

# Exponential Happiness

How to identify and pursue life  
goals starting at a young age

JUDSON L MOORE

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How to identify and pursue life goals starting at a young age

Judson L Moore

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*With daily inspiration from Lew Jessen Moore, my  
brother, who was not able to live such a fortunate life as*

*I.*

*To my parents, who gave me their blessings to always  
say “yes.”*

*In loving memory of Jacqueline Segall Caplan for  
inspiring me to find my passion and live it every day.*

*To the Rotary Club of Alexandria, who held open the  
first door.*

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# My motivation

Independence. People go through Hell to achieve it. Nations have been divided and reborn, relationships have been destroyed and made stronger, outcasts drift further away while socialites climb the rungs of society. We all find independence or die trying.

I am no more special than you or anyone of your friends, yet somehow I seem to have broken the chains of society and achieved a level of independence that many of the people within my circle only wish to obtain.

My secret? I did it while I was young! A cliché thing to say, yes? But it is not at all a cliché thing to do.

When I was young, I had many older and wiser people telling me to “do it while you are young.” They mentored me. They encouraged me. They empowered me to feel like I had permission to try. They created the conditions by which I was able to claim independence for myself.

The only thing that separated me from my peers is that one day, I stopped listening to all the clichés and started doing, starting *living*.

I have had an extraordinary life. Pick any chapter, and it might sound like a once in a lifetime opportunity. But these experiences have been back to back to back.



Now that I am a little older and a little wiser, I feel compelled to be one of those encouraging voices in the lives of others. I want to encourage you to *do it while you are young*.

Everyone has a story. This book is mine. I don't intend to showcase myself or argue that I am better than anyone. On the contrary, I hope to drive home the point that I am utterly average in every way. In some areas, I am below average. One thing is for sure: I have had just as many obstacles in life as anyone.

I will take a moment now and introduce you to a brief story of my life. Some further details will emerge later, but I believe you would like to know who the author of this book is, and what motivates me to write these pages for you. In the course of this book, I will share many philosophies and concepts I've picked up in my travels around the world and throughout my diverse career. This brief biography aims to orient you around how all this came to be.

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I was born in 1983 as the second child to two Baptist ministers and academics in the suburbs of Lexington, Kentucky.

My first memory is from when I was three years old and living in Campbellsville, Kentucky. I was with my best, and first, friend, Trey.

My fourth year as a little human remains, even 32 years later, to be the worst one so far. I had no love for the preschool I attended during the one year we lived in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. This year proved to be terrible for the whole family, except my brother.

From ages five through 14, we lived once again in Lexington. My father was a sociologist for the Center on Aging at the University of Kentucky. My mother got her second master's degree; the first was in fine arts, the second in divinity.

Through these years living in Lexington, a family vacation often involved providing testimony to the United States Congress in Washington, D.C. We even met the First Lady a few times. The topic of our deposition was always around healthcare reform. Specifically, to improve access to healthcare for children with disabilities. After hearing our story, First Lady Clinton even visited my brother once in Louisville.

One notable exception to the D.C. vacations that became routine, was a trip to Disney World when I was seven. I got to ride Space Mountain with my granny. It was great.

By age 13, I had made five trips to D.C. I also made an uncountable number of road trips to Louisville to visit my brother, who spent his last four years living at the Home of the Innocents<sup>1</sup>, an in-patient nursing home for children with severe disabilities. He had dyskinetic cerebral palsy since birth.

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<sup>1</sup>Home of the Innocents - <https://www.homeoftheinnocents.org/>

My last year in Lexington was my first year in high school. It was also when I got my first job, delivering newspapers with my dad. We would start working in the early morning and then have breakfast with the jockeys at the Keeneland horse race track.

I attended two high schools that year because a last-minute redistricting sent me to the rival school. At that school, I was in a masterful music program. The Lafayette High School Marching Band ranked #8 that year in a national competition. Despite that great opportunity, I could not find happiness there, separated from my childhood friends. So I transferred to my “rightful” place after New Year.

A month later, in February 1998, my brother died at age 16 during *The Forgotten Snowstorm*, which dumped over 22 inches of snow on Louisville.<sup>2</sup> The cause of death was complications of acute respiratory infection. He was en route to the hospital down the street, but couldn’t reach it in time because of the blizzard. His name is **Lew Jessen Moore**, and his struggle in life motivates me every day to live the life he couldn’t.

Shortly after that, dad got a job offer in his native Louisiana. It was a perfect opportunity with perfect timing. The family needed a change of scenery, and this fit the bill. My parents had worried that it could be tumultuous to relocate a child in high school. When they

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<sup>2</sup>Kappell, Jeremy “February 1998 - The Forgotten Snowstorm” WDRB Weather Blog. Last modified Date 02/05/2013. Accessed 08/15/2019. [https://fox41blogs.typepad.com/wdrb\\_weather/2013/02/february-1998-the-forgotten-snowstorm.html](https://fox41blogs.typepad.com/wdrb_weather/2013/02/february-1998-the-forgotten-snowstorm.html)

approached me with the idea of moving, I had my bags packed before they got to the end of the sentence.

In Alexandria, Louisiana, I found myself faced with an opportunity to shift my thinking from *little fish, big pond*, to *big fish, little pond*. The next years are a whirlwind, and it is in these years that I started to form a world view for myself.

During my first week in Alexandria, I attended the summer band practices for my new high school marching band. The band director was also directing the orchestra for the community theater's upcoming run of *South Pacific*. He needed a drummer. I took the gig.

The community theater and arts organizations of Central Louisiana became a part of my family, so much so that my mother says, "it takes a community theater to raise a child."

