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HARNESSING
THE POWER
OF TOTAL
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To Jacqueline—my muse, my rock, and a source of abundance in my life.

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Billye's Lesson I Never Forgot



It was a typical sunny summer morning, and my grandmother and I were eating a breakfast of hot cereal, fresh biscuits, and Karo syrup. Through a freshly Spic-and-Span'd window, I spotted a stranger trudging through our wheat field toward the house. He was walking slowly, deliberately, with his head down. With each lumbering step, he appeared larger and larger.

Soon my grandmother noticed him too. She grabbed my hand, and together we made our way toward the field. We stopped in the peach orchard, just on the other side of the electric fence that surrounded the wheat field.

"Can I help you, sir?" my grandmother called out.

The man looked at us with a shy smile and replied, "I pray so, ma'am, I pray so." He took a long breath and continued: "My name is Clarence, and I need a day's work and a hot meal. I'm at my wit's end, ma'am, and I have no other options. But I am a good worker."

My grandmother sized him up—he was middle-aged and African American with salt-and-pepper hair and wore an ashy black suit with a yellowing white dress shirt underneath. He looked harmless albeit shabby. She motioned for him to step over the fence and sit down with us on folding chairs around a card table in the orchard.

"I'm Billye," she said. "This here is my grandson, Tim. What's your story?"

"I've been walking for days, coming from my hometown, Dripping Springs, Oklahoma. I lost everything I owned in a swindle. I have nothing left but my winning smile, what's in this here pillowcase, and a few relatives who are willing to help me start over in Arizona."

He wiped his brow and said, "I just need some work, ma'am. I need someone to believe in me, only for today."

Billye looked to the sky, as if seeking advice, looked back at him, and then said, "I'll pay you ten dollars to work from right now till sundown. First, I need you to prune the tops of these peach trees I can't reach them. Next, clean out the barn. And finally, if there's time left, you'll need to climb a ladder and touch up the trim on top of it."

Clarence hung his jacket on the limb of a peach tree and got right to work. So did I, walking around behind him as his pseudoforeman, commenting on his progress, and peppering him with all kinds of questions. He answered most of them with grunts. He finished the pruning in less than an hour and then started to clean out the barn. It was a dusty and herculean task.

Billye came out periodically to check up on us. Later she explained that she was making sure I wasn't leaning on his broom—a Southern phrase for "goofing off on the job."

At high noon she served lunch in the orchard on paper plates. It was a bounty: sliced hot dogs with ranch-style beans, mustard potato salad, Texas toast, and sweet tea. Clarence dug into his meal like

he'd dug into his work that morning. His massive hands made his plastic fork look like a toothpick.

~~The more Clarence ate, the more conversational he became. He started to answer my questions~~ more thoughtfully. He also started to dish me advice. He lowered his eyes and said, "I want to tell you something about your grandmother. She's special. She has faith!" He stopped to take a swig of his sweet iced tea.

"Miss Billye," he continued, "is an angel that God put on this earth to have faith in a stranger who needed someone to trust him. People like her make the world go round, boy. You understand?"

I nodded. I knew my grandmother was special. She had taken me into her home at a time when my own mother couldn't or wouldn't keep me. Billye loved me as if I were her own son, agreeing to raise me from the time I was four, even though she was getting on in years. She declared from the time I could walk that God had big plans for me. That's the kind of person she was—a big giver and believer in people.

"In the last few days I've had guns waved at me and dogs sicced on me," Clarence said. "I thought no one would give me a chance. But your grandmother did." He wiped his lips and summed up my lunch lesson: "See how happy she is? You will be too if you follow her example. You learn from your grandma's faith in people. Inherit some of her sweetness."

After lunch, Clarence really stepped up his efforts, as if energized by his meal. He cleaned out the entire barn, hauled off garbage, and painted all its trim.

Billye joined us at the end of the day to evaluate Clarence's work and pay him. She took a good look around, smiled, and said, "Clarence, you and I agreed on ten dollars for a good day's work. But today you gave a *great* day's work. You are a go-getter, and I appreciate that."

She pulled a worn twenty-dollar bill, a small fortune to us at the time, out of her clutch purse. She handed it to him and said, "For twice a good day's work, you deserve twice a good day's pay."

Wide-eyed, Clarence thanked her profusely. "You're an answer to prayer, ma'am."

"Speaking of prayer," she quickly replied, "would you pray with us before you leave?" Clarence eagerly obliged.

