

You GET ONE SHOT
AT LIFE
AIM FOR SUCCESS

*Secrets of
Living a Meaningful Life*

Aaron Lumpkin

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Introduction

Sandy Walters had it all. She was God's gift to the world. She was chosen Homecoming Queen and Cheerleading Captain. She had been the Student Council's Vice-President in the 11th grade and President in the 12th grade; Class Favorite in the 10th and 11th grades, and a member of the Beta Club for four years. Her life seemed almost perfect. She was smart, beautiful, and popular.

I was reading about Ms. Walters while waiting to speak to the inmates at a women's prison. When I entered the dull, dreary room where the women were kept, I noticed that some of the ladies were so unkempt that they didn't seem to care how they looked. All the women were wearing the same prison attire: red shirts and pants that didn't fit. Some of the ladies were wearing signs around their necks with various messages on them such as, "I must listen better," or "I talk too much." These were grown women. Their faces had defeated looks and many of the ladies did not seem to care about anything. Their spirits were broken because they had suffered a lot of discouragement.

The contrast between the Homecoming Queen and inmates was striking. The Homecoming Queen probably woke up eager to begin her day while many of the women in the prison woke up dreading their day—and some would rather be dead.

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The contrast struck me so dramatically that I felt driven to understand why some people seem to have everything and for others mere existence is hell. I became resolved to encourage people who feel they are only average to reach for the stars, and from that moment on, I have devoted a large part of my life to that cause. I have triumphed over adversity in my own life, and because of my success, I believe that everyone has what it takes to live meaningful lives.

We get one shot at life. If our lives lack meaning, happiness and purpose, we need to consider how not to throw our lives away through apathy, indifference, self-pity and hopelessness. We can't allow other people's opinions, our learned behaviors, self-doubts, our poor self-images, our misfortunes, and our unwise choices to keep us from living rich, meaningful and exciting lives. **We have the right to be happy.**

There are two main reasons why many of us do not live more colorful, energetic, enthusiastic, compelling, and inspiring lives. First, many of us have not made a diligent effort to overcome the negative feelings that we have developed over the years. Some of us have decided that we are not smart enough, not lucky enough, not deserving of a better existence, so we resign ourselves to living mediocre lives.

The second reason is that we have allowed *others* to determine whether or not we are happy. Society says we must be good-looking, educated, accomplished, wealthy, and clever to have true value in this world. And who is making all these rules? People—imperfect people who in many cases operate largely out of self interest, people who don't know what they really want, people who talk a lot but say little, people who play psychological games.

Introduction

It's time to see life for what is really is. All the rewards in life do not go to the lucky, the strong, the wealthy, the attractive, or the popular. The true rewards go to those who are able to see life for what it really is—**a fascinating and complex experience.**

Right now would be a great time to reflect on our lives and ask ourselves some serious questions. Have we resolved to live our lives the way we currently are? Is there anything that can be improved? Are we running on automatic and simply responding to stimulus? Are we **waiting** on something to motivate us to live more exciting lives?

This book is written for people who are not perfect and know that they are not perfect. The book is for people who do not have their lives totally together. Many people act as if they have no problems, trying to convince other people that they have it all together. But, even if they are not honest enough right now to recognize their problems, eventually they will have to. Life itself will make them honest.

Life is a struggle for all of us. I have made mistakes and I continue to mistakes. The Bible says all of us are imperfect. So why can't we share our humanity in a spirit of helping and encouraging one another? Whether we are wrestling with lust, pride, envy, selfishness, lack of confidence, poor self-concept, or the loss of a loved one, life can be a daily challenge—and we need to realize this fact.

It doesn't do anyone any good to go through life pretending that everything is ok when everything is not ok.

All of us are imperfect.

CHAPTER ONE

Making Our Lives Count

—LIVING LIVES THAT MATTER—

Why is life such a challenge? Why does life seem more wearisome for some people than it is for others? Why do some people seem to have all the fun and all the luck? Why are so many people unable to find real meaning and happiness in life?

Is it possible for us to find more excitement, adventure, romance, and experience more of the feelings that make us **feel alive**? Is there some central truth that will help us live richer, more rewarding lives? Is there anything we can do to live more dynamic lives **right now**? The answer to these questions is a resounding yes! There are actions we can take that will help us live successful lives.

