superhero” action mode before we are replenished and ready. And when renewal is insufficient, we turn to reinvention—making wholesale changes in the fabric of our lives, stitching them together with new material better suited to the days ahead.

This framework of core identity, opportunity recognition, vision, goals and strategy, support systems, action, and renewal has worked for countless business and social entrepreneurs across generations. In this book we show how it can also be a powerful model for approaching our lives. We address each of these steps in a subsequent chapter. Before doing so, we first tell the stories of three life entrepreneurs in action. In their stories, we will see how life entrepreneurship has played out in the full arc of their lives, how they coped with difficult decisions and personal setbacks, how they prioritized their actions and behaviors, and how the entrepreneurial path helped them, ultimately, to create extraordinary lives.

## CHAPTER TWO

# LIFE ENTREPRENEURS IN ACTION

*If you ask me what I have come to do in this world . . .  
I will reply: I'm here to live my life out loud.*

—EMILE ZOLA

Raised in a middle-class New Jersey neighborhood by parents who were civil-rights activists and among the first African-American executives at IBM, Cory Booker was taught the value of service early in life. At Stanford University he volunteered as a youth outreach coordinator in East Palo Alto and worked at a suicide hotline. He was also a standout tight end on the football team and was approached by professional scouts from the National Football League.

After an outstanding performance against Notre Dame's famous "Fighting Irish" squad on national television, Cory found himself surrounded by a swarm of reporters' microphones, but his thoughts drifted far from the gridiron to a few days earlier, when a young man had threatened to jump off a building, and Cory was the first responder. After a long and intense exchange on the rooftop, the man had reached over and grabbed Cory's hand.

Cory recalls, "It was a moment where I said to myself, *Okay, I get it.* Being there to touch somebody's spirit was much more important to me than being surrounded by microphones. . . . I think we all have to do what we are called to do. For me, it was a matter of what fulfilled me the most and having the courage to be loyal to that calling no matter where that path leads."

He attended Oxford University as a Rhodes scholar and then Yale Law School but hadn't yet figured out how to put his talents and passion for service to use in the world. "I was pretty firm on what I didn't want to do," he says, "but I still didn't know how to manifest the desires I had. . . . I had a choice of going down a more traditional route or going my own way. I decided to invent myself."

Following long conversations with his mother and other close confidantes, he says that he asked himself "*What would be the wildest dream for myself—the largest thing that I could do that would make me feel that sense of fulfillment and contribution?*" I decided I wanted to be part of a community in transformation. . . . I had this ambitious desire to go to the front lines of this struggle and fight." He envisioned himself finding the worst street in the entire city of Newark, New Jersey (not far from where he grew up), living there, and joining that effort. "I was really naïve at the time," he recalls, "but I think it was one of the smarter things I could have done."

In pursuit of his vision, Cory secured a modest fellowship and moved into the Brick Towers, one of Newark's toughest housing projects. A drug trade was flourishing across the street, anchored by a crack house. In his first month there, the body of someone who had been bludgeoned to death was found on a street corner, and Cory witnessed a shooting on his front steps. Then his life was threatened by the local drug lord.

"That night I had a real gut check," he recalls. "This guy had so convincingly scared me that I had to ask myself, *Is this worth dying for?*" He found strength in a quote from Edward Teller, which he paraphrases, "When you come to the end of all the light you know and you are about to step into the darkness, faith is knowing one of two things will happen. Either you find solid ground underneath you or God will send you people who will teach you how to fly."

Booker decided to stay and fight. Soon afterward, he met with the local tenant president, Virginia Jones, and offered to help, admittedly with a "touch of arrogance in addition to audacity." Looking back, he laughs. "I told her 'Hi, my name's Cory Booker, I'm a law student, ma'am, and I'm here to help you'. . . like I was a sheriff from an old Western. And she put me in my place." After Jones asked him what he saw around him and he described in plain terms the conditions of his impoverished neighborhood, she

rebuked him: "You need to understand that the world you see outside of you is a reflection of what you see inside of you. If you see only problems and darkness and despair, that's all it's ever going to be. If you are a person who sees hope and opportunity and the face of God, then you can be one with the people who make real change." And so began Cory's streetwise education.