After one year of attending high school number three, I decided that I was not satisfied with my music education and sought another transfer. I found the perfect fit and had an incredible junior year. Entering this year is also when I attended a summer camp organized by the local Rotary Clubs, which would change my life.

It is this camp, and the events of that week, which sets the foundation for this book, though it took me a decade of reflection to figure that out.

In what would have been my senior year, my life took a turn: I moved to Germany for one year. I attended a

German school, my fifth high school, for those of you keeping count. I lived with two German host families. I made lifelong German friends, as well as friends from all over the world. Many of them from Brazil.

My eyes opened. My life would never be the same.

I returned to Alexandria and learned that if I went back to school number three, I could graduate in half a year, but I would have to give up music. I took that deal, got a job, saved money, graduated in January, and because I'd had such a hectic high school experience, I decided university should be more "normal." Therefore, I had six-months to fill until I would start university in the fall.

I made a decision.

My principal, my counselors, my teachers all told me that this decision would be my life's greatest regret. They told me that I was too young to understand. They begged me to reconsider. But no. I stood my ground. My decision meant that I would miss my senior prom, my high school graduation ceremony, and other momentous occasions which are indeed fond memories for those who have them. I wouldn't wear the cap and gown, and I wouldn't receive my diploma while being congratulated as I walked across that auditorium stage.

Instead: I backpacked Brazil for those six months. That experience changed everything about me. I came face-to-face with real poverty for the first time. I also became familiar with how true happiness looks.

I returned to America a changed person. My mother, to this day, believes that I had a brain transplant in Brazil.

Now it was time to enter university. The next years were somehow typical. Precisely the experience I had hoped to have. I *only* attended three universities across five years. I studied political science and was hyper-involved in student life, student government, the university ethics committee, and a fraternity. I even had a student job with the Louisiana State University Athletics Department, just as my dad did decades before.

Hurricane Katrina decimated New Orleans in 2005. Baton Rouge was the next major city, and so the residents of the Big Easy came to our lifeboat. I went to volunteer at the American Red Cross. I spent some weeks in shelters, and then somehow, I was hired to rewrite their emergency response plan. I spent two years doing that until I graduated.

Somewhere in there, my best friend “went to Hollywood” on season four of American Idol. I was the drummer in his band. We all moved to Las Vegas for the summer and played music on the Strip. The rest of the group stayed there to pursue music, but I was too close to graduation and went home to finish my education.

Just before graduation, I realized that my education was not something I wanted to put to use in my career. I panicked. Then, the universe righted itself, and I received an offer for a dream job.

From 2007 to 2009, I was a concert promoter based out of Memphis, Tennessee. I organized concerts for the likes of Taylor Swift, ZZ Top, Three Days Grace, Breaking Benjamin, Wyclef Jean, Jason Aldean, Eric Church, and many more.<sup>3</sup> Yes, I met them all and have many stories from backstage, tour busses, and private jets.

I loved my work, and it seemed like I was good at it. *But I wasn't happy.*

I shifted to a retreat center in Chattanooga to manage events for a leading sales coach, author, and keynote speaker. He worked primarily in the automotive industry, and on June 1, 2009, General Motors went bankrupt and sent shivers through our office.

Quitting this inspiring job, in this fantastic place, with those amazing people, was one of the hardest things I have ever done. But I had decided that I could not live a life wondering, “what if?” So I moved to London.

London didn't last long. I had arranged a job with a work visa, but just before my arrival, my employer died, and I lost the job and the right to work. I could not find another job before my savings ran out. Being broke and without any apparent options, I started to get desperate. Then the phone rang, and I was asked to move to New Orleans to work in student life at Loyola University.

The world of academia felt familiar. Academia was, after all, my parent's world. The world in which I grew up.

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<sup>3</sup>Concert Posters - <https://www.judsonlmoore.com/concert-posters>



However, it did not take long for me to figure out that it was not my world.

I had been doing some freelance web development work on the side. I've always been interested in technology. I built my first website when I was seven. I wasn't technically advanced, but I had some highly sought after skills and could make some extra cash helping people out. I had two friends who were sharing a lot of similar work, and I partnered up with them from time to time, especially when I found myself out of my depths.

As soon as the sunset on Mardi Gras of 2010, I loaded up my car and drove to Los Angeles to be closer to the two business partners. We had a thriving little business building political campaign websites. It flourished until the election, and then there was no more money. Oops.

Those six months in Los Angeles made a significant impact on me. I learned a lot about life, business, and sleeping on a futon. I had no disposable income, and it didn't matter, I still accomplished everything I aimed to achieve. I made great friends whom I meet and travel with even to this day.

One person I met there had recently received his acceptance into the Peace Corps. He heard my story and my interests. He saw that I was living without a lot of direction. I shared that I had the goal of serving in the Peace Corps one day. He asked me the best question, "why not today?"

Six months later, I was in Kyrgyzstan.

From 2011 I served as an economic development volunteer in a remote village in western Kyrgyzstan. My assignment was to a community radio station. After a year, I wrote a proposal for a new media platform. Today, seven years later, that platform, Kyrgyz Media<sup>4</sup>, is thriving and is a premier news and storytelling platform in Central Asia.

My time in Kyrgyzstan came to a sudden close when my appendix decided it was time to exit the body. The surgery I had there was old-school and painful. The recovery time was long. Thankfully, all of the T.B. tests came up negative.

Shortly after the surgery, in the spring of 2013, I received an offer to work at a mobile apps development agency in Austin, Texas. This job was an exciting opportunity with the added benefit that it was only 90 miles from where my parents had been living since I graduated from high school.