The three of us got down on our knees in the barnyard, just by the horse tie. Clarence went first. His prayer was brief but heartfelt. He thanked God for bringing him to this farm. He thanked God for Billye. He asked God to look over our farm and keep us safe and healthy.

Billye's prayer went on a bit longer, as I knew it would. Her prayers were always epic and usual. She made my knees go numb. She was, to quote Pastor Heck, "a prayer warrior." She started out by thanking God for Clarence's character and what it taught me about the value of hard work. And then, sobbing in joy, she thanked God for the opportunity to be a helpful part of his journey to Arizona where he would make what she called "his great comeback." She asked God to put other Christian families in his path over the coming days.

With a final amen, she and I stood and dusted ourselves off. Clarence, however, stayed down on his knees, observing a lingering moment of silent prayer. As he knelt, we both noticed the holes in the soles of his shoes. They were the size of silver dollars, big enough to reveal his dirt-brown socks.

When Clarence stood up, Billye said, "After you put away the tools, come by the house on your way out. I have something you might want."

I helped Clarence clean up the tools, and when we got to the back door of the house, Billye was already there, beaming and holding up a brand-new pair of black wing-tip, go-to-Sunday-church shoes. I knew they had belonged to her deceased father, Tommie King, who had bought them a few months before he passed away. Billye had kept them in her bedroom closet "for a sunny day." (She never planned for rainy ones.)

"I hope these fit," she said, handing the shoes to Clarence. He quickly sat down on the porch swing to try them on. Slipping them on effortlessly and tying them, he smiled up at us and said, "They fit."

like they were made for me.”

~~His eyes were glassy with tears. He shook Billye’s hand and patted me on the head, then picked up his pillowcase of possessions and strutted off confidently toward the west, on his way to Arizona. I was in tears too, but I wiped them away so Clarence and Billye wouldn’t see me bawling. I felt sorry for Clarence and, at the same time, elated at what we’d been able to do for him that day.~~

As we watched Clarence walk off into the sunset, Grandmother put her arm around me, squeezing me tightly to her side.

“Timothy,” she said in a near whisper, her voice rising with each word, “today is a special day for us. Don’t ever forget this feeling. Today we are rich!”

With the cadence of a minister, she repeated herself for emphasis:

“Today. We. Are. Rich.”

* * *

A few nights later Billye and I were having dinner at Burger Chef, a monthly treat. We split a chicken fried-steak sandwich and a large bag of crinkle-cut fries and sipped Dr. Pepper over crushed ice. There’s just something about food that brings out philosophizing.

When we finished, as Billye gathered up the wrappers and napkins, I asked her, “When you said ‘We are rich,’ the other day, what did you mean? You mean rich like Woody”—the owner of Turner’s Department Store on Main Street—“or like Lane’s dad?” (the attorney who drove the best car in church).

“Nope,” she replied. “I meant that we have all we need, enough to share with Clarence. And because we were able to share, we’re worth something. By being able and willing to give, we are rich.”

The puzzled look on my face must have told her I didn’t get it. She continued, “There’s bank account rich, and there’s rich in spirit. The second kind is achieved when you make a difference. It’s the forever kind of rich that no one can take away from you but you.”

She held up her Dr. Pepper cup and tipped it so I could see inside. She had drunk about half of it.

“You see this?” she asked. “‘Rich’ means the cup’s got enough in it to quench my thirst. More than enough. As far as I’m concerned, it’s full, running over. If *you’re* still thirsty, you can have some of mine. Get it?”

“But what if you get thirsty later?” I countered.

She took a little sip and then continued, unfazed by my question.

“I’m *confident*,” she stated, emphasizing the word’s first syllable. “I believe in myself, all the people in my life, and even when everything else fails, God. Through all these beliefs, I know there’s always more where this came from.”

She had a twinkle in her eye, as if she knew she was teaching me something important. And she was. I understood that the key to being rich was the belief that there would always be more: the twenty-dollar bill, the soda pop, friends, family—anything.

I’ll never forget the last thing she said as she pressed the buzzer for the carhop to pick up the tray. “Rich is a full cup and a light heart.”

As we waited, her words hung in the air. I didn’t quite know at that time the power of those words, but I could sense it: Billye wasn’t just quoting truisms to me. She lived these truths because she had learned them the hard way. For Billye, life was a lesson in the ephemeral nature of being bank-account rich. She had come from a family of dirt farmers in Oklahoma who had saved just enough money

buy some land on the outskirts of Clovis on the eastern plains of New Mexico. Billye's father, ~~Tommie King, worked hard, and everything he touched in Clovis turned to gold.~~ He raised bumper crops, which allowed him to purchase even more land and a gas station/hotel. Unlike the rest of Billye's high school classmates, she had her own car at seventeen. When she drove down Main Street, the boys on the football team would run beside the car and jump on the running boards to get a ride. Far away from the turmoil on Wall Street, her father was one of the few who had money to spend on machinery, fertilizer, and manpower.