In the ensuing months, he and Ms. Jones met with their neighbors at her kitchen table and collectively decided to form a coalition for community change. Substantially through their efforts, the crack house was torn down, the slum lord was convicted, and a local business "adopted" a neighborhood school. Cory recalls, "It was a very powerful experience. I was sold. I knew what I was going to do . . . and my dreams got bigger and bolder. . . . [It] unleashed my belief in what was possible."

Leveraging its early wins, the Brick Towers Coalition began to effect change on a larger scale. Soon they realized they needed cooperation from the city government, but the local politicians were not on board, perhaps in large part because many of the biggest landowners were their major campaign contributors. The tenant group pressured Cory to throw his hat in the ring for city council to "take on the machine."

For Booker, this was another big "gut check." To run, he was going to have to give up his fellowship and income, sideline (and risk throwing away) the work that he had become so passionate about, and spend six months trying to unseat a powerful incumbent—all in a place where politicians typically only leave office if they are being "buried or convicted." Racked by sleepless nights and back spasms induced by stress, Booker recalls, "It was one of the most difficult decisions I've had to make. . . . Everything was going in the direction I had imagined, and now suddenly people were confronting me with evidence that something else should be done on a bigger scale." One day, a friend challenged him, "Are you here to do what you want to do or to meet the needs of the community?"

And so he ran. Cory engaged in a bruising battle for a seat on the city council, defeating a four-time incumbent. He carried his independent streak and unconventional approach into office—living for five months in a motor home, parking on corners notorious for drug trafficking, and going on a ten-day

hunger strike outside a housing project to protest open-air drug dealing. Though he proposed a number of bold initiatives, he was regularly outvoted (typically eight to one) by an entrenched city council. Stymied by the corrupt politics of the city, he decided to run for mayor against sixteen-year incumbent Sharpe James. After another nasty campaign (captured in the Academy Award-nominated documentary *Street Fight*), Mayor James prevailed with 53 percent of the vote.

Cory recommitted himself to the city and went on to found and direct Newark Now—a grassroots, citywide civic leadership program that is still thriving today—and to run again for mayor in 2006. Seeing the strong support behind Booker, James recognized the writing on the wall and withdrew from the race. At thirty-seven, Mayor Cory Booker was finally in a position to enact systemic change for the city and its people.

Now in office, he faces enormous challenges. A death threat issued by local gangs resisting his tough stance on crime resulted in a twenty-four-hour security detail. But his resolve has only been strengthened. “My life has been one long path,” he says. “There are days when I get punched and knocked down, but I get up again and keep walking. The path has led in directions that I could never have anticipated . . . but I need to keep asking: *Am I dedicated to my values and my ideas? Am I acting courageously even when the path leads into pitch darkness?* I still need to walk down this path.”

*If one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours. He will pass an invisible boundary; new, universal, and more liberal laws will begin to establish themselves around and within him; and he will live with the license of a higher order of beings.*

—HENRY DAVID THOREAU

## “RAISING THE BAR”

“I felt trapped.”

It had been ten years since Gary Erickson had launched the energy bar company Clif Bar & Co. The ups and downs of

the company's start-up years had been exhilarating, but now Gary was pushed into a corner, beaten down, and about to sell the company that had been his happy obsession for the past decade.

Gary's partner had a 50 percent stake in the business, and she wanted out. As the market matured and the competition intensified, the ongoing risks were too much for her to bear. All of it was affecting Gary: he had stopped exercising, wasn't sleeping well, and was mired in stress. He recounts, "I was getting worn out. We needed money to grow the business. I was marooned and everybody would just beat me down. . . . Everybody was saying that the competition was going to kill us."

The industry was consolidating: all of Clif Bar's competitors were being bought by global corporations, and Power Bar now had the resources of Nestlé, the largest food company in the world. "My partner was literally having breakdowns in the office," he continues. "It was crazy. So I gave in and just said, '*That's it, let's just sell it.*'"

Selling would be lucrative. Gary was on the cusp of bringing in \$60 million personally from the sale, but he was torn because this wasn't just a business to him.