I spent three years in Austin. It was surprising not to have to buy a car to survive in an American city. I learned a lot at work and was able to enter into a new career category. I reconnected with community service and became a Rotarian. I even had the extraordinary opportunity to spend six months in India on a business trip. Life was good.

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<sup>4</sup>Kyrgyz Media - <http://kyrgyzmedia.com>

Austin was amazing. Indeed, if I am to return to America to live, Austin is the city I feel most likely to call home. But after those initial three years, I couldn't hold back from scratching the travel itch. There was something that had been on my mind for a long time. I had lived such an extraordinary life, and I had done and seen so many things. I was still so young. Much of what formed my identity had started in Germany, yet I had never revisited Germany.

So I asked myself, "why visit when I can simply move there?" Hallo, summer of 2016!

I found a great job in Product Marketing at a world-leading hotel search website based in Duesseldorf. After one year, I found a path into Product Management, which I had long wanted to do, and can now say with certainty that this is what I want to stick with for a career (besides writing more books, of course!)

After two years, my visa status upgraded, and I was permitted to work for any company in Germany. I looked around, and on the coldest day in December 2018, I moved to Berlin. After getting settled in, I revived my long-held goal to write a book and committed myself to the effort.

Now I sit on my balcony under a summer's sky and write this book for you.

Thank you for reading.

Judson

# Will this book change my life?

*“Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.”  
From The Road Not Taken by Robert Frost*

In a word: no. Any book that promises to change your life is likely selling you fluff. The only thing that can change your life is you and your decisions. Books, just like people, events, and your community, will have an influence on the choices you make, but ultimately, it comes down to you and how you choose to live your life. Even taking into account that things will happen to you that are beyond your control, it is still up to you to decide how to respond to them.

Lottery winners blow millions in a matter of months and are broke. People living with paralysis find ways to publish industry-leading books and give TED Talks. Privileged with the most exceptional advantages, people fail. Likewise, struck with grave disadvantages, people go on to achieve great things. It is more than a combination of privilege, opportunity, and education; those things have an influence, but ultimately, it comes down to you and your decisions.

This book aims to equip you with the mental and organizational tools to think introspectively about your life, your goals, your advantages and disadvantages, and how to go about crafting a plan which will propel you toward achieving your definition of success.

I often refer to time, energy, and money being limited resources that constrain the choices we make. You've chosen to invest your resources into the reading of this book, for which I thank you. I've done my best to convey, in as precise and entertaining of a way as I know, the ideas, philosophies, and words of encouragement which I've picked up around the world and which have made a strong influence on my own life. I desire that this book will make an impact on your life and that having read it, you will go on to reap the benefits of this investment for years to come.

Now it is up to you.

## **Who is this book for?**

You have your life in front of you. The world is a big place, and time seems even bigger. You have dreams and aspirations about how you fit into the society around you and the world beyond that, but by comparison, your small place in it all, with your mark not yet made, feels insignificant. You have many questions about how you can develop into the adult you aspire to be and how to secure a happy future for yourself and those loved ones

around you. You seek guidance through other people's stories, and you are interested in gaining tools to help you build your future.

*I wrote this book for you.*

You are a parent, mentor, teacher, coach, or friend of someone whom the last paragraph describes. You are looked up to by them as a source of inspiration. You have already offered a lot of great advice and see your mentee eager for more. You are looking for some outside help to point your friend in the right direction and to provide them with some actionable steps they can take right away to get to the next level.

*I wrote this book for you.*

You are at a later stage in life and want to reinvent yourself. You think the worn-out cliché “do it while you're young” can't apply to you anymore, yet, you can't help but feel that it is never too late. You believe that today is the first day of the rest of your life.

*I wrote this book for you.*

As I curate the learnings from my own life's path into advice to fill the pages of this book, along with anecdotes from those who have motivated me, and interviews with friends, I am driven first and foremost by the thought that everyone who humbles me by picking up this book will take something away from it before they put it down.

Thank you for allowing me to share these lessons with

you. If there is ever any doubt, know this: *I wrote this book for you.*

## Who am I to write this book?

The reason I most believe I have a story and philosophy worth sharing at all is that on most accounts, I am a fairly average guy, even if I have had a not so ordinary journey.

The truth is, I am not extraordinary. My friends tell me from time to time they perceive my life as remarkable, and sometimes I am even inclined to agree. So what? I haven't founded a billion-dollar startup from my garage. I haven't revolutionized a global industry. Despite all my time abroad, I haven't truly mastered a second language.

Therein lies the value of my tale. I am just an average person, probably not too dissimilar from you, who has had to overcome adversity and push through unforeseeable barriers just like anyone else.

As a teenager, I had no sense of destiny or vision of what I wanted to accomplish in my life. That feels like just yesterday. Back then, my life was a blank book ready to be written. Sure, I had dreams, but none of them felt like they aligned with my reality. How do such vast and seemingly untouchable aspirations get met? When the goal is to build the Great Pyramid, how are we supposed to lay the first stone?



I've gone on to accomplish things that were simply unimaginable to my teenage self. I've traveled the world, learned several languages, received blessings from popes and pujari, toured with rockstars, constructed high-rises, built products used by hundreds of millions of users, and reshaped the media landscape of an entire region in Asia.

For years, my childhood friends have asked me how I have done all this. What makes me so special to have been granted all of these opportunities? How have I been able to travel so much?

Throughout my 20s, I had an unsatisfactory response to that travel question, "uhh... I bought the plane ticket, and I went?" Which is, of course, neither what they wanted to know, nor is it truthful. Buying a plane ticket is just one step in a much longer series of events which led to my decision to backpack Brazil for half a year, or move to India, Las Vegas, Kyrgyzstan, London, and Germany (among others).

