

A Book Report on *Take the Stairs – 7 Steps to Achieving True Success*

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(Book Report by Gary Tomlinson)

Introduction: Waking Up in a ProcrastiNation.

The last time you came up to a set of stairs and an escalator, did you *Take the Stairs*? If you're like 95% of the world, then you probably didn't. Most people don't; most of the time we look for shortcuts. We all want to be successful and we all want to have a happy life, but we constantly look for the easy way. We look for the "escalator" in hopes that life will be easier. Unfortunately, in our search for making things easier, we are actually making them worse.

Americans are failing. Health data shows that 66% of adults in our country are overweight and 31% are obese. The divorce rate for our first marriages is 41% with the rate for second marriages soaring to 60%. There were over 800,000 of us who filed for nonbusiness bankruptcy recently and an estimated 46.6 million of us are smokers.

Are you affected by any of these problems? I certainly am, and so are the people I love. In many areas of our life we are simply missing the mark. Central to all of these challenges is a lack of one value that is diminishing in modern culture: **self-discipline**. We live in a "get rich quick" society where we can "lose weight fast" or cure our ailments by "asking our doctor about the next magic pill." But there is a huge invisible cost to living in our shortcut society.

We are conditioned to believe that it is moral to pursue immediate satisfaction and that difficulties can always be circumvented. We don't want to make any sacrifices and for many of us we have never had to. Instead, the vast majority of Western societies have adopted an "escalator mentality" – one that says getting what we want shouldn't require much work and that there are always shortcuts in business and in life.

We have no accountability because we all allow each other to get away with debt, indulgence and procrastination. We want everything now and we want it without earning it.

What makes successful people successful? There is one thing that *all* successful people have in common. Successful people have all had to do things they didn't feel like doing in order to get where they want.

Success isn't easy. Success isn't overnight. Success isn't ordinary. And so becoming successful requires us to do things that aren't easy and things that people don't ordinarily do. Success means we have to develop the self-discipline to get ourselves to do things we don't want to do. In other words, success is not about taking the escalator – it's about taking the stairs.

Take the Stairs is about self-discipline – the ability to take action regardless of your emotional state, financial state or physical state. This book isn't about doing things the hardest way

possible, but it is about doing the hardest things as soon as possible so that you can get whatever you want in life – as soon as possible.

The Hidden Cost of the “Easy Way: A study of 10,000 U.S. employees indicated that the average worker self-admitted to wasting 2.09 hours each day on non-job-related activities. Considering the average salaried employee makes \$39, 795, that means procrastination costs employers \$10,396 per year per employee!

If you work for a small company of about 100 employees, then as much as \$1 million a year could be lost in productivity because of procrastination. The scariest part is that the problem is so pervasive it’s almost completely imperceptible. The same is true in our lives!

The Real Secret to Success: The popular book and movie *The Secret* teaches us that we create our lives with every thought of every minute of every day. Yes, this is true and I believe in the concept. But if we don’t get off our butts and take action, we won’t achieve anything. The real secret to success has more to do with *action* than *attraction*. We just don’t talk about it as much because it doesn’t sell as well.

Most of us would agree that we could use more self-discipline. We often know what we should do and we even have some intentions of doing those things, but we never really get around to it. It’s not because we’re bad people, or that other people have more talents, opportunities, or gifts than we do; it’s just because nobody ever taught us how to think about hard work. This book will.

Simply stated, there are only two types of activities: things we feel like doing and things we don’t. And if we can learn to make ourselves do the things we don’t want to do, then we have literally created the power to create any result in our lives.

The reason you have to commit to being disciplined every day for the rest of your life is because of the Rent Axiom. The Rent Axiom states that success is never owned, it is only rented – and the rent is due every day. You can substitute the word ‘success’ with ‘a healthy body,’ or ‘thriving business,’ or ‘financial security,’ or a ‘happy marriage’ etc. and you’ll see what I mean that all of them are rented.

Self-discipline is the simplest and fastest way to make life as easy as possible. It is the key to everything you’ve ever dreamed of. Discipline creates freedom – the freedom to do anything! The seven principles for simplifying self-discipline to liberate your potential are:

1. Sacrifice: The Paradox Principle
2. Commitment: The Buy-In Principle
3. Focus: The Magnification Principle
4. Integrity: The Creation Principle
5. Schedule: The Harvest Principle
6. Faith: The Perspective Principle
7. Action: The Pendulum Principle

I didn't sit in a room and think these seven strategies (concepts) up. In fact, I'm nothing more than a conduit of information that has been assimilated from a variety of sources. What you're about to learn are truths that I've gleaned from successful people around the world. What I'm sharing are not all my ideas but evidence of what I learned from all of them. They worked for them, they worked for me and they will work for you.

However, you got to Read this Book Cover to Cover: This book won't just increase your motivation; it will shift your mind-set. But you have to read it! Unfortunately, there's a great chance that you won't finish reading this book. At least not cover to cover. If you're like most people in the world today, then you have read fewer than five books cover to cover in your lifetime. According to one major American Publisher, 95% of all books that are purchased are never completely read. And 70% of all books ever purchased are never even opened!

Sacrifice: The Paradox Principle.

In our quest for self-discipline, we would all be wise to adopt a buffalo mentality. Yes, buffalo. Let me explain.