Then, during the 1940s, Tommie suffered a setback. For more than a decade, he'd been sending most of his money back to Oklahoma, where a pair of cousins had a bank. As it turned out, they were swindlers. Virtually overnight the Kings became land rich and cash poor.

By the 1960s, my grandmother Billye Coffman, now married to a retired air force officer, had earned it all back through hard work. She had a prosperous farm and a hair salon that did a brisk business.

A few years later, she lost it all again. Lloyd, her husband, poisoned her reputation at the air base where most of her clients lived. He ran up credit all over town, then told banker friends that Billye was crazy. When he left town, all she had was the stuff in the house. She was land rich and cash poor again.

But through these highs and lows, Billye learned a valuable life lesson: You can't control your material wealth, but by cultivating a strong sense of confidence, you *can* control your attitude about whether there's enough to go around.

Billye's charity toward Clarence was a part of her mental exercise program to cultivate her sense of confidence and faith. Even though that twenty-dollar bill was gone, we were still having our monthly burgers and getting by just fine.

As Billye turned the ignition switch on her Buick Electra, she summed up the idea: "Being rich is a decision that stems from a sense of *confidence*. It's right up here," she said, tapping her forefinger on the side of her head. "Listen to me: Confidence is rocket fuel." She revved the car's engine for emphasis. "It'll fill you up and make you believe there will be enough of what you need. The other day with Clarence was your first lesson in abundant living."

At that exact moment I realized that Clarence was right about one thing: I'd be a smart kid to study my grandmother and be like her. He was wrong about her being an angel, though. She was my confidence teacher. A tingle crawled up the back of my neck as it occurred to me that *Clarence* had been the angel, put in our field that day to teach me a lesson about life. I didn't realize at the time that it was a lesson I would stray from but never forget.

PART 1

The Case for Confidence



1

Sideways Years

I first met Eric Goldhart in 1997.¹ With his toned physique and strong, confident demeanor, he was known as a “rock star” at his company. As the top producer and de facto sales leader at his dot-com start-up in Dallas, Eric possessed a charismatic let-me-lead-you personality that could convince even the most conservative staffing professionals to spend money with his Internet company. Eternal optimistic, Eric had a ready answer for any prospect’s objection. In fact, he loved skeptical clients and tough audiences because he saw them not as obstacles but as opportunities.

Eric and I met when I was asked to give a presentation at his company’s annual sales-awards dinner. We hit it off immediately because we had a lot in common: We’d both been raised by our grandmothers. We liked to read the same types of books. We’d both been successful in our fields and had similar dreams of running our own companies someday.

In the months that followed, we spun it up over long lunches, exchanging tips and dreaming about when we would eventually make it big in the business world. And the next year I wasn’t surprised to hear that Eric had been recruited by a Seattle-based leasing company as the western regional vice president of sales. As far as I knew, Eric was well on his way to running Microsoft someday.

I didn’t hear from Eric again until early 2002, when an e-mail from him arrived, asking me for a few minutes on the phone. I could tell by the tone of his e-mail that something was very wrong. This was not the “rock star” I once knew. This was someone who had lost his way and needed help. I called him that weekend, and we talked for over an hour as he laid out his problem in detail.

Since 2001, the dot-com industry had been under fire from Wall Street, and Eric’s region, which stretched from Silicon Valley to Seattle, had been the hardest hit. Each week start-ups of all types were running out of cash and shuttering their businesses, breaking leases, and selling cubicles and computers for pennies on the dollar.

The mood in the industry was darker than the weather, and just as depressing. As surviving companies implemented massive layoffs, Eric found himself pummeled from every side by messages of fear and insecurity. When he worked out at the gym, talking heads on cable television spelled out all the ways the coming recession would likely unfold. Newspapers ran headlines hysterical predicting the end of the Internet era. Even Eric’s coworkers were growing increasingly concerned and wondering when the hammer would drop on them, too.