It took me a long time to understand what they were really asking me and to understand what made me different from other people.

It wasn't that I was born into any particular advantages in comparison to others around me. The key to my success is that when I was young, I had several older and wiser people in my life telling me cliché things like "do it while you're young." One day, when it mattered most, that conditioning, that permission to say "yes" to an invitation, changed my life forever. It could have just

as easily been anyone else, but it was me.

Now, years later, as I reflect on how my life has unfolded, and what benefit I've received by that early do-it-while-you're-young advice, I realize how powerful it is to identify and start to pursue one's life goals beginning at a young age. You can do anything with your life that you set out to accomplish. The earlier you start on your path, the higher your chance of success in achieving your goals.

So dear reader, I say it now to you, "do it while you're young."

This book is about helping you uncover what "it" is in your life, and how to start pursuing "it." If that sounds useful to you, then you're in the right place.

## **Why am I writing this book now?**

The first time I created a file on my computer to start writing this book was in 2012. That file consisted of a working title, a list of people I wanted to thank, and then it stopped. The document sat unchanged, but never forgotten, for years.

The question, "who am I to write a book?" blocked me for years. I blogged and wrote in other media, but a book always seemed beyond grasp; perhaps it was pretentious

of me to think that I had a whole book's worth of thoughts to share.

Then a self-published author of over 50 books and a friend of mine, Honorée Corder<sup>5</sup>, shared an insight with me. She said, "Perhaps your readers will have already heard similar advice like yours, but they never heard it from *you*."

My own, unique, life experience is what drives me to share these words with you, and even if not all the principles herein are entirely new concepts to you, perhaps my view of the world and my approach to living my life to its fullest every day will resonate with you in a way that moves you to action.

I will share stories from my own life simply because, quite frankly, I'd like to wrap these philosophies into something more relatable, and examples from my own life story are the best examples of which I have first-hand knowledge. To make things more interesting, I have also interviewed others and included their stories and advice on these pages as well.

Despite the inclusion of all these other stories, this is a book about you. This book is about how you can live your life to the fullest despite all the external influences, pressures, and seemingly impossible feats that you must overcome so that you can live an adventurous and prosperous life.

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<sup>5</sup>"Getting Things Done." Honorée Corder, September 1, 2019, <http://honoreecorder.com>

## In the beginning

To help set the scene, please allow me a moment to share with you a little bit about my childhood. If you read the introduction to this book, then you have a solid overview of my life's overall timeline. Now I will delve a little deeper.

My family and where I grew up, met the classic definition of the American nuclear family: two married parents with two and a half kids (depending on how many gerbils, hamsters, and dogs it takes to make up that half kid). Though we didn't have the white picket fence, I did grow up in the suburbs, and yes, there was a treehouse in the backyard that I built with my dad.

But not all is what it seems in the American Dream. That half kid was possibly the world's cutest puppy, rescued from the animal shelter on Christmas Eve when I was 9, and who died of parvovirus a week later as I lay next to her on our kitchen floor. My older brother, born with severe disabilities, passed away when he was just 16 years old. My parents, both Baptist ministers, had opposite responses to the tragic loss of their firstborn.

My mother turned toward the church and her faith as a pillar of support through those dark times. There, she found solace in the wisdom of others and focused her grief in the form of artistic expression. She is also an

artist, and her art<sup>6</sup> has carried the theme of mourning and loss ever since we lost Lew. Her art not only gives her strength but also empowers others to move through the grieving process during their time of loss.

My father, on the other hand, turned to the bottle. He slipped into the trenches of alcoholism, away from his Creator and isolating himself from all the things which had previously brought him joy. His brilliant mind became his own worst enemy. He pursued ever-diverse personal and professional ambitions, learning new skills and industries more vigorously than most young college students ever attempt. He quickly outpaced his instructors and knew more of a topic than the lifelong professionals teaching him. Once the learning curve reached a cliff, so did he.

He was never violent, not once, and truthfully, he has always been a brilliant father to me, but to himself, he became his own worst enemy.

My parents, those academics of the cloth, eventually separated, and now I am the adult child of divorced parents. So much for the cookie-cutter American Dream.

But this is not a book about tragedy, and it certainly is not one about divorce or even about family. If anything, this book aims to look at such turmoil right in the face and see the opportunities. The ability to overcome life's inevitable conflicts is at the center of achieving success.

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<sup>6</sup>"Making Divine Images Visible." Cherry Winkle Moore, September 1, 2019, <https://www.cherrywinklemoore.com>

It is more often than not these moments of difficulty in my own life, which have led me to derive a series of philosophies by which I live my life to the fullest every day.

## **My life philosophies in a nutshell**

There are several principles, philosophies really, by which I have come to live my life. In the course of this book, I will share each of these in great detail. I will tell you how I came to discover these principles, how they have challenged me, how I have challenged them, and how you can apply them to your way of thinking. Let me take a moment to outline a few of these.

### **The first philosophy: find your *what if* and live it every day**

We all have dreams about our future. The places we might visit. The jobs we might have. People with whom we might fall in love. The successes we hope to accomplish. Many of these dreams are lofty, as they should be.

Dreams are the most significant ambitions of our life. Because dreams are big, they come with a sense of challenge, even sacrifice, which we must make to accomplish them.

Many dreams come to us in the form of a *what if* question. As in, “*what if* I [insert dream here].”

Many people only think about this in hindsight. They ponder, “I wonder what could have been if I had tried to \_\_\_\_.” I find it tragic when people have identified their own *what if* but never sought an answer to that question.