The concept of the Clif Bar had come to him during an epic bike ride with his friend Jay over Mount Hamilton in northern California. It was supposed to be a 125-mile ride, but Jay had miscalculated the distance—badly. As they approached the 125-mile mark, they realized that they still had a punishing 50 miles to go. Gary was "bonking": his muscles were shutting down due to fatigue and a lack of nutrients. He "just couldn't eat another chewy, bland energy bar," so they found a 7-Eleven and he powered through a package of powdered-sugar donuts. Pushing into the final leg of the ride, he turned to Jay and announced, "I'm going to create a better-tasting energy bar."

That "epiphany ride," as he now calls it, led to a start-up sensation that took the nascent energy bar industry by storm. Living in a garage at the time with his dog, skis, climbing gear, bike, and two trumpets, he recruited his mother to help him gin up different recipes in the kitchen until they finally landed on one that was just right.

The first year, they racked up \$700,000 in sales and had their products selling in seven hundred bike shops and hundreds of natural foods stores. From 1992, the company's revenues nearly

doubled each year—to more than \$100 million in 2002. Clif Bar—named after Gary’s father, Clifford—became not only a lifestyle product but a grassroots phenomenon as they promoted their energy bars “at the point of passion”: at climbing crags, bike events, marathons, triathlons, and more.

The power of his vision was not only in the market opportunity he spotted (and strategically tapped into) but in the authentic convergence of his passions that the product embodies. His core identity was wrapped up in his passion for music and the great outdoors as well as his family’s love affair with good food. Looking back, he says that “the best ideas come out of extreme situations in unknown terrain, whether in cycling or in business. Pushing beyond what I think I can do creates an opening for new ideas. The bike epiphany was a purely intuitive moment. Yet it brought together three elements of my life in a way that made sense. . . . Successful entrepreneurs take who they are and what they already know and create surprising combinations.”<sup>1</sup>

Gary’s cooking heritage and enjoyment of good food can be traced to his Greek grandmother, Kalliope. Before starting Clif Bar, he had opened what he calls a “fresh and artisan” bakery in the Bay Area based on recipes from his mother and grandmother.

He was also a jazz fanatic. He had become enamored with jazz way back in the fifth grade, jammed in bands throughout high school and college, and even considered a career in music. “What I like about jazz is improvisation,” he explains. “There is a discipline side of the improvisation and then there is a free-form part, and I think business is the same thing. . . . Having the skills to do it but then being able to risk your own melody or solo reminds me of being an entrepreneur. . . . Jazz has always been an influence in how I run my business.”

The third point of convergence was his lifestyle, flowing from his love of outdoor adventure sports, the wilderness, and what he calls the “white road” approach. He grew up playing every sport known to man, and his whole family would frequently head to countless national parks for hiking, skiing, and more. Gary took up mountain and ice climbing, then bike racing, and later became a wilderness guide. “None of these things made a lot of money,” he says, “but it didn’t matter because I was living the lifestyle I wanted to live. I was living in the mountains and

climbing every day and hanging out with really cool people.” Eventually, he saved enough money after holding down three jobs to travel around the world for a year. On a subsequent biking trip through the European Alps, he and a buddy found that the “red roads” on the maps were full of traffic and congestion, but the “white roads” were the smaller paths that led to adventure and risk. They always took the white roads.

Gary brought all those elements—good food, jazz, and the “white road” approach—to Clif Bar. He had poured his heart and soul into it. Now it was all about to end.

“It came down to the last minute,” he says, “one last walk around the block. That moment changed everything. I decided *I’m not going to do this.*” He returned to the office and sent the lawyers home. “I felt the happiest I had felt in months,” he recalls. In his book, *Raising the Bar*, he elaborated: “I didn’t know it at the time, but my walk around the block exposed *the nature of things* to me; it revealed what I wanted in a partnership, in the company, in my life, and in my marriage.”<sup>2</sup>

He was ecstatic, but the decision carried immense risk. To honor his business partner’s wishes, he had to buy her out. “Instead of selling and walking away with \$60 million for my half of the business,” he explains, “I was now keeping the company but facing \$70 million of debt financing to buy my partner out of her half of the business.” Facing what appeared to be a bottomless pit of debt and uncertainty, he resolved to take Clif Bar as far down the “white road” path as possible and see where it led. Staying private and in full control was key to staying on that road.