Even though Eric was a long-standing optimist, he couldn’t resist the fear chatter. Against his better judgment, he read, listened to, and viewed these scarelines like drivers who can’t look away from a car-crash scene. Before long, his positive outlook evaporated. He began to question his ability and commitment and to wonder whether he had enough talent and drive to survive the impending

economic storm. He even started to feel guilty for taking downtime or enjoying himself, attributing the root of the dot-com industry's failures to an overabundance of fun.

Suffering from a shortage of confidence, Eric became doubtful about his own company's chance of survival, even though senior management was holding to a more positive, wait-and-see attitude. Deciding to take on this fight himself, Eric hunkered down and told himself that it was up to him to come up with instant sales solutions.

He stopped going to the gym because he felt guilty when he wasn't working. Leaving work at six in the evening felt morally wrong—inasmuch as the ship was presumably sinking—so he stayed late at the office, missing dinner with his wife and two toddlers.

Even when he was at home, his mind stayed in overdrive mode. He snapped at his wife and kids, locked himself away in the den with his computer, and sat glued to the cable news channels for hours at a time. He stopped having morning devotions—they seemed insipid in the face of reality—and attending church with his family. The only thing that mattered was finding some way out of the mess in which he found himself.

Trapped in an emotional spin cycle and sleeping fitfully at best, Eric started chewing his fingernails and developed puffy circles under his eyes. At work, his productivity plummeted faster than the stock market. He wasted hours rereading the same set of bad numbers from a variety of sources. He poring over an endless supply of downward projections and combed the Internet for more bad news on the horizon.

For every minute Eric worked, he worried for ten. And his outlook was contagious. He badgered his salespeople to work harder because times were apocalyptic. In meetings, he filled his coworkers with personal doubts and fears, which led to a swift decline in personal productivity on their part. Customer sales calls often ended up with a gloom-and-doom session that left all parties worse off than when they started.

At the end of the year, Eric's boss gave him a lukewarm annual review and a warning: "Get your groove back, or I'll have to replace you." Eric had never been demoted or fired in his young career, and now he was on the brink of both.

At this point, Eric was running on empty. He was in a full-blown personal recession. He was shrinking as a person, drinking far too much, and chasing away everyone in his life. He knew things had to change, and on New Year's Eve he made a resolution: *I'm going to get help, and I'm going to make a comeback.*

That's when he wrote to me.

As I listened to Eric talk on the phone that afternoon, I had to admit that his story sounded eerily familiar. He described 2001 as a year he failed to move forward in any part of his life; in other words, he had experienced his first "sideways" year. At that point, I knew I could help him. He'd only had one of those years. I'd had fifteen of them in a row. My sideways years had stretched from my early twenties to my midthirties, and I was proof positive that you can fill your tank back up and come roaring back.

I knew that the way for me to help Eric was to share my story with him, one that I'd always been reluctant to tell.

* * *

It was late summer 1981, and I was out for a spin west of town in my candy-apple-red Pontiac Astr

rocking out to an eight-track tape of the band Yes on my new car stereo. The song "Close to the Edge" was playing, and I was singing along at the top of my lungs when I noticed flashing headlights in my rearview mirror. When I pulled over, I recognized my uncle Jim's black Monte Carlo rolling up behind me. We got out of our cars, and when he approached me, he put his hand on my shoulder and said with a heavy sigh, "I don't know how else to say this. Your father's been murdered, Tim. I'm sorry."

I stood there on the side of the road in shock, mumbling the words back to him, "My father's been murdered. . . ."

As I followed Jim back to the house, a slide show of times with Dad played in my mind. I could smell his aftershave—he always wore Brut—and feel his whiskers pressing against my cheek as he hugged me. Fighting tears, I tried to distract myself by changing tapes in the car, only to hear Diana Ross and the Supremes sing "Someday We'll Be Together." I had to keep my eyes glued to Jim's taillights for the rest of the way home to avoid driving off the road.

Even though I had spent only a week or so with my dad each summer when I was growing up, he had made a big impression on me. He had been forced to give me up twice: first to his wife (my mom) and then later to his own mother (Billye) when my mom decided she couldn't raise me. My dad had a jack-of-all-trades career and a big-city lifestyle, and he knew I would be better off with Billye. Even though we were apart, he called me often, mostly to tell me how much he loved me.

The week before his death, my father, Tom Sanders, had accepted a writing position with a television production company in Los Angeles, the same city where I was attending college. It was the first time we would be living in the same city, and I had been looking forward to getting to know him better. He was funny, smart, and sophisticated and had always been one of my biggest fans.

Now, it was all gone. Our reunion seemed to have been canceled by fate.