I grew up in central Colorado. When people think about Colorado, they often think about the world-famous Rocky Mountains all over the western part of the state. What they often forget is that we also have the great Kansas plains that roll from the foothills out toward the east. Because of the unique topographical landscape, we are one of the only places in the world that has both buffalo and cows.

One of my favorite places that I look to for principles of success and the way the world works is in nature. The way these two creatures, buffalo and cows, respond in nature has some really powerful lessons for us.

When a storm approaches from the west, as storms almost always do out there, cows respond in a very predictable way. They know the storm is coming from the west, so they head east to try to outrun the storm.

The only problem is that, as you may know, cows are not real fast. Before long, the storm catches up to them and the cows, not knowing any better, keep on running. Instead of outrunning the storm, they actually run *with* the storm, maximizing their exposure to it. Isn't that stupid?

Many of us humans do the same thing every day!

We try to avoid conflict that's inevitable. So often, whether it's in our relationship disputes, financial troubles, or even our physical health, we try to "ignore" problems, pretending that they aren't that big of a deal and then we try to run away as the last minute as they're fast approaching. Unfortunately, as most of us have learned the hard way, problems tend to compound when we ignore them and we end up being exposed to something worse than what it might have been.

What buffalo do, on the other hand, is truly unique. They wait for the storm to cross right over the crest of the peak of the mountaintop, and as it arrives, they turn and charge directly into the storm. By running at the storm, they run straight through it as the storm passes overhead, which minimizes the amount of pain they experience.

If only more of us would tackle life's inevitable, unavoidable problems the way the buffalo do – head on. Problems that are procrastinated on are only amplified and we're the ones who pay the price. There's a great deal of strength – and strategic payoff – in charging at our most challenging circumstances head-on. But for us, unlike the buffalo, it's a skill we have to learn, practice and maintain.

The Pain Paradox: We know, rationally speaking, what we should do, but we also feel, emotionally speaking, what we'd like to do. Our human tendency is to make the decision based on the force that is most substantial right here and now. And in the short term, our emotions, feelings and impulses almost always outweigh the logical considerations – which is why the vast majority of people make decisions based on emotions and impulses.

Most of us make decisions this way because we want our life to be easy, and doing whatever makes us feel good is easy in the short run. However, the choices that are easy in the short term are very often in direct conflict with what makes life easy in the long term. The great irony here is that what seems easy and feels good in the short term usually doesn't last long.

The Pain Paradox of decision making states the short-term easy leads to long-term difficult, while the short-term difficult leads to the long-term easy. So while most people make decisions based on the short-term emotion, successful people can make sacrifices because they base their decisions on long-term logic.

Understanding and embracing the Pain Paradox is one of the most important things you can do on your path to true success. Every day we are faced with thousands of choices, all of which must be filtered through this exact same decision-making process. The Pain Paradox fundamentally demonstrates why success, and becoming a successful person, is more a matter of choice than circumstance.

It starts by realizing that a sacrifice isn't really a sacrifice at all; it's just a short-term down payment on a rich future blessing!

Commitment: The Buy-In Principle.

A man named Bob is in a restroom, standing in front of a urinal – and he is suddenly in a bit of a predicament. Somehow he's managed to drop a \$5 bill into the urinal. Just as Bob is looking down thinking about what he's going to do, another gentleman named Dave happens to walk into the restroom.

Dave sees the \$5 in the urinal, assesses the situation with an empathetic sigh, and then says, “Oh, that’s a tough decision. What are you going to do?”

Bob thinks about it for a moment. Looks at the urinal, and then looks back at Dave. A split second later Bob pulls out his wallet and out of nowhere grabs a \$50 bill and *throws it into the urinal!*

In shock, Dave exclaims, “Man, what are you doing? I can’t believe you just did that. That’s fifty dollars!” Bob looks back at Dave, cracks a smile and replies, “Well, c’mon, you don’t think I’d stick my hand in there for just five dollars, do you?”

This is an old story, but it illustrates something that is critical in your ability to be more self-disciplined. I call it the Buy-In Principle of Commitment and it simply states that the more we have invested in something, the less likely we are to let it fail.

The Commitment Continuum: It’s interesting to note that very often the emotional energy of making a decision is greater than the physical energy of executing that decision. In other words, it’s not the working out once we get to the gym that is hard; it’s sitting on the couch deciding whether or not we’re going to go that is more difficult and therefore more important.

We need to stop spending so much of our time trying to make the *right* decisions and instead start spending our time making decisions and then *making them* right.

A life of *average*, or a life of mediocre, doesn’t come from having a bad attitude. A life of *average* comes from having an *average* attitude. If we aren’t consciously choosing a good attitude, then we are unconsciously choosing a poor one.

As Vince Lombardi said, “Winning is a habit; unfortunately so is losing.” Attitude is simply the way you *choose* to see things. A commitment is about asking yourself the question “How will I?” instead of “Should I?”

Focus: The Magnification Principle.

The Magnification Principle of Focus simply states one of life’s most important truths, that *Focus is Power*. When we have diluted focus, we get diluted results. Another way of looking at it is minimizing the amount of distraction that occurs in life.

Three Types of Procrastination: Earlier, we looked at how procrastination costs employers more than \$10,000 per year per employee. However, procrastination might be affecting you in more ways than you think.