My goal is to give you the inspiration and the tools to discover and pursue your own *what if*. When you do that, you can live a life void of regrets and never have to ask yourself, “I wonder what could have been if I had tried to \_\_\_\_.”

## **The second philosophy: show up**

Opportunities are all around us. They take all forms, shapes, and sizes. Sometimes showing up is about going to class prepared with your homework complete. Other times, showing up is about accepting an invitation. Often in life, showing up is about applying for that job you’ve been interested in, the scholarship that will pay for your education, or a fellowship program you think might impact your world-view. Regardless of the form an opportunity takes, it is a wasted chance if you do not show up.

There is also something brilliant about showing up. It is the prerequisite of every opportunity. And the fact of the matter is that most people do not bother showing up at all. They have the tools in their hands to show up, they



are even invited by others to do so, yet they do not afford themselves the opportunity. If you can successfully shift your mentality from one of doubt to one of optimism, then you will find yourself showing up more often than anyone else, and just by pure numbers, you will excel beyond everyone around you who stayed at home.

After all, you cannot walk through a door if you do not first walk up to it. Some doors may never open despite how hard you pound on them. Other doors that are wide open are useless if you don't even approach them to see what might be on the other side.

## **The third philosophy: suffering does not make you stronger; learning does.**

"I had to suffer when I was your age, so you do too; it builds character!" Does this sound familiar to you? I adamantly disagree with this sentiment. "Character" can be learned in any number of ways, and struggles of the previous generation should not be the struggles of today's generation.

Believing that the repetition of the previous generation's struggles is a rite of passage seems to be more like a way to stifle human progress and creativity than to advance it. When we can learn from others' mistakes without having to repeat them ourselves, then it allows us to develop and discover new problems that need solving.

There is much to be learned from those who came before us. Whether it is someone who stops to tell us the bridge ahead is flooded and we shouldn't drive there, or it is our grandparents relaying lessons learned after decades of experience, there is plenty we can and should learn from our predecessors. Repeating struggle is inefficient and should be avoided where possible.

## **The fourth philosophy: a bad plan is better than no plan**

Now that you have your *what if* in mind, you are energized to show up, and you have learned from others around you, what comes next? Well, you need a plan! Just as I drafted an outline for this book before I started to write paragraphs, you need to have an idea about the steps necessary to take to reach your goal.

As children, we are asked enough times about what we want to be when we grow up. Rarely does that conversation continue to discuss *how* we can live that life. In Chapter 4, I am going to walk you through a planning and decision-making process that will save you a lot of grief in creating a plan which will propel you toward living your *what if*.

## **The fifth philosophy: be flexible**

Having a plan is great and all, but remember, life is complicated. You are always getting new information,

and the circumstances are ever-changing. The ability to be flexible is paramount. Flexibility is not about flip-flopping or even changing your mind. It is about allowing yourself and your plan to adapt to a continually changing environment so that you ensure success in accomplishing your goals.

Flexibility is hard. People don't like the uncertainty of change. Learning to be flexible takes discipline. Once mastered, you can apply it to achieving success in all aspects of your life.

## **The sixth philosophy: do it while you're young**

Albert Einstein wisely said, "Compound interest is the eighth wonder of the world. He who understands it earns it... he who doesn't... pays it." Compound interest is what time gives your financial investments. It is the exponential growth of accumulated interest over time. It is essentially free money awarded to those who start investing while young. In the same way that this principle works in finance, I believe that happiness compounds. Happiness is awarded to those who start living their *what if* while young.

The result is *exponential happiness*.

Those formative younger years, when we have not yet amassed responsibilities to others or crushing debts, gives us the ability to live life for ourselves. We get this one

chance to say *what if*, to show up, to make a plan, and to afford ourselves the flexibility to change. As you will see later on, this becomes much more difficult with time. Those who start while young have a higher probability of finding happiness when they set the foundation before all those other pressures pile up.

**Note:** If you are already a little later in life, do not despair! It is never too late to pursue your dreams. The principles outlined in this book are relevant to all people of all backgrounds and ages. Starting young is genuinely a once in a lifetime opportunity, but it is not mandatory.

## Some universal truths

In the same way that the United States Declaration of Independence lays out some universal truths to be self-evident, please allow me also to make some bold statements about the Pursuit of Happiness while young.

## Anyone can do this

Anyone can live their *what if*. It is merely a matter of doing it. Yes, it might seem that others have more inherited advantages in this world, and that might be true in some limited ways. But, comparing your situation to others' is not constructive. Everyone has their own set of advantages and disadvantages. The trick is to develop the confidence that you are someone special and that

the world needs to hear from you. Then, make yourself heard.

## **Uncertainty is not an excuse**

No one knows what the future holds. The fear of failure, even the fear of success, must not stop you from trying. In the process, you may very well change the destination, but you must go through this learning process before you can have a chance at succeeding in your goal.

## **It is up to you**

Your dream is your own. Your journey. Your goal. No one else can live this for you or tell you how to experience your life's journey. Those around you can and will be a source of inspiration and learning, but only you can walk the path of your *what if* story.

## **It is never too late**

Beginning while young is a critical advantage that dissipates over time, but it is never too late to live your dream. Do not think about the doors which have closed behind you. Focus on the infinite possibilities that tomorrow holds and pursue your *what if* like there is nothing but success waiting for you.

## My promise to you

When you have finished reading this book, you will come away with two main ideas in your mind. The first is that you are precisely the person who can achieve your dreams. The second is that you should and can start pursuing your *what if* immediately.

In addition to believing this, you should also have many questions. Write these questions down as you go and use these questions as a starting point for writing your 10-year action plan (Chapter 2) and for seeking guidance from people around you.