When I got home, Billye was there, surrounded by friends and family. She knew I would be a wreck, so when she saw me come through the front door, she stood up and extended her arms toward me. She was ready to comfort me, as she always did during my difficult moments. Billye had always been my rock. Her solid faith and serene confidence had inspired me to achieve so much during high school and my first two years in college.

For years Billye had taught me confidence lessons as I sat perched on the edge of the bathtub. While she shaped her beehive hairdo, she shared tips I could employ the next day. Her lessons had paid off in my life. I went from being labeled a "discipline problem" and being placed in the local special education program in second grade to returning to public school and making the honor roll in sixth grade, in spite of being called "Short Bus Sanders" by the other kids. By my senior year of high school, I was on a roll: class president and state champion in debate. Just a few months before my dad's death, I had received a debate scholarship to finish college at a prestigious school on the West Coast, after winning several junior college national championships. Yes, Billye's hard-won life lessons on confidence had turned my life around.

Yet on that day, something inside me snapped. As Billye tried to get me to join her prayer circle of family and friends, I snarled, "Why would God do this to him? Why would he do this to me?" She was crestfallen and hurt. She didn't have the energy to pursue me. All she could do was bow her head and begin to pray.

Billye's words about a loving God didn't make sense to me anymore. In an instant my faith had been shattered. Suddenly, I no longer trusted anyone. Since all of Billye's principles were based, in some part, on her faith, her teachings no longer had the ring of truth to me.

When I left Clovis to move to California later that month, rejecting everything Billye had taught me over the years about how to live life, I didn't take a single book from the family library with me, even though Billye offered them all. I didn't even bring my Bible.

As I went through the motions of my junior year in college at Loyola Marymount University, everything was different. I no longer cared about earning good grades or making something of myself. I skipped classes, took shortcuts in my research, and coasted along, just getting by with what little confidence I had leftover from the previous years.

My sideways years had begun.

When I moved to Tucson to attend graduate school, my attitude shifted from a simple lack of faith and trust to one of full-blown negativity. I decided that my championship years as a debater had been little more than dumb luck, and I figured I'd better take whatever I could get in terms of a job. When I landed a consulting position at Hughes Aircraft, I again assumed it was a fluke. Since I couldn't imagine ever being successful in business, I didn't take the position seriously.

Instead, pursuing my passion for music, I joined a local band and settled into a month-to-month lifestyle that eventually left me in a broken-down school bus in an RV park just east of Dallas, Texas.

A few years later, I met Jacqueline, who became the love of my life. I was a mess at the time, but she saw something beneath my black rocker clothes and penchant for pessimism. Her son, Anthony, was four years old at the time, and I fell in love with him, too. Still, I didn't have the confidence or ambition to strive for more than living paycheck to paycheck.

I found a sales job in the cable television business that leveraged my gift of gab. And even though I made good money, I always found a way to sabotage my path toward management. I was earning a solid income, but I still wasn't happy. I had no goals other than to be discovered one day by a record mogul and stop working for "the man."

By the spring of 1996, I was near the breaking point. I quit my job, cashed in my 401(k), and devoted my energy to getting a record deal—even though I knew deep down that it was a next-to-impossible feat. I took odd jobs to help with the rent, and we ate on the tips that Jacqueline made as a hairstylist. Each day I became more disappointed in myself, and one afternoon while driving home I had a sudden impulse to jerk the car's steering wheel to the right and drive full speed into the concrete freeway barrier. The compulsion was so strong that I had to pull the car over and stop until I regained my composure. It wasn't the first time such a dark thought had crossed my mind that year. When I told Jacqueline about it that night, I cried uncontrollably, shaking in her arms as she tried to console me.

I was far away from the wide-eyed kid Billye had taught to love life and achieve great things. I knew I needed to find a way out of my sideways years, even if it meant going backward—back to the time and place where life made sense.

The Awakening

Eric and I had our second coaching phone call the week of Valentine's Day 2002. I began our conversation with a question: "What are you *not* doing today that you *were* doing when I first met you?"

"I'm not sure what you mean," Eric said, laughing nervously.

"What investments in yourself and others are you no longer making?" I asked. "What daily or weekly practices for a better *you* have fallen by the wayside?"

If Eric could answer these questions, I knew he could pull himself out of his negativity and get back on track. There was power in these words. How did I know? I was living proof. Billye had asked the exact questions of me in 1996, just months after I had nearly rammed my car into a concrete wall.

* * *

I had been emotionally disconnected from Billye ever since my dad's death. In my mind, I wasn't the little kid sitting on the edge of the bathtub anymore, listening to her spout life lessons. I'd gone off to college in Los Angeles and learned how to doubt. Now I was "worldly."