There are three types of procrastination. The first is *classic procrastination*. This is consciously delaying what we know we should be doing. For example, you might be very efficient at work, but when it comes to paying your bills, you almost always let them pile up until they’re out of control. Or perhaps your finances are in order, but you always seem to find ways of putting off

cleaning up around the house. Or maybe you have all of those things going well for you but you can't get yourself to the gym even though you know you need to go. You may or may not be willing to admit that you struggle with this problem, but most of us do in at least one area of our life.

The second type of procrastination is *creative avoidance*. This is a more dangerous type of procrastination that's increasingly prevalent in the workplace today. It's dangerous because it is unconscious, subtle and invisible. Creative avoidance is unconsciously filling the day with menial work to where we end up getting busy just being busy! In the absence of disciplined focus, we become strangely loyal to performing daily acts of trivia.

The third type of procrastination is another one that often goes unnoticed and it tends to affect the very people who aim to achieve. It's called *priority dilution*. Priority dilution is most commonly found in high-performing people – the ones who are the most busy, competent and overwhelmed. They know what their goals are – but they nonetheless allow their attention to shift to less important tasks.

Discipline is about focusing on what's most important, learning to let go of minutiae and being okay with delaying the less important tasks to an appropriate time. To achieve the focus we so vitally need, we need to manage three essential aspects of ourselves: *our thoughts, our words* and *our behavior*. Permanent changes in our actions have to be reinforced by permanent changes in our thinking.

Focusing our Thoughts: From the time you were born, you have not been alone. You have had with you your entire life a little companion. This companion is commonly known as “your little voice.” At Southwestern we like to call him “Mr. Mediocrity.” Let's call him Mr. M. And for some reason Mr. M was programmed from birth with one objective: to ruin your positive momentum. Mr. M whines, complains, sees the negative and always points out every reason and everything about why things aren't going to work out the way you want them to. His only focus is to make sure that you live a life of average, a life of comfortable, a life of mediocrity.

If you are going to be successful, you have to learn to discipline yourself to use positive affirmations. Train your mind so that every time you hear Mr. Mediocrity going off about something, your personal alarm will sound and you will immediately exterminate his fire by spraying it with a blast of positive self-talk. This will feel stupid at first. Actually, it might always feel a little silly. I will tell you right now that most people do not want to use positive affirmations. But remember: Successful people do what others don't feel like doing – and that is why they get extraordinary results.

Visioneering: Focusing our thoughts is the entry point for all creation in our entire life. Before we create anything in our physical world, it first must be conceived in our mental world. Some people call it purpose, some call it vision and some call it possibility. The term I prefer is “Visioneering.” This term appropriately accounts for the two most critical aspects of creating a new idea – “vision” and “engineering.”

Regardless of whether you call it a goal, a purpose or a vision, the bottom line is that you need to have one. Developing a vision isn't an academic exercise, it's not an element of a business plan, and it's also not a metaphysical meeting with the universe. A vision is an inspiring mental picture that propels you to take action. Your vision is important because the amount of your endurance, and the intensity of your focus, is directly proportionate to the clarity of your vision.

The more clearly you see your vision, the more you can focus on it, and the more you can focus on it, the more it draws you to action. A great vision is like a powerful magnet pulling you into a future of becoming a better you.

The power that a clear picture of your desired future has over your life is indescribable. The moment you capture a detailed vision in your brain, your physical body starts to respond immediately. It's imperative that you not underestimate the power of this mental picture and its connection to the physical world you will create for yourself.

One thing that is certain is we definitely don't pay *attention* to things we don't first give our *intention* to.

Make Your Visions VAST: A practical technique is to make your visions (declarations, intentions, possibilities, goals) VAST. That is, describe and write out your vision using words that appeal to the senses: Visual, Auditory, Smell and Touch. Adding this simple technique to the way you create your visions will make them more visceral, activating your senses and increasing their power. Making a vision VAST will help it come alive for you.

Vision Boards: One ageless technique of the most successful people in the world is to create a vision board. They are very simple. You collect pictures or images from the Internet, in magazines or anywhere else and you create a collage of the things you hope to manifest in your life. This technique is powerful because it enables you to quickly remind yourself of the things that you want and to experience them as emotional triggers.

First In, Last Out: One of the most important ways to focus your thoughts is to make your very first and last thoughts of the day ones that inspire and motivate you. It's important that you are deliberate with the first few thoughts you allow to enter your mind right when you wake up in the morning. Those first few thoughts have a lot to do with dictating your attitude throughout the day. It's equally important that you also visualize the things you want most in life before you fall asleep at night. It starts with thinking about your thinking and focusing on your focus.

Visioning in Action: What do you see for your future? What matters most to you? What would you want your perfect life to look like? What is it that you want to have? What things do you want to do?

Focus on them. Think about them. Affirm in your mind, on paper and out loud your ability to achieve them. By consciously shaping your thoughts, you'll be consciously shaping your attitude. Once you have a strong attitude, then sound actions are guaranteed. With sound actions taking place, success and real results are inevitable.

It's a shame that we spend years of our life doing activities we think we're supposed to do and we spend only minutes figuring out what we really want. Start writing now!

Integrity: The Creation Principle.