We're going to take a journey together through the pages of this book. We're going to see that all of us have the potential to live meaningful lives.

Maybe life makes no sense to you. Possibly you just need to be motivated. Perhaps you have low self-esteem and a poor self-image. Maybe you are struggling with alcohol or drugs. It could be that you just need a little guidance and direction to get your life on track. You may be confused and scared,

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troubled by life in general. Maybe you just need something or someone to jumpstart your life. Whatever the case, if you are interested in turning your life around, **it is possible**.

We are going to take an honest look at ourselves and see what we can do to get our lives on track because we only get **one chance at life**. We do not get to start over. Each moment of life is precious, whether we realize it or not. People are responding to us **right now** based on the way we are acting. That's right. You and I are actually determining how the world treats us **right now**. If we are not satisfied, then we need to focus on transforming ourselves.

In this book, we will be considering some exciting concepts. We will see why the world is such a challenging place. We will look at some of the greatest emotional dangers that we will face and how to avoid them. We will learn how to wake ourselves up if we are taking life for granted.

We will also look at how we can make sense of ourselves, the world in general, and how to improve our relationships. We will discuss how to become more confident and courageous so that we can live more fulfilling lives. We will consider how to put our lives back together if we have made some unwise choices. We will learn how to make a plan that that will start us down a new road of adventure.

I'm on your side. I want you to win at the game of life. If you are really interested in getting your life together, put everything you can into this book. Give it your best shot. When you see how stimulating life can be, you will begin to strive even harder. I guarantee you that I will not waste your time. I promise that you can have more good times, more excitement, and more adventure. Life is not an experience to dread everyday, but a fascinating adventure! That's **great** news!

Today is a new day of opportunity. There is just no telling what you could become. You have no idea the excitement awaiting you. Give life your best shot. I'm going to help you see the real *you* that is trying to get out!

Start Making The Most Of Your Life Today

My goal is for you to decide today that you are going to start taking action. Life does not wait for us. Universities begin classes at definite times. The four seasons are on a set schedule. There are only certain seasons in which various sports can be played.

We are getting a little older every day. We need to be careful not to have a “one of these days I am going to change my life” attitude.

You need someone to encourage you. You need someone to cheer you on. I will be your coach. As far as your life is concerned, **today is your day.**

There are many ways to approach transforming our lives and developing a more optimistic attitude. But, if you are like me, you want to feel better now. So I want to ask you to decide in your **heart** right now that you are not going to **throw away your one shot at life.** Just say to yourself right now, “I am not going to throw away my life.” This decision is actually a good start.

Who Are You And What Do You Want Out Of Life?

Some of us are very attractive; some of us are typical

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looking. Some of us are extremely athletic or musically talented; others are not. Some of us are very clever and humorous and some of us are a little boring. Some of us feel like the world belongs to us and some of us feel almost too ashamed to exist.

What do you really want out of life? Do you want to be more attractive? Do you want to help people or change the world? Do you want to find peace of mind? What do you really want?

No matter who we are, all of us are going through the human experience together. None of us asked to be here. We just awakened one day and noticed that we were in this thing called life. As we grew, we noticed there were nice people, jerks, large people, mean people, stuck-up girls and guys, bullies, sickness, poverty, death, pain, drugs, and violence. We noticed that in many cases, people who were more attractive than others often seemed to be more popular. We noticed that people who had money seemed to have more and seemed to feel that they were better than everyone else. We noticed that our shortcomings, whether mental or physical, worked against us. People put us down and made us feel inferior while others used their assets to their advantage.

Throughout my life, I have noticed that the rewards of life do not go to any certain group of people, even the lucky and the strong. The true rewards such as peace of mind and joy go to those who search for knowledge and the *true* meaning of life.

To develop a deeper sense of the meaning, we should center our attention on seeking wisdom and understanding. If we are not careful, we will throw away our lives by allowing the world and its standards to determine how we feel about our-

selves. **The real truth is that all of us have the potential to live meaningful and rewarding lives.** This is not just something nice to say to make you feel good. The fact is that all of us are incredible people, but if we do not realize this fact, we may miss the true excitement that life has to offer.