But when dark thoughts of worthlessness and suicide began to be part of my daily routine, I knew it was time for me to reconnect with my rock in life—Billye. During the Thanksgiving holidays, Jacqueline and I flew to Lubbock and rented a car to drive to Clovis. We bought a disposable camera at the local Walgreens, and I gave Jacqueline a tour of my hometown, taking pictures of places and things that had meant something to me when I was growing up: the wheat farm, the cemetery where my father was buried, the high school I attended. Billye encouraged me to take pictures of my debating trophy collection in my bedroom, which she had left proudly on display, but I refused.

"That was a hundred years ago," I snapped. I had little confidence of ever returning to the glory days of my earlier years. To me, those types of achievements would remain in the distant past forever.

Once we were back in Dallas, I turned in the camera for developing and got back twenty or so prints. As I flipped through the photos—snapshots of the farm, Billye sitting at the kitchen table, the cemetery where my dad was buried—the last picture in the stack nearly stopped my heart. It was a picture of the water tower in Sudan, Texas—the very spot where Billye took final delivery of me after my mom had abandoned me in a hotel. It wasn't the first time my hapless mom had misplaced me, but in Billye's eyes, it would be the last.

As I stared at that photo, it dawned on me that it couldn't have been a worse time for Billye to adopt a child. ~~In addition to supporting me, she was also responsible for her eighty-five-year-old mother Hattie.~~ Billye's twenty-year marriage had just broken up, the bank accounts were dry, and her credit had been extended to the breaking point.

My mind floated back to the hot summer day when two imposing repo men had forced their way into our kitchen. Within minutes, our refrigerator and stove were loaded into a white truck, and our kitchen sat empty. That was the first time I ever saw Billye cry.

But it didn't take her long to shake herself off. After locking herself in the bathroom for a couple of hours, Billye came out and announced that we would be just fine. Ever industrious, she talked to neighbors and church members, trading haircuts and bookkeeping for used appliances until our kitchen was back in working order—even though nothing matched.

Billye had made the decision to claim me in spite of the sacrifices it would require, and it was that choice that turned an unwanted and abandoned little boy into someone who felt valued and cherished. As I stared at the grainy image of that water tower, a familiar tingle crawled down the back of my neck. A quiet voice reasoned that if Billye could lose everything and still come out on top, I could get over my dad being taken away from me. For me, the water tower was symbolic of hope: Anybody's story can start over again and, through the love of others, have a happy ending.

That night, I opened up a book Billye had given me: *Think and Grow Rich*. It was one of her most cherished books in the family library, handed down by her father, Tommie King. Flipping to a random page, I found these words to be a cool drink to my soul: "Go back into your yesterdays, at times, and bathe your mind in the beautiful memories of past love. It will soften the influence of the present worries and annoyances. It will give you a source of escape from the unpleasant realities of life and maybe—who knows?—your mind will yield to you, during this temporary retreat into the world of . . . plans which may change the entire financial or spiritual status of your life."²

I looked across the bed at my wife, Jacqueline, who always believed in me and was willing to wait for me to grow into my potential. I thought of our son, Anthony, snoozing in the next room, a precious young man who deserved a powerful father. I snapped the book closed, blinked back tears, and let the water-tower moment linger in my mind as sleep descended on me.

The next day I called Billye during my lunch hour.

"I'm ready to go back in time," I offered up, "to the lessons you taught me, the books you told me to read, and the daily do's you gave me. I've been terrible to everyone, and I've got no one to hold me accountable for it but myself."

"Hmm," she replied. "Sounds like your heart is tender and your mind is open."

"Jacqueline and Anthony deserve better," I continued. "They deserve a champion."

"Let me ask you a few questions," she said, surprising me that she wasn't immediately launching into a sermonette.

"What are you *not* doing these days that you *were* doing during your senior year in high school and your early days in college?" she asked, like a rural-route Socrates.

I thought back to the lessons she had taught me during my teen years, the habits she had helped me develop, and the principles upon which I had built my success. They were simple ideas, really, but at the same time, deep and powerful: Feed Your Mind Good Stuff, Exercise Your Gratitude Muscles, Prepare Yourself.

I ticked off a list of daily rituals that were no longer part of my routine: reading for the good of my soul, doing things to improve my personal résumé every year, volunteering, taking care of my body.

Billye listened carefully and then confirmed that I was on the right track.