You and I have the power to author change in our lives by first carefully choosing our words and then living into them. Most people don't realize the impact of their words on themselves and others. Words have power – the power to add meaning and the power to diminish meaning. The power to give life and the power to take it away.

The Creation Principle of Integrity states that all of creation follows a simple and powerful pattern: *You think it, you speak it, you act it, it happens.*

Words are the engine that sets actions in motion. As with our thoughts, they carry tremendous power if they are chosen with care and intention. Having a strong word is the absolute foundation of a disciplined life. With concrete integrity, you can create anything you want for your life.

What would you create in your life if you knew you could start the process by simply speaking it into existence?

Positive Ways to Strengthen Your Word: There are a number of simple ways we can strengthen our words, adding to our integrity and maximizing their potential for positive change in our lives and the lives of others.

- **Inventing Possibility.** In order for change to take place, you must first *invent* the possibility of it actually happening.
- **Expressing Gratitude.** There is perhaps no better way to keep the tenacious Mr. Mediocrity at bay than expressing gratitude of the good fortune in your life. At any given moment we are either choosing to focus on what we're grateful for or we're worrying about the things we've not been given.
- **Compliments.** It is an interesting peculiarity of human nature that we have a deep fundamental desire to be *right*. Compliments are powerful because, when we genuinely acknowledge someone for an admirable trait or job well done, we satisfy their intrinsic appetite to be *right*. In this way, verbal appreciation is a form of currency. It is an unlimited resource that can be exchanged freely to create very strong bonds between two people.
- **Seeing People for Who They Can Become.** Your conviction can easily become someone else's conviction when you have strong integrity. Paying someone the compliment of their life not only makes you both feel terrific, but also allows you to help contribute to a more powerful future.
- **Hold People Accountable.** Many people would like to be held accountable to what is best for them, yet it can be hard to do that when nobody wants to be criticized or to offer criticism to others. The most effective way to encourage positive change in this way is to remove our own judgments and feelings and simply commit to reminding the person of

who they said they wanted to be. An effective accountability partner is someone who attacks the problem that is being dealt with, while supporting the person who is trying to make the change. If you can master the delicate balance of holding people accountable without holding them hostage, you will have dramatically increased your ability to facilitate change.

- **Walking the Talk.** Being able to do what you say you're going to do isn't enough; you have to also not be willing to ask people to do things that you wouldn't do. Mastering this principle is critical to developing integrity as the foundation of a disciplined life.

Negative Ways to Weaken Your Word: One of the greatest problems in the escalator world is a lack of integrity in the way most of us use our words. It comes from music, movies, people in the media, the Internet and more. Having a Take the Stairs mind-set means recognizing and avoiding these common pitfalls.

- **Breaking Our Promises.** When you break a promise, you let someone else down, and you also damage your own credibility. Every time you fail to come through on something you said you'd do, you weaken the power of your words to produce the results you want in the future. Any incongruence between our words and our actions directly impacts our ability to *create* as we move forward.
- **Uncontrolled Language.** One of the most common ways that people lack discipline with their words is by not thinking about their impact on others. What kind of language you use is up to you, but the discipline part comes in by crafting our words with care rather than simply disregarding how what we say might be affecting the people we're saying it to. Saying whatever we feel and think without first filtering it through the lens of how it might impact the people around us first is not transparency; it's indulgence.
- **Tearing Others Down.** Dale Carnegie wrote decades ago, "Never say anything bad about anyone. Ever." Always remember that "the microphone is always on." This is good advice especially given the advancement of technology and how easy it is for people to capture the words and have them etched permanently in Internet history.
- **Creating Back Doors.** Undisciplined people are often afraid to make commitments. Because they don't have confidence that they will be able to follow through on their word, they create "back doors" or verbal and mental escape hatches so that they can abandon their commitments and still save face when they become inconvenient. A Take the Stairs mind-set means saying either "I will do _____ period," or "No, I'm sorry; I can't commit to that."
- **Previous Negation.** In the same family as a "back door" is a previous negation. If "back doors" are most commonly characterized by saying "as long as," then a previous negation is identified most often by the word "but." Whenever you say the word "but," you're negating whatever you said before it.
- **Gossip.** One of the hardest forms of discipline to master is to avoid the indulgence of gossip. Gossip can destroy companies, destroy relationships and even destroy families. It is one of the most destructive forces in the escalator world.
- **Using Too Many Words.** Mark Twain said, "Brevity is the essence of wisdom." David Brooks says, "Tell people everything they need to know and not a word more." If someone has to talk a lot, they probably don't know what they really want to say. The most powerful people in the world listen first, process the information and then respond.

- **Intellectual Dishonesty.** This is perhaps the sneakiest and fastest-growing form of weakening word. Intellectual dishonesty isn't telling a lie. It isn't even saying something and not following through on it. Intellectual dishonesty is simply allowing someone to believe something that you know is not true. Intellectual dishonesty is tricky to spot because it's not something you say; it's what you don't say.

Go Create. Remember that when used with integrity, there is almost nothing more powerful than your own word. Words are the first manifestation of ideas or thoughts in the *real* world. At their origin, those ideas exist only in your mind, but once they have been spoken or written, then they *exist* and have the power to shape the world around us. The moment we galvanize our thoughts into *words* marks the onset of creation.