Gary’s goal was “to create and sustain a business where people can live and experience life, not just where they go to make a living. . . . I wanted to create a place where people had fun, worked hard, and felt that their work had meaning.”<sup>3</sup> Collectively, they developed the company’s “Five Aspirations” centered on sustaining their brands, business, people, community, and planet.

These are not just platitudes at Clif Bar. In many ways, the company was designed by a life entrepreneur for life entrepreneurs. In the spirit of their aspirations, they created a collaborative culture that is disciplined, entrepreneurial, and playful. They offer profit sharing for employees, sabbaticals, and a wellness program, including an in-house gym, three full-time trainers,



and twenty fitness classes per week—during working hours. Employees get paid for staying in shape (two and a half hours of workout time per week) and are able to take a three-day weekend every other week. They built a theater in their headquarters, complete with a grand piano and Hammond organ, where they have their Wednesday night jam sessions. “Music is part of Clif Bar,” says Gary. “People spend 2,080 hours a year at the workplace. We believe that if we provide meaningful work as well as something *beyond* work, people will do their jobs well *and* lead healthier, more balanced lives.”<sup>4</sup>

Clif Bar also has a robust community service program, including a goal of over twenty paid hours of community volunteer work per person per year, and in 2006 launched the Clif Bar Family Foundation to provide financial support to grassroots organizations working to promote environmental restoration and conservation, sustainable food and agriculture, and an array of other social concerns. Several years ago the company went “green,” with an aggressive sustainability initiative led by a staff ecologist.

This multifaceted approach is paying off. With high morale, a diversified line of energy bars (including Luna, the Whole Nutrition Bar for Women), and growing global brand recognition, the company has grown approximately 24 percent each year (compounded) for the past nine years to almost \$150 million and shed all of its debt. The Clif Bar brand has become the number-one-selling organic energy and nutrition bar on the market.

Gary himself has managed to build this progressive enterprise while also maintaining an integrated life. He explains, “There is no separation of work and play. It’s all together. . . . For me, the goal was to keep the lifestyle. I’ve been able to create a business that supports all the things I love to do.” This includes prioritizing family time with his wife and children. They ski every weekend in the winter, travel in summer, mountain bike together, attend Clif events as a family, and recently completed a five-thousand-mile biodiesel R.V. (recreational vehicle) “white road” trip to educate their children and the Clif Bar customer community on the potential of biofuels.

Today he and his wife Kit are focused on maintaining the company’s “mojo,” as he calls it. In 2004 they started the Clif Bar

Family Winery and Farm, supporting organic farming in their community. “Entrepreneurs bring their life stories into business,” says Gary. “Entrepreneurialism is more about a spirit, passion, desire, and way of being than about innate gifts and abilities. It is the willingness to tackle first ascents—climbing new routes.”<sup>5</sup> His recipe for living his dreams? “Just enjoy it. It doesn’t take that much to be really happy. Why not be happy today?”

*We must not forget that only a very few people  
are artists in life; that the art of life is the most  
distinguished and rarest of all the arts.*

—CARL JUNG

## CREATING BRIGHT HORIZONS

Having grown up in a little farming village in the Finger Lake area of central New York, Linda Mason recalls, “A big early influence in my life was my father. Every few years, he would take a few months off his practice and go to a country in the developing world and volunteer as a doctor in Central America and Africa. I just hung on his stories when he came back.”

Inspired by that novel combination of adventure and humanitarian work, Linda sought to push the boundaries of her own life. She moved to Paris after college to study another passion, music, at the Rachmaninoff Conservatory. At the time she “had no objective in mind as far as what my future would hold—no plan whatsoever. I mainly was thinking about what kind of adventure I would have.”

She then volunteered for a non-profit that worked with North African refugees. “I became very interested in humanitarian work,” she recalls, “but I had no skill, and not too many humanitarian groups have a need for classical pianist or art history majors. So I thought maybe I’ll go back and get a management degree.”