I am also happy to hear from you and offer you additional feedback on these questions. You can read more of my recommendations about living your *what if* at [judsonlmoore.com](http://judsonlmoore.com), and you can also email me at [book@judsonlmoore.com](mailto:book@judsonlmoore.com).

Now, let's start this journey together. First things first: identifying your *what if*.

# Identify your *what if*

*“Find your passion and live it every day.”*

*Jacqueline Segall Caplan*

When you look at the world’s most successful and inspiring people, they all seem to have one thing in common: they are passionate about what they do for a living.

But is that true?

Did they get there because they were passionate to start, or are they passionate now because their destination became a success? I venture to say there is a combination of both. I can say one thing with certainty: No one stays the course through the challenges of life unless they are laser-focused on something for which they care deeply.

It is easy to yell out answers to the question, “What do you want to be when you grow up.” When I was a kid, all of my friends and I had the standard responses: pilot, doctor, president, and astronaut, but none of us knew what those careers entailed. In most cases, those professions had nothing to do with the things for which we had any passion. They were just seemingly cool things to do.

Once upon a time, I wanted to be a doctor. My parents worked in medical institutions, and so I knew many doc-

tors and respected them very much. I thought it would be amazing to do what they do and to command the respect they had from people like me and most everyone else.

But was I truly passionate about medicine? Passionate about biology and chemistry? Was I four-years of medical school and another 3-7 years of a residency program passionate about being a doctor?

No. Not even close.

I was, and still am, passionate about helping others. I couldn't imagine how that passion could turn into a career, but of course, there are many jobs out there that help people. I even view what I do now in software development less about selling widgets and much more about helping people overcome a difficult task and accomplish an important goal.

Being able to frame the work I do in a light that is more about helping people is very important to me. That is what drives me every day. Some days are more about making the world a better place than others, but over the long arch of my life, it is this fundamental driver that pushes me forward.

## **A case study in flexibility**

When I was 18 years old, and about to begin college, I had recently returned from a year abroad in Germany and a six-month solo backpacking trip across Brazil.



These were very formative experiences in helping me understand what I most valued in life.

It was at this time that I wrote the mission statement for my life. It reads, “to make a positive impact on people’s lives while working in the international arena.” I did not know what that meant at the time, and in many ways, I am still figuring it out, but this is the core value by which I measure all of my decisions as being a good fit for me or not.

I had my mission statement in hand and was beginning university. But what to study? I found the answer in Political Science with a concentration in Foreign Policy.

My education in politics was fascinating. I loved what I was learning, and I was very engaged with the political crowd. I climbed the ladder of Student Government, from college senator to student body Vice-President. I memorized Robert’s Rules of Order with the enthusiasm that my friends learned the latest Beyonce lyrics.<sup>7</sup>

You see, I planned to study foreign policy, give two years of service in the Peace Corps, and then take, and hopefully pass, the U.S. Department Of State’s Foreign Service Officer Test to become an American diplomat. The diplomatic corps was where I thought I could best accomplish my life’s mission statement.

And then, in my senior year, it happened: disaster struck.

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<sup>7</sup>“Billboard Year-End Hot 100 singles of 2007.” Wikipedia, September 1, 2019, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Billboard\\_Year-End\\_Hot\\_100\\_singles\\_of\\_2007](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Billboard_Year-End_Hot_100_singles_of_2007)

I was in the middle of a class called “Foreign Policy,” when I realized: *I don’t like this*. Everything came crashing down around me. My Golden Brick Road disintegrated right in front of me, and I no longer had sight of my path.

Suddenly I realized that I wanted no part in fighting for resources at the expense of others’ ability to live happy lives. At that time, diplomacy seemed to be more about how to make America a winner at the expense of others. Those motivations didn’t align with my values at all.

I further realized there were exactly three things I could do with a Political Science degree:

1. Go to law school,
2. Intern for some political office, or
3. Have a career change.

Choosing a career change was a no-brainer.

But to what could I possibly change? I had just invested my entire collegiate education into the pursuit of a career in federal service. The only career direction I had ever had disappeared just a few weeks before graduation.

So now what?

Well, this was easier than I thought it would be. Easy because I allowed the answer to come organically. I let my heart lead the way, and all of a sudden, it became clear what my next step should be.

In Student Government, I honestly was not all that interested in the organization's policy discourse. You see, while all of my political comrades were busy debating political philosophies and partisan politics, my focus was overseeing a nearly \$200,000 annual budget to plan the big spring concert, a battle of the bands, and a few other programs related to student wellbeing.

I also had a student job working with my university's athletics department as part of their event management team. As part of the events crew, I put together sporting events attended by thousands of people every week.

It was exciting, and I loved every second of it.

During my last two years of university, I spent all of my available mental energy organizing these large-scale events. I am also a drummer and had a touring band in college. I'd even spent a summer in Las Vegas playing music at many of the casino lounges on The Strip.

My passion was not in foreign policy. My passion was event management. Specifically, I loved the logistics that went into making music festivals.

I was going to graduate in just a few weeks, and how could I even begin to think about such a drastic change in career direction at this time with finals just around the corner? Luckily for me, my passion was evident to the professionals whom I had hired to produce these concerts on campus. They knew I was about to graduate, and sitting on a tour bus backstage at a Chevelle concert, a

legend of the concert promoter industry asked if I would like to be his right-hand man at Green Machine Concerts. My Plan just took a dramatic turn, and I was flexible enough to say yes!

My time as a concert promoter does indeed make for a fascinating story. I can tell you about encounters with the likes of Taylor Swift, ZZ Top, The White Stripes, Wyclef Jean, and many others, but we would come too far away from the point of this story.