Unfortunately, we don't recognize the simplicity of initiating the creation process and so we often don't place appropriate value on the use of our words. Here is a checklist of seven basic guidelines for preserving and harnessing the power of your word.

1. Think before you speak.
2. Choose your words carefully.
3. Do what you say you will.
4. Be where you promise you will.
5. Resist the urge to use emotionally charged, untamed language.
6. Assume the "mic is always on" and that everyone will hear everything you say.
7. Use empowering language when speaking about yourself and others.

Integrity is one of the only things you take with you everywhere you go. You are in charge of creating the world around you.

You think it, you speak it, you act, it happens.

Schedule: The Harvest Principle.

Farmers have a harvest each and every year. It's one period of the year when all of their crops must be taken up at just the right time in order for their survival. There is a short window of opportunity when the harvest must be captured. It doesn't matter if the farmer would rather work eighteen hours a day at some other time of the year because the harvest is when the harvest is.

Feeling fatigued, burnt out or dissatisfied doesn't enter into a farmer's decision-making framework during the harvest because that is the only time of the year that will produce the type of results needed to make life work.

Instead of evaluating, in the "heat of the moment," whether or not he feels like working, the farmer instead sets up his life in a way that allows him to prepare for the coming harvest time so as to maximize the reap. Whether or not you've ever stepped foot on a farm, the law of harvest is one you need to become intimately acquainted with if you are committed to a Take the Stairs

mind-set. The law of the harvest says: Focused effort is amplified by appropriate timing and regimented routine.

The Myths of Time Management: With an infinite number of options vying for our attention, just deciding how best to spend our time and fit everything in is a major cause of stress today. The simple Take the Stairs solution to the problem is not doing everything that we *can* do in a day, but rather do everything we *should* do in a day. Unfortunately, we've been led astray by popular misconceptions about time that don't serve us well. First and foremost is the myth of *balance*. Balance shouldn't mean equal time spent on equal activities. Balance should mean appropriate time spent on critical priorities.

Not "Enough," But "When:" The biggest problem with the notion of balance is that it causes us to ask the wrong questions. Instead of asking, "Am I spending *enough* time on this activity?" we should really be asking, "*When* is the best time to be focused on this activity?"

Achieving balance is not only a questionable goal; it's also an impossible one. The world we live in is constantly changing and therefore requires a more nuanced approach. Life, like nature, operates in seasonal periods of intensity and decline much more like a harvest. This is where the farmer's law of harvest comes in.

There are all kinds of seasons in life. We have seasons of education, seasons of independence, seasons of love, seasons of growth, seasons of new beginnings, seasons of sickness and seasons of health. A "season" could be as long as a few years or as short as a few minutes. Much of the anxiety in our lives is due to the fact that we're trying to take on too many seasons at once and some of them are naturally conflicting.

We need to be more intentional in planning and aligning our seasons in realistic fashion. For example, if you are in the season of having a baby, it's probably not a good time to start a season of entrepreneurship. If you're in a season of heavy workload, it's not a good time to start a season of remodeling your home.

Instead of asking ourselves, "How can I fit *more* in?" we should be asking, "What season(s) is my life in *right* now, when is the *right* time to be completing its associated activities and what are the *right* things I need to do to maximize my harvest of this season?" Focused effort is amplified by appropriate timing and regimented routine.

We frustrate ourselves by trying to harvest results at *inappropriate* times with *inappropriate* focus on too many things at once. Instead of asking "How much can I get done today?" we should be asking, "What is the most effective thing I can be doing right now with the time I have available?" This small shift can yield massive results.

Double-Time Part Time for Full-Time Free Time: From our discussion of the Magnification Principle of Focus, we know that focus is power. Combine focus with timing and you truly have a winning combination. Focused work in the season of the harvest, when the soil is ready and the conditions are right, will always yield more than the same amount of work (or more) when the conditions aren't right.

In other words, the Take the Stairs mind-set is not about hard work or smart work; it's about both. The amazing thing about focusing our work at the most advantageous time is that we can get things done much faster than we otherwise would. At Southwestern we call this phenomenon "Double-Time Part Time for Full-Time Free Time (DTPTFTFT)." In other words, the Take the Stairs approach says I'll work double-time part time now (at the appropriate time and season) for full-time free time later.

Applying DTPTFTFT to Your Daily Life: After studying thousands of successful people and working with them closely in our coaching program, it seems that they simply do what they have to do when they have to do it and pay the price in the short term so that they can reap the benefits in the long term (the Paradox Principle of Sacrifice).

Part of why so many companies and families are falling apart in today's escalator environment is that we want the results and the full-time free time without first being willing to put in the double-time part time. We have to pay the price for success in any endeavor.

"On Schedule" Is a Mind-Set: A big part of a Take the Stairs mind-set is staying "on schedule." This means more than just being where you're supposed to be, doing what you're supposed to be doing, when you're supposed to be doing it. "On-schedule" is a mind-set. It's a condition of mental toughness.

Being on schedule means having a regimented routine within a harvest season. One of the biggest ways we lose time and energy is thinking about where we have to go next. Having a schedule eliminates that issue and provides a structured regimen that allows us to focus our energy on the tasks at hand.