While in business school, she interned with the consulting firm Booz Allen Hamilton, which offered her a full-time international position when she graduated. But circumstances intervened. She explains, “That was the year that the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia and ousted the Khmer Rouge, and hundreds of thousands of refugees fled to the border of Thailand. It was in the newspaper

every day.” She decided to defer her consulting work and instead go to Cambodia with two classmates, Neal Keny and Roger Brown. The idea was to work in refugee camps for the summer and write case studies on the management of relief operations. For her, it was “the sense of adventure and this draw to humanitarian work.”

That’s when her world got turned upside down: “Ten days after we arrived, our refugee camps were attacked by the Vietnamese and the whole area turned into a war zone. The needs became much, much greater, and several organizations withdrew. The organizations that stayed had an enormous crisis on their hands, so we decided to extend our stay.” Linda and Roger ended up writing a book, called *Rice, Rivalry, and Politics: Managing Cambodian Relief*, on the management of the relief effort—and they also started dating.

When the year came to a close, she honored her commitment to Booz Allen Hamilton and traded in interviews with ambassadors and jungle warlords for a suit and an office. She recalls, “When I returned to the States, I was working on the forty-fifth floor in midtown Manhattan wearing stockings, heels, and a suit. It was a shocking transition. . . . I threw myself into it, but I could never really get inspired.”

At a New Year’s gathering a couple of years later, a friend asked the revelers to reflect back on the year and their accomplishments. Linda remembers, “I looked back and was mainly depressed. I made a ton of money, I worked eighty hours a week, but I didn’t really feel that I had accomplished much of anything. I felt fairly empty.”

Linda and Roger—now married—concluded, *This is not what we want to do with our life*. That led her to a seeking phase in which she started examining, thinking, and becoming very open to what was around her. At the time, there was a severe famine in Sudan and Ethiopia, and she and Roger were drawn to helping. Through her former classmate, Neal Keny, they learned that a relief organization was looking for a team to go to Africa.

Linda explains, “The head of Save the Children called us and invited us to meet, so we flew down to New York to his apartment on a Sunday afternoon. He had just come back from Sudan and Ethiopia and painted this picture of incredible human devastation. He asked us to go over and launch a program for them.

Then he said, ‘But I need to know by tomorrow.’ We walked out of his apartment and looked at each other and decided on the spot. It seemed very impetuous but actually it wasn’t at all. We had been open to something like this. Three weeks later, we were in Khartoum.”

Save the Children had already raised \$2 million for this initiative, but it had never operated in that part of Africa, so Linda and Roger raised another \$10 million and built an emergency famine relief organization in Sudan. As she recalls, “It was intense. The crisis was enormous. We put a great deal of thought into creating a strong organization that was very entrepreneurial. We hired people and trained and developed them, and it became very large. We served about four hundred thousand famine victims. We had committed to staying there until the first good harvest. It was a job that was 24×7 in very tough conditions. . . . When we returned to the States, we were pretty burned out.”

They didn’t know what would come next, but they set certain goals for the next chapter of their lives: they wanted to create an organization on their own, do it together, and do something that would make a difference in people’s lives. With that in mind, they started taking “long walks with a pen and pad in hand and just dreaming.” Through an old friend from their consulting days, they were turned on to the idea of starting a network of work-site child-care centers, a type of business that didn’t exist at the time. For weeks, they analyzed it methodically, ultimately deciding that it could work.

The launch of Bright Horizons Family Solutions corporation was both invigorating and taxing. As Linda recounts:

We were very idealistic and wanted to make a difference, and we were going to do it quickly. Then we had a long, long period of struggle where we just hit brick wall after brick wall, and it took five times as long to get the company up than we had forecasted. It was really an idea before its time and it was hard to get support, but we stuck to our guns. . . . The company did almost collapse a few times. We were also starting a family at this very time and that’s not something I recommend to beginning entrepreneurs . . . but we stepped into it and I think having each other made a difference. If one of us started to lose our resolve, the other one could hold you up. A strong partnership really helped us through those tough times

and helped us keep focused on our original vision, and now we have done it.