The point is this: an essential element to any plan is the flexibility to change. Allow yourself to be as flexible as you grow. By doing this, you will always be able to achieve what is most important to you.

Let us shift the focus back over to you now.

We are going to do two exercises which will help you formulate a plan for your life. The first is called the “Life Goals Exercise,” and the second is the “20-Year Plan.” Follow along by using a sheet of paper or your favorite notes app.

## Life Goals Exercise

As you are the type of person who would read a book like this one, you might already have some life goals identified, and a plan thoroughly thought out. If so, good for you! But, I still encourage you to give this exercise a try.

You should review your goals and plans regularly; after all, your aspirations from a year ago may have changed until today, and they might change yet again a year from now. Therefore, plans need to be updated as your goals change.

What we are going to do now is very simple, but you should still take some time to think about it. After you do this exercise, you should come back to it later today or this week, and read through what you wrote down and decide again if it is reflective of who you are and what you want or not.

## Your main goal

The Life Goals Exercise is intended to help you identify your core passion and some tangible steps you can take to live a life which advances you toward fulfilling that passion. So let us start by you filling in the blank in this sentence:

The overall experiential goal of my life is to \_\_\_\_.

Keep this thought very broad; very high-level. Don't get too specific with it right now. For example, when I first did this, I wrote down "to make an impact." Maybe you want to be a doctor, then you could write "to save lives," or you want to join the military so you can write "to serve

a mission bigger than myself,” so on and so forth. Think of this as the driving force behind WHY you want to do whatever it is you would like to do with your life.

Again, there is no right or wrong answer here, and you are most welcome (and encouraged!) to revise this later. We, humans, are, after all, evolving creatures with ever-changing needs and desires. However, I believe if you get this line correct, it should not need much changing, because this should reflect your inner core and what drives you to do all the things you do in your life.

## **Contributing objectives**

Write a numbered list, 1-15. With this list, you will identify some contributing objectives to the life goal you have written. A contributing objective is an actionable step you can take that is more short term or quantifiable than the life goal. These are the things you might like to accomplish throughout your life, the completion of which will signify that you are fulfilling your life goal.

You do not need to fill in all 15 contributing objectives, but you may also feel free to do more than 15. 15 is a pretty good target which gives you plenty to work with, lots of flexibility later on in life, while also keeping the list concise enough so that you do not get lost in an endless list of potential activities.

I've filled in the first three contributing objectives here

from my own Life Goals Exercise<sup>8</sup> so that you have a few examples of what scope of activities you could have on your list.

**Contributing objectives, in priority order, that I'd like to do before I die that would contribute to my goal:**

1. Always be the one to “walk through the door.”
2. Volunteer.
3. Gain vast cultural knowledge.

All of these are specific enough to provide me with direction, but also vague enough to leave me plenty of flexibility for how I achieve each item.

You should feel very free to come back to this later. This list can and should be a living document, something that, as time passes and you grow, you will want to revisit and edit.

## Prioritization

Before moving on, can you rearrange this list in such a way that it becomes priority-ranked? Move items that are most important to you to the top, and the less-important items toward the bottom.

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<sup>8</sup>Moore, Judson. “How to identify and accomplish your life goals.” Judson L Moore, September 1, 2019, <https://www.judsonlmoore.com/life-goals-exercise/>

Once you have this list of priority-ranked contributing objectives written down, there is one more step before we can put it to rest.

## Timeframe

To the right of each item, assign a time value, in years, for when you would like to have accomplished that item. Some of these will be ongoing and not necessarily have a completion date. That is ok. You can leave those without a time value if you genuinely feel that they will be consistent themes throughout your life.

## Review

Great! Now you have identified the

- Overall experiential goal of your life,
- Contributing objectives to achieving that goal, and
- Specified a timeframe in which you hope to accomplish those goals.

Excellent progress! You should now feel free to reward yourself with a treat. For example, you could have a cupcake, a walk in the park, or, you can keep on reading! There is more work to be done here, so if you do take a break, come back soon while the last exercise is still fresh in your mind.



## The 20-Year Plan

Now it is time to write a 20-Year Plan! Twenty years is a very long time, roughly  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the average lifetime of an adult living in the Western Hemisphere. But don't fret, you have already done the hardest part.

Take a look at your list of contributing objectives. You can use these as the foundation for your 20-Year Plan because you have already assigned a time value to each item. Rewrite that list now according to those time values. Start the new list with the objectives you believe you can accomplish more quickly, and end the list with the things which will take longer to achieve, followed by the ongoing items with no set time value at the end of the list.

Try to write the items without a specific timeframe at the end of the list in some sequential order, if you see a clear way to do so. Perhaps by what is most important to you, or in dependency order.

This reordered list is now the foundation for your 20-Year Plan.

Maybe the timespan here is only a few years, or perhaps it is more than 20-Years; either way, that is ok. The idea is not to have a rigid list of things you must do. The point of this exercise is to give yourself a vision of the incremental things you can do that will lead to you succeeding in achieving your life goal.

The philosophy you should keep in mind here is that any plan, even a bad plan, is better than no plan. Additionally, the most crucial aspect of any plan is flexibility to change.

Let's review what you have here. You have a life goal. You have a list of contributing objectives you would like to accomplish over a defined period. These items are reasonably broad, but they offer structure, and they contribute to the strategy of a longer-term goal.

So let us go one level deeper.

For each of these contributing objectives, write two concrete, specific Action Items that you can do to accomplish that particular Contributing Objective. These Action Items should be items with a precise definition. Examples could include:

- Complete a specific course or certification,
- Learn a new language,
- Submit ten photos to a contest, etc.

Here are a few items from my 20-Year Plan once I ranked them in chronological order:

1. Complete Peace Corps service. (before 30 years old)
  - a. Develop a relationship with a Peace Corps Recruiter
  - b. Apply to the Peace Corps

2. Be an active Rotarian. (at 30 years old)
  - a. Stay engaged with local Rotary Clubs in any community where I live.
  - b. Apply for membership when I find a club that is a good fit for me.
3. Share my knowledge and experience with others. (ongoing)
  - a. Publish at least two blog posts each month.
  - b. Write a book about the lessons I have learned.

Whew! You did it! You now have a 20-Year Plan! And if not for 20 years, then hey, that is also totally fine. You have a plan that gets you significantly closer to achieving your life goal, and that sets you far ahead of most people!

Now, remember, this is a living document. Make a fresh, legible copy and put it somewhere safe. Or do what I did and put it on your blog for the world to see. Or keep it secure in a Google Doc or on another cloud storage service. Whatever you do, just put this somewhere safe and where you can find it again in the future. If you want to be hyper-organized about it, you can even create some calendar reminders for yourself once a year to look at the document.

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### **What is Rotary?**

Many people ask me to explain what Rotary is. It has been a strong influence in my life since I was quite young, but most of my peers are unaware of Rotary's global impact. From the [rotary.org](http://rotary.org) website, Rotary describes itself as:

Rotary is a global network of 1.2 million neighbors, friends, leaders, and problem-solvers who see a world where people unite and take action to create lasting change across the globe, in our communities, and in ourselves.

In addition to leading the effort to eradicate polio from the world, promoting peace, and supporting educational and exchange programs like what took me to Germany for my exchange year, Rotary is family.

Rotary's membership is made up of business and community leaders who have a desire to volunteer their time, money, and intellect for the betterment of all.

Learn more about Rotary and how you can get involved with a club near you at [rotary.org](http://rotary.org)

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## BONUS: 20-Year Plan Summary

You may or may not see some categories clumping together in your 20-Year Plan's timeline. For me, I was able to think of all the details in my Plan in just three steps which clumped everything together nicely:

### My 20-Year Plan Summary

- Graduate University
- Spend my 20s gaining as much and as diverse experience as possible
- In my 30s, focus my learnings into a more stable career path

Can you write a summary of your 20-Year Plan? Think first about the most significant near-range item, then envision how you think the first ten years will look, and then how the second ten years might look.

You can see the entire Life Goals Exercise and 20-Year Plan that I did when I was 18 years old, and the progress that I have made thus far, on my blog at [judsonlmoore.com/life-goals-exercise](http://judsonlmoore.com/life-goals-exercise).

You can also subscribe to my newsletter there and receive additional tips and encouragement about goal-setting.

## Being spontaneous

There is a lot more advice I am going to offer you about what to do with your 20-Year Plan, but before we dive deeper, let's take a break from planning and discuss spontaneity.

Earlier in this chapter, I shared a philosophy about plans that I believe is truly valuable, "The most important aspect to any plan is flexibility to change." This philosophy is critical. A long-term plan will not serve you well if you do not allow yourself the flexibility to make changes as you go.

People receive new information, opportunities, knowledge, and inspirations every day. As such, our desires and values will also change over time.

Planning is just goal setting. Goals also change. When a primary life goal changes, then you need to rethink the steps in achieving that goal, but you still need to take some time to contemplate what the best steps are.

Sometimes, the best step to take is a spontaneous one. Living in the moment and just doing what feels right without overthinking the benefits or consequences can often lead to the most rewarding experiences and memories. If a spontaneous decision is going to lead to disaster, you will probably have an idea about that possibility before jumping in, so hopefully, you will also intuitively make the best spontaneous decision.

I am going to discuss decision-making skills in further detail later in Chapter 4. The principles I will share with you there are going to help you make on-the-fly decisions as well as more long-term decisions. You will get a lot out of those principles once we get there, but for now, let's get back to the planning phase and what to do once you have your life goals identified.

## **Finding inspiration all around**

Inspiration exists all around us. The list of what inspires is infinite. Our family, our friends, our teachers, celebrities, nature, architecture, the skies above, books, and so much more all inspire us.

As with most things, not all inspiration is treated equally. We take much of our daily inspiration for granted, and may not even realize at the moment that inspiration is seeping in. We tend to think of inspiration as being necessarily grandiose and life-altering, and though this can also be the case, I believe that inspiration also comes from the small, everyday parts of life. I believe that these sources of inspiration have much more tangible impacts on the way we live our lives than any other source. Since this type of inspiration has a way to sneak into our lives, it is sometimes difficult to fully appreciate or even to identify when it is happening.

With your Life Goals and 20-Year Plan in-hand, let's search together for some inspiration.

For each item on your Life Goals and 20-Year Plan, can you add some annotations with names of people or organizations who have inspired your desire for those actions in your life? Are these people that you know personally? If not, can you get an introduction? Can you engage them via social media or by writing them a thoughtful handwritten letter? There is no better feeling in this world than being told by an aspiring person that you are a source of inspiration for them.

If you can let it be known to these people that you look up to them, let them know the specific impact they have made in you. When you do this, mention what the specific actions are that you plan to take because of that inspiration. Let them know that you are not just passively sitting around awestruck and inspired. You must be inspired to action, that is what makes this inspiration special.

Once the inspirational person knows the action you are planning to take based on their inspiration in you, they will more often than not feel a vested interest in helping you become successful. Their interest can be a precious advantage few people will ever obtain because others seldom reach out.

## **Engaging mentors**

A lesson I learned while serving in the U.S. Peace Corps is that if you are doing something for someone else, you