Rocks, Pebbles, Sand: A professor once had a glass jar sitting at the front of his class with large rocks in it up to the top. He asked the students, "Is this jar full?" To which they all replied, "Yes, of course it is." The professor then took a handful of pebbles from behind his desk and dropped them into the jar, where they settled in around the rocks. He then asked, "Is the jar full now?" And then with a smile they said, "Okay, now it's full."

From behind the desk the professor then pulled a cup of sand, which he proceeded to pour into the jar, watching as it filled in comfortably around both the rocks and the pebbles. He then asked once more, "Class is this jar full?" Now realizing that it couldn't possibly be filled any further because there was no visible space, they said, "Okay, now it is definitely full."

Yet again from behind his desk the professor pulled out another element. This time it was a pitcher of water and as he poured it in, it filled in the last remaining space in the jar. He then turned to the class and said, "As in life, we often think we can do no more, but when we push to be creative, we find that there is always room for us to fill."

The Fundamental Five: One of the key reasons for having a schedule is to make sure we're satisfying all of our commitments while creating a life we love that is free of stress and full of fun. Interesting enough, we began to notice that ultra-performers, the super wealthy and

extraordinary happy people from many different backgrounds seem to follow some of the same routine habits. All of them had protected “harvest periods” in their week that were dedicated to five basic areas of their life.

1. **Faith.** Start each day with ten minutes of inspirational reading from the Bible or other source and engage in church or another spiritual practice of fellowship at least once a week.
2. **Family.** Have one weeknight dedicated as a private date night with a spouse or a child – even if it can only happen with each person once a month.
3. **Fitness.** Do some physical activity every day (like 30 push-ups and 100 sit-ups) and work out hard for 30 minutes a day three times per week.
4. **Faculty.** If necessary, have one uninterrupted night per week (or two during a highly intense predefined and pre-communicated harvest season) dedicated to work or a personal hobby.
5. **Finances.** Review all of your up-to-date financial account balances every Sunday night.

In every instance, the value of planned and protected weekly time, even if it was small, created better results than doing a little “here and there” of each one. Success in these five “rocks” in our life is almost always based on quality of time and not necessarily on quantity of time. Having a relentless Take the Stairs mind-set about accomplishing these five activities will take less than a total of ten hours per week, but will be tantamount in helping create a life you love.

Creating Your Ideal Schedule: It’s pretty clear that the number one challenge for most people is *time*. It may be true that it’s unlikely for us to stick to a perfect schedule. But one thing we know for sure is that if you don’t know what your ideal week looks like, you will never have one.

To create a schedule, all you need is a spreadsheet; that is your jar. Put the “big rocks” in first. Those are your Fundamental Five. Then insert the “pebbles” like sleep and work meetings around them. The “sand” of things like e-mail catch-up and office time will fall in naturally. The “water” then is whatever is left and that’s all free to do whatever you want.

Preparing for the Inevitable: Vince Lombardi once said, “Winning is a habit; unfortunately, so is losing.” He understood that the results we get in life are simply the by-product of our repeated effort and our regimented schedule.

Improving your self-discipline, then, happens not only from creating a good schedule but also from learning to recover from getting *off schedule*.

Too many people get upset or discouraged because they focus on results that are not within their control. In other words, they let their sense of self-worth be defined by outcomes rather than effort, so that when they don’t experience overnight success, or they get off track, they start to disregard their schedule. Take pride in controlling the activities that are within your power and to let go of the worry and fear attached to the results that are not. A Take the Stairs mind-set means knowing that today’s work turns into next week’s success.

Schedule and the Slinky Effect: Do you remember the Slinky? A slinky is the best metaphor I can think of for the relationship between your schedule and your results. Working a defined schedule is an investment and it is what you lead with; but the results of that labor usually trail behind it with delayed manifestation.

“Discipline is not a microwave; it’s a Crock-Pot.” It does work, and it is better for you and it has greater impacts on your life but it often takes a while. So, get relentless about putting your self-esteem into your work habits instead of your results.

Faith: The Perspective Principle.

To change your behavior, change your perspective. There may not be a more relevant statement to improving our self-discipline than that.

Sometimes we make choices not out of a lack of discipline, but out of a lack of perspective and faith. Yet with limited perspective, we make decisions that lead to pain. With limited perspective, we have no explanation of tragedy.

Broadening our perspective, taking a step back to look at the entire tape measure of our lives, empowers us to make decisions that will make us happier in the long run. It shrinks our momentary ups and downs to their appropriate size. It provides an explanation for setbacks and even tragedies. Broadening our perspective allows us to have peace of mind.

Our ability to have peace is directly proportionate to the term of our perspective. That’s the Perspective Principle of Faith.

Faith is choosing to believe that all that is happening today – good or bad – is part of an ultimately greater plan. When it comes to a Take the Stairs mind-set, just about the only thing that matters is that we’re doing our dead level best. Our absolute best!

Action: The Pendulum Principle.

A professor was explaining to his class something called the Law of the Pendulum. He said, “The Law of the Pendulum states that once a pendulum is released, it cannot return to a point higher than the point from which it was released. Do you understand this law?” The students said yes. The professor replied, “Well, do you believe it?” Again they said yes.

The professor walked over to the middle of the classroom, pulled back a large curtain and there stood a very large and perfect pendulum. He then asked for a volunteer. The professor grabbed the pendulum and he slowly walked it right up to the student’s nose and he said, “The Law of the Pendulum states that once any pendulum is released it cannot return to a point higher than the point from which it was released. Do you understand this law?” The student said “Yes.” To which the professor said, “Well, do you believe it?” Just then the professor let the pendulum go.