I'm convinced that all of us are here for a reason. All of us have a purpose for existing. But if we cannot believe that we have a purpose, we may drift through life like a raft lost on the ocean.

I want to help you see your **true value** as a human being so that you can begin living the meaningful and rewarding life you were meant to live. Start your new life today by resolving that you have had enough of feeling less than great.

Your life can be a fascinating adventure. Begin your quest by improving your aim at a better life.

Reaching For A Higher Level Of Serenity

Two main purposes of this book are to encourage us to capitalize on our strengths and to expand our way of looking at ourselves. All of us have our own particular challenges to face: loneliness, depression, poor self-concept, anger, revenge, jealousy, envy, feelings of hopelessness, lack of meaning, sickness, lack of confidence, drug/alcohol problems, feelings of insecurity, lust, or fear. Now is the time to reach for the next level in life, rather than hanging on to these negative feelings.

We are going to unlock some of the mysteries of life. As you go through this book, focus on the following principles:

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1. You are not only the physical person you were born to be, but you are also the person you have the potential to be.
2. Fate and destiny favor the brave and courageous.
3. The only way we will ever be great is not through what we do with our bodies, but what we do with our minds.
4. People who consider life boring and uninspiring have not had anyone teach them how to dream.
5. People who live mediocre lives are often hypnotized by their environment by things such as the media, television, and ideals that no one can truly attain.
6. It is not so much what we know as it is knowing that life is a great mystery.
7. Most of us live out of habitual feelings, so we tend to experience the same reality everyday, over and over. We become stuck in our emotions because we have not learned how to raise our awareness.
8. We are not in the condition we are in by chance or accident. Our thoughts, aims, and actions have put us where we are.
9. All of us are ruled by our habits. To be successful, we have to develop better habits.
10. Either we develop better habits, or our habits control us.

My goal is to help you reach the next level in your life. I am going to offer you help instead of blame, support instead

of judgment, and information rather than condemnation. My desire is to help you develop a new perspective on your life, so that you may find for yourself some of the meaning and happiness that you are searching for.

There is hope. I know it is possible to turn our lives around because I have seen it happen in my own life. My main goal here is to plant a seed of hope that your life can change, too.

First, we will consider **seven important principles for success**. I will be elaborating on these basic principles throughout the book.

Seven Basic Concepts Of Success

1. When we respond or react to other people negatively, we often do not realize what kind of experience they are having. They may be angry, frustrated, or confused. If other people treat us badly and we let the experience make us feel bad, we are being unfair to ourselves by assuming that the negative feelings of other people are aimed at us. In most cases, this is the farthest thing from the truth.

2. Few situations are going to happen in life that we don't cause to happen. Life is not about luck. Whatever we want in life, we must go after. When we realize that nothing is going to fall into our laps, we can really begin taking responsibility for our own happiness.

3. We have more personal power than we realize. All of us have the potential to stand up for ourselves. If we believe that we do not have personal power, we are going to constantly hold ourselves back.

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4. We must realize our true value as humans. Even though we may not be as attractive, wealthy, or smart as others, we still have value and purpose. If we do not realize how precious we are, the world will run over us.

5. It is important for us to spend some time trying to determine why we act the way we do. All of us have character defects and shortcomings. If we are not aware of our imperfections, we will repeat our negative patterns without even realizing it.

6. Realize that life is not fair. If we received the short straw in one area or another, we need to compensate for our shortcomings rather than spend our lives being depressed.

7. Try to see life as it is, not as we wish it were or the way we think it should be. Often we live in our own little world and not in reality. If we are not able to see past our own experience, we are destined to live out our lives in our own little bubble, perhaps missing great opportunities for happiness.

These seven concepts will help you to start thinking about your life differently. Now, let's also consider *why* we don't strive harder to live more exciting lives.