"You know what to do," she said, "because I taught you. Your life lacks the daily practices you once had. You've taken your faith and your spiritual practices for granted. It's time to go back to what

works—back to the basics. And it starts with rereading the masters: James Allen, Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, Napoleon Hill, Dale Carnegie, Claude Bristol, and Maxwell Maltz.”

My mind swirled with excitement as we talked. I *knew* how to do this! I had simply allowed the uncertainties of life to get in the way of doing what I needed to do.

“It all starts today,” I said as I wrapped up our call. “Your Timothy is back among the living, Mom.” Billye always wanted me to call her Mom, as she’d raised me as one of her own. When I did, she’d get that sparkle of pleasure in her voice.

“Today we are rich!” she crowed.

And since that day, I’ve never been poor.

The Good Loop

Billye's question on that lunch-hour phone call set me on a new, exciting path. I went from being an entry-level salesperson at a start-up multimedia business to an executive at Yahoo! in fewer than four years. And then, suddenly, I got a book deal, which launched me into new speaking opportunities. And it all started with getting back to the basic principles of living that Billye had taught me when I was a kid. Following the principles of confidence had definitely put me in a good loop.

So when I asked the same question of Eric on that Valentine's Day, I knew from experience that the question contained a lot of power.

"What are you *not* doing today that you *were* doing when I first met you?"

At first, Eric's answer was flippant: "Having fun and being high on life."

But when I countered, "No, Eric, I mean, what investments in yourself and others are you no longer making? What daily or weekly practices for a better *you* have fallen by the wayside?" He got more circumspect about what he had let go of: "Reading business books. I've definitely lost the luxury of reading about the future. . . . Giving, sharing, teaching, coaching, pitching in, networking, and helping my customers succeed. I'm in survival mode, dude."

My phone call with Eric got him thinking about all the habits he had given up during the dot-com crash. He had let his uncertainty about the future knock his entire life out of whack. Billye had always warned me about that: "Uncertainty is a spiritual enemy that will siphon out your rocket fuel. It turns go-getters into giver-uppers." As I hung up the phone after talking to Eric, I wondered whether Billye's question would make a difference in his life as it had in mine.

On the first Monday in 2003, I got my answer. Eric sat down at his laptop to tap out an update for me on his progress. The tone of the note signaled right away that he was in a good place emotionally and spiritually. The subject line said it all: *I'm baaaack!*

He explained how he'd thought about my questions and changed his daily media diet from "grist for the mill" to "good stuff." He popped CDs of great books into his car every day on his long commute, starting with *Good to Great* by Jim Collins. Instead of combing through the *Financial Times* every morning, he read inspiring devotionals. Instead of watching cable television news, he tuned in to his kids playing with the family dog. He saw his outlook improve almost immediately. "You have no idea what a difference a year makes! I changed what went into my noggin, what came out of my mouth, and what's come in my life!" Eric was in a good loop, thanks to Billye's principles of confidence. His thoughts led to positive actions. They created positive results in his life, which encouraged him to continue in his good loop. That's how it works.

Again and again I've noticed in other people's lives the same experience Eric and I have had.

Unless you are living the principles of confidence fully, suffering or uncertainty can shake up your belief in others—or even in God. Eric faced adversity, and I experienced a personal tragedy. Eric lost self-confidence first, and then eventually trust and faith. I had lost faith first, and then eventually trust in others and my own self-confidence. We had both slipped into a negative loop, but the result was the same: sideways years. Both Eric and I drifted during our times of crisis because we had underestimated the importance of maintaining our confidence with life-giving habits.

Billye knew from experience the crucial link between confidence and achievement, but multiple studies have confirmed that when you *believe* you'll be successful, you achieve a calmness that improves your ability to slow life's game down and see things more clearly. As Dr. Peale says, when you conquer worry, you can “relax for easy power.”³

Countless studies pioneered by Dr. Albert Bandura document this clarity gain in students who believe they are prepared for a test and confident in their abilities to ace it. When you think you'll get an A, the test is an opportunity to shine, not a daunting task. Your relaxed mind is able to add two plus two and come up with four, in contrast to the nervous mind, which can be fraught with basic errors in math, logic, reason, and judgment. A modern study conducted at Goldsmiths University of London concluded that confidence is just as important as one's IQ in a testing environment. Think of it this way: Your mind is either clear or cluttered with negative thoughts. Self-confidence is a purifier of sorts that reduces the chatter in your head and allows you to fall into a state of flow. You have likely felt this during an activity you consider yourself very good at. You don't really have to think about what you're doing; you just do it.