It swung across to the right side of the room and was starting to return right toward the student's nose. What do you think the student did? That's right. He got out of the way. However, the pendulum never would have hit him. You see, on this day the professor wasn't teaching the class about the Law of the Pendulum; he was teaching the class about a different law, the Law of Action. And the Law of Action says that it does not matter what we *say* we believe; our real beliefs are revealed by how we *act*.

You can understand the Law of the Pendulum and not believe in it. You can understand everything that we've talked about in this book, but not believe in it. The only way that we will know if you believe in any of what you've read in this book is if it actually causes you to make different decisions and take different actions.

Having a Take the Stairs mind-set means that you don't just recognize your inadequacies; you resolve them. You don't just identify changes you need to make; you make them. Being a successful person *requires* that you take action.

Much of this book has been about your mind-set and the psychology of how to think differently. All of that thought and understanding is critical because the right mind-set precedes proper movement, but the bottom line of seeing change in your life is you need to ACT! You have to go and *do something!*

Wisdom is simply the application of knowledge and the application of everything you've learned in this book is manifested in one simple way: ACTION. You start doing the things you don't feel like doing. You set aside short-term discomfort for long-term results. You move. You act. You create motion. You cause change. You win.

As Roger Seip has stated; "You are much more likely to act your way into healthy thinking than to think your way into healthy acting." I believe that most of us already know what we should do. The problem is that we don't do it. For most of us, *it's not as much a matter of skill as it is a matter of will.*

What We're Up Against: The Law of Diminishing Intent: Procrastination seductively destroys our dreams more than any other controllable force. It robs us of our greatest passions and leaves nothing in its place except a wake of ultimately unfulfilling excuses. Therefore, we have to constantly be managing ourselves to take action against a dynamic enemy that is perpetually working against us.

The culprit I'm referring to is something called diminishing intent, and like so many saboteurs of our discipline, the biggest reason it is dangerous is because it is invisible. Most people set out on fire to achieve their goals because our intent to take action is strongest the moment we create that intention. Unfortunately, however, over time our initiative slowly starts to erode.

The classic example of this is the New Year's Resolution. We go to the gym on January 2nd and it's packed. If you go to the same gym at the same time of the day but on March 5th, what will you see? Suddenly everyone has disappeared and it's mostly vacant. What happened to all the

people who made New Year's Resolutions? Are they bad people? Are they liars? Are they weak-willed? No, absolutely not.

They are simply, through their own unawareness, victims of the law of diminishing intent. They are people who do not realize how fickle and fleeting our own intentions can be. Understanding this phenomenon explains why New Year's Resolutions rarely work. We can't make a resolution once a year and expect it to leverage us to action for that entire period of time. Instead, as Albert Gray wrote in 1940, "Any resolution that is made today must again be made tomorrow." And the next day and the next day and the next day (remember the Rent Axiom?).

What's Holding You Back? The Three Faces of Inaction: We consistently find that people who are struggling with inaction or procrastination invariably have one of the following three deep-rooted attitudes:

- **Fear:** "I'm scared to do it."
- **Entitlement:** "I shouldn't have to do it."
- **Perfectionism:** "I won't try to do it if I can't do it right."

These all-too-common problems affect people across all professions, ages and endeavors. You show me a person who is not achieving life at the level they want to be and I'll show you one of these diagnoses. The good news is that they don't need to hold us back.

Fear: It's an oldie but a goodie: "FEAR stands for False, Evidence Appearing Real." That is almost always what fear is. It's a fictional story written by our own minds.

Why do so many of us succumb to fear? Because it's more convenient and more comfortable for us to let our dreams disappear than to muster up the discipline and the work ethic to go out and transform them into reality. The payoff of fear is that we don't have to try, we don't have to work and we don't have to challenge ourselves to test our limits. In other words, the escalator mind-set allows our fears to thrive so that work required to achieve our dreams doesn't have to. In contrast, the Take the Stairs mind-set demolishes our fears so that the only option is to work to make our dreams come true. *Action is the cure for fear.*

I once heard the true story of a woman who was trapped in a burning building on a very high floor. She had an intense fear of heights and also a fear of closed-in spaces, so when the fire alarm went off, she absolutely refused to follow her colleagues in the stairwell to evacuate to safety.

She could not handle the thought of going down the stairs being able to look down in the middle all the way to the bottom. And the thought of being trapped inside the enclosed stairwell was just too much to endure and so instead she made a conscious choice to hide under her desk and wait to die. She was willing to choose death over facing her fears.

Finally a fireman found her and began to drag her toward the stairs. She resisted him, kicking and screaming, "I'm scared! I don't want to because I'm scared!" He couldn't get her to go anywhere until he looked her in the eye and said, "That's okay, do it scared."

“Do it scared. Do it scared. It’s okay to be scared; just do it scared.” He repeated this in her ear all the way down eighty flights to safety. The phrase saved her life in a literal sense, but it also transformed her life emotionally. The catchphrase became her mantra, which enabled her to make better choices both large and small.

It’s okay to be scared – do it scared. It’s okay to be uncomfortable – do it uncomfortable. Just get started where you are. That is the attitude of the most disciplined and successful people on the planet.