The Greatest Obstacle Keeping Us From Living A Meaningful Life

The greatest obstacle to making positive changes in our lives is lack of **drive**. There is a lot of information available to help us change our lives, but the information is of no use if we just don't feel like changing. **Many of us hold ourselves back because we just can't seem to lift ourselves out of our**

present frame of mind. It's like trying to lose weight. Most of us would like to lose weight and look better, so why do so many of us not even try? **We just don't want to. It's too much trouble.** We deceive ourselves into thinking that life is for the attractive, the lucky, and the strong. We say, "Why should I deprive myself when I will probably fail anyway? I am what I am and nothing can change that."

I have picked up lots of books similar to this one and read 30 or 40 pages, became bored, and then just put them away in my house somewhere. Some of the books seem to ask too much of me and want me to give more than I am able to give. Often the information is glorified, unrealistic, and syrupy.

My main goal is to help you develop the *desire* to live a more fulfilling life. I am a fairly average person. Sometimes life is very challenging for me. Sometimes I get depressed. Sometimes, I wish I were younger, wealthier, and better looking. Sometimes, I absolutely love life. The important fact is that I have come a long way from where I was in the past. I lived most of my life with poor self-esteem, a negative self-concept, and a cynical attitude.

If this book helps at least one person on the planet to see him or herself in a better way, then it would have been worth it. In a relatively short few years, I will no longer be here, but the principles and ideas discussed here will remain the same today or a thousand years from now.

A Wake Up Call

The information in this book is a wake up call. We never really know what kind of person or situation is going to affect

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us. Recently, I was profoundly encouraged by two twelve-year-old girls. One girl was blind. The other girl had only one arm, because her other arm had been bitten off by a shark while she was floating on her surfboard.

I saw the blind girl, Brittney Luna, singing in front of a small group of people. She was an excellent singer, but what really impressed me about her was how comfortable she was with herself. She was very relaxed with the audience, and she seemed not overly concerned about what the crowd thought of her if she forgot some lyrics. She was not egotistical, shy, or overbearing. She did not “put on airs,” and she did not act like she had anything to prove. I don’t think I have ever seen a human be so natural. Her behavior seemed to say, “This is life, people. Let’s enjoy it while we can.”

After she finished singing, I told her how much her performance meant to me. After I told her, the first thing she said to me was, “I need a hug!” She had never met me before, but she seemed to have a natural love for life and people. I do not often see this kind of love for life. I believe this lovely young lady is the kind of person who is going to encourage and bring meaning into the lives of thousands of people, even though she can’t see. **To me, she can see much better than the rest of us.**

The other young lady, Bethany Hamilton, had met with misfortune while floating on her surfboard. Her arm was dangling in the water and a large shark came along and bit it off up to the shoulder. It was bad enough that she lost her arm, but the situation was compounded by the fact that she was an extremely promising surfer.

When Bethany was interviewed by the media, she asserted that she had to keep a good attitude so that her family and

friends would not be sad. She had to keep herself upbeat and keep on going so she could accomplish her goals. To top it off, she could not wait to get back to surfing! **She was so full of love and courage.** (Check out her web site! www.bethany-hamilton.com).

Both of these girls humbled me. Without realizing it, they helped me to explain the central idea in this book. Both of these girls have severe limitations, yet through their positive attitudes they bring more meaning into their lives and the lives of others than many of us who have no true limitations. **Many of us never truly learn to live, to realize what is important in life, or to truly encourage others.** It's not so much that we are bad people, it's just that we are driven by our learned behaviors, our habits, and our environments.

It takes a lot of honesty to see ourselves as we really are. I have seen and met many different kinds of people in my life: politicians, great speakers, movie stars, business executives, scientists, and physicians. But few have compelled me to want to live a more meaningful life than those two twelve-year-old girls. My hope is that by mentioning them in this book, thousands of other people will also be encouraged and inspired to live richer and more rewarding lives now, rather than letting limitations—real or imagined—determine our level of happiness forever.

Today is a new day for us. **We are still here; we still have a chance. Resolve to begin a new life today. Life is amazing! Don't miss out on it!**

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- Are you sincerely warm and friendly with other people? Do you add joy to their lives?
- How would your life be different if you lost a limb or became blind?
- Do you think that it is possible that many people are “blind” to what is really important in life?
- What would it take for you to develop the **desire** to live a rewarding, fulfilling life?