Today, Bright Horizons operates more than six hundred day-care centers in the United States and Europe. Not long after launching, Linda and Roger also noticed that no one in the industry was serving the growing underclass of homeless children, so “though it made no logical sense” at the time—given the start-up challenges of the parent company—they launched Horizons for Homeless Children, a non-profit that has since created over one hundred play spaces for children in homeless shelters and three full-service child-care centers for homeless children.

One of the biggest challenges for Linda had to do with work-life balance. Linda recalls, “Here I was having a baby while I was running a child-care organization. . . . I had enormous support and great child care, but it was so difficult to be a parent and run this organization. . . . When I wasn’t with my baby, I felt guilty. When I wasn’t at work, I felt like I was letting things down there. It was a huge struggle, and I wanted to be great at both—to be a wonderful devoted mother and a great entrepreneur.” She later wrote a book, *Working Mother’s Guide to Life*, to help other working moms navigate that maze.

Looking back, Linda believes that allowing herself to have seeking phases while also remaining open to new opportunities that fit with her values has been essential to creating a life of adventure, service, and fulfillment—from Paris to the Cambodian border to Khartoum to the brighter horizons she and Roger have created for thousands of children, including their own.

*Life is either a daring adventure or nothing at all.*

—HELEN KELLER

Three stories, three lives—all different, all inspirational and instructive. As we have seen in each of these accounts, leading an extraordinary life entails a willingness to take chances and push beyond the boundaries of what is comfortable. Think back to Cory’s decision to move to Newark, face real danger, and run for office against an entrenched opponent. Or Gary’s decision to turn away a lucrative opportunity to sell his company in order to build a stronger organization aligned with his values. Or Linda

and Roger's decision to leave comfortable consulting careers to dedicate themselves to humanitarian work in Africa and child-care support in the United States.

Life entrepreneurs also draw strength from close relationships and build healthy support systems to help them accomplish their vision. Think about the early influence of Cory's parents and the important lesson Cory learned from Virginia Jones. For Gary, strength and inspiration came from the team he built at Clif Bar and the support he draws from his wife and children. For Linda and Roger, it was the commitment to stick together through the toughest challenges and thus grow stronger in the process.

In the end, our resolve to live our life "out loud" or as a "daring adventure" must come from within, first by understanding—and honoring—who we really are. We explain how in the next chapter.



# Praise for *Life Entrepreneurs*

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"Pick up this book and read it. It might change your life."

—**Stephen R. Covey**, best-selling author, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* and *The 8th Habit: From Effectiveness to Greatness*

"Business leaders and entrepreneurs alike will greatly benefit from *Life Entrepreneurs*. It captures the essential qualities of leadership. I highly recommend it."

—**Howard Schultz**, chairman, Starbucks Coffee Company

"Provocative reading . . . an intriguing, challenging guide for the next generation of leaders."

—**Wendy Kopp**, president and founder, Teach for America

"Gergen and Vanourek have done a spectacular job shining a light on a new approach to professional success and personal fulfillment . . . belongs on the nightstand of every thoughtful businessperson in America."

—**Daniel H. Pink**, *New York Times* best-selling author, *A Whole New Mind* and *Free Agent Nation*

"A fresh and vital approach to life and career planning. The book speaks directly to the younger generations of Americans who increasingly reject pigeon-holed and segmented careers. I highly recommend the book to anyone who is seeking The Good Life."

—**James O'Toole**, author, *Creating the Good Life*

"At last, a powerful guide to integrating life, work, purpose, and work-life balance . . . that will make a difference in the lives of leaders at every level. A great gift."

—**Frances Hesselbein**, chairman, Leader to Leader Institute; former CEO, Girl Scouts of America

"This book is true, smart, honest, hopeful, and helpful. Here's the good news: entrepreneurship isn't just a way of making a living—it's a way of life. Buy this book, read it, and then do it!"

—**Alan M. Webber**, co-founding editor, *Fast Company* magazine; former editorial director, *Harvard Business Review*

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JOSSEY-BASS™  
An Imprint of  
 WILEY

\$24.95 U.S. | \$29.99 CAN

ISBN 978-0-7879-8862-3

52495



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