Entitlement: Even more than fear, the attitude of entitlement is a symptom of today’s escalator mentality. So many of us are frustrated because somehow we believe that we are entitled to a life that is supposed to be easier. We want someone else to work the long hours for us, someone else to solve our problems, someone else to teach us, someone else to get us out of debt, someone else to pay for our retirement, someone else to take care of our kids, someone else to make us feel good about ourselves, someone else to give us what we want. These beliefs are so ingrained and ubiquitous that we don’t even notice them anymore.

Entitlement is a disgusting disease that destroys our ability to reach our dreams – because the exact moment entitlement engages is the same moment our self-discipline disengages. Entitlement gets us nothing; only action does. Entitlement is the end of achievement. Reject it!

Perfectionism: Psychologists say that the number one cause of all procrastination is self-criticism. It can feel safer not to begin a daunting journey or not to take on a challenging task because at least we know we won’t fail.

So instead of working, we wait. We wait for the perfect plan, the perfect time and the perfect resources. The problem is the perfect circumstances never show up. What was once a harmless decision of opting for safety soon becomes a limiting, even debilitating lifestyle of inaction.

The irony of this crippling fear of making mistakes is that mistakes can be our greatest teachers. No one has all the answers before they start. Successful people take action despite not knowing how it will turn out and they embrace the idea that success is messy along the way. They choose to move forward without knowing exactly where their path will lead and they become comfortable with imperfection for the short term. They move. They go. They act.

360-Degree Accountability: People excel the most with the interest and support of others around them. You’ve surely experienced this yourself – on both sides of the dynamic. We try harder, endure longer and bounce back from disappointments faster when the people we care about take an interest in what we’re doing. It’s strange how easy it can be to let ourselves down, but how unbearable it can feel to let down others. At a fundamental level, we need each other – to motivate, empathize, push, challenge and celebrate. In short, we have the power to help each other change our lives.

The 360-Degree Accountability is based on a simple principle: If you want to do everything to influence the likelihood of your taking action, it's important to have accountability in at least four different relationships, as follows:

- *Supervisor*: a boss or highly respected mentor.
- *Subordinate*: an employee or mentee.
- *Significant other*: a spouse, family member, colleague, best friend or other trusted peer.
- *Supporter*: a more objective outside third-party partner who will bring about a unique unbiased perspective.

360-Degree Accountability works because each of these relationships has power. There is a powerful and significant cost in letting each of these people down.

Accountability coaching or consulting is worth the investment on the front end to have what we want in the long term. The cost of accountability may be a few hundred dollars (or even a few thousand) a month, but the cost of no accountability is almost immeasurably high.

Create accountability in your life. Share your vision with someone who can encourage you, develop action plans with people who can help you, invest in your dream and you'll be amazed at how quickly your fear, entitlement and perfectionism begin to fade.

Call to Action: Although in our escalator world we'd rather find a way around it, action is the inevitable prerequisite for our success. Action validates our words; it erases our setbacks and cures our fears. Often it is not making the *wrong decision* that has the greatest cost, but choosing indecision that does.

Final Note: Time to Climb.

The truth about success may not be popular, but it is certain. It may not be easy, but it is simple. In fact, it's so obvious that it can be elusive. And while it may not be what we want to hear about success, it is the only guaranteed method of high performance in any endeavor. It can be summed up in one simple word...**discipline**.

The challenges we face today are not a matter of skill, but a matter of will. Our problem isn't time management; it's self-management. And we're not losing to poor circumstances as much as we're losing to a lack of self-discipline.

When you let go of the escalator world's "short-term-fix mentality" and instead adopt the mindset that success is never owned, it is only rented – and the rent is due every day – then something truly magical happens. And that is that over time your appetite will begin to change. An empowering transformation occurs where you start to crave the things that you once couldn't get yourself to do and the things that were once a great sacrifice to give up later won't even be temptations. When you embrace self-discipline as a conscious choice, it's not a source of sacrifice at all, but one of satisfaction. See you in the "stairwell!"

Message from Gary Tomlinson:

I hope you enjoyed reading this book report. It's important to understand that this book report should not take the place of you reading; "*Take the Stairs – 7 Steps to Achieving True Success*. Rory Vaden's book contains a lot of stories, models and examples that are not contained in my book report. This is an incredible book and may well be one of the most important ones you'll ever read. You'd be doing yourself a disservice if you didn't buy it and read it cover-to-cover. You can learn more at www.roryvaden.com.

Enjoy the education and wisdom contained within this book report and feel free to share it with others because the "illiterate of the 21st Century will not be those who cannot read or write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn."

About Gary Tomlinson: Gary is a business consultant and motivational speaker. As a business consultant, Gary specializes in strategy execution management. He works with CEOs to help establish a culture of knowing how to plan and execute while overcoming the daily surprises that always seem to get in the way. As a motivational speaker, Gary's key presentations are the *Art of Telling* (professional speaking education for professionals) and *Top Ten Messages from Ten Top Books* (great business education). Regardless of his topic, Gary's guiding coalition is that the golden rule not only makes good moral sense, but it makes good business sense too! You can engage Gary at gary@gary-tomlinson.com. If you like this book report and want to read his others go to www.gary-tomlinson.com.