Many people I've talked to point out how they are more influenced by people's credentials than by their perspectives, but I think that's wishful thinking on their parts. Carnegie Mellon University professor Don A. Moore researched this proposition and through a carefully crafted experiment found that humans are more likely to accept a person's advice because of the communicator's level of certainty than because of his or her track record or résumé. Show me someone who lights up a room, commands respect, and charms everyone, and I'll point out the underlying energy that makes it all possible: confidence.

* * *

In the years following my conversation with Billye, and then with Eric, I became convinced of my next assignment: to inspire a new generation to model total confidence at a time when fear was spreading like a virus.⁴ Once again, I started by going back to the source of those lessons—Billye.

What follows in part 2 are seven principles distilled from Billye's life and teachings. I have tested them by studying the research on motivation and by talking to master motivational experts. The principles will change your life. I know because they have turned my own life around twice—first when they launched me into a good loop in my high school years, and second when they powered me out of my sideways years in my thirties. They will have an immediate impact on your perspective, and you'll be able to measure that impact through your increased performance. You'll sleep better, be happier, and do the world more good than you did before you learned them. Eventually, life will start spinning in a good loop for you as it did for Eric and for me. Some of the principles will be consistent with what you've been raised to believe. Others might be different—even difficult to swallow—but all that has no bearing on their effectiveness.

Each of the following chapters contains a principle followed by a set of practices designed

improve your outlook in two areas: your circumstances and the participants (including you) who will be a part of your new future. I'm not going to try to make this sound easy. These principles require a lot of work. You'll have to invest time and energy to live by them, and you'll likely need some patience to stick with them. But my promise to you is that if you do, you will lead a life of consistent achievement—a life that continues to move forward, which can only create goodness for everyone around you. A life in which a set of principles works to keep you on track, regardless of whatever comes along.

If you bought this book because you have struggled recently and want your “swagger” back, then this is your water-tower moment, a time for renewal. If you are a confident person who wants to stay confident, this is a way to keep yourself moving forward. The secret to renewal and true confidence is simple: Get back to the basics.

PART 2

**The Principles of
Total Confidence**



4

[Principle 1]

Feed Your Mind Good Stuff

Billye got up with the chickens at the crack of dawn and yet kept bankers' hours. What did she do during the hours in between? She fed her mind good stuff.

During my childhood, I observed her morning routine hundreds of times. When she got out of bed she would walk out on her patio and slowly stretch. Then she'd sit down in her easy chair in the living room and read the Bible for about fifteen minutes. After pouring her first cup of coffee, she'd read a book, a devotional, or the latest edition of *The Midnight Cry* or *Guideposts*. Meanwhile, the *Clover News Journal*, the town's local paper, would sit on the front porch with the rubber band still on it. After a half hour or so of mindful reading, Billye would make notes in her journal, mostly insights from the morning's study.

On many mornings, she followed her reading with a phone call to one of her closest friends, who followed a similar morning mind practice. They talked about what they had read or thought about and often giggled, too. Billye's final piece of the prework morning was a long prayer as she knelt in front of her easy chair. Afterward, she'd get up, eat breakfast, and get ready for a hard day's work.

Billye never watched television during the day. When she occasionally tuned in to the news, she trusted only a few news sources, such as Walter Cronkite or Edward R. Murrow. "The rest of them," she'd say, "are scare merchants, selling soap by dirtying our minds." She watched only movies and television programs that had positive themes and avoided violence or vulgarity with the switch of channel. To her, the *R* in an *R* rating stood for "rubbish."

Billye was just as judicious in her response to what others tried to put in her head. She avoided "gossip snipes" as if they had an infectious disease. She even dumped negative-minded friends after one too many offenses. When one of the ladies at our church asked her why a Christian woman would quit friends over the words they used, Billye would paraphrase Dr. Norman Vincent Peale from *The Power of Positive Thinking*: "What comes out of the mind is what you put in the mind. You must feed your mind like you feed your body."

Her positive-intake plan wasn't selfish—it was purposeful. The filter she put on what or whom she listened to wasn't prudish—it was prudent. The secret to positive thinking, she had learned, lies in consuming the right mind food. From waking thoughts to the edge of sleep, she fed her mind mostly good stuff.

Rick, a friend of mine from my Yahoo! days, had a different morning routine—one much more familiar to many of us. When he woke up—usually springing out of bed right after he slapped his alarm off—he fired up the coffee pot and booted his laptop. He downloaded his e-mails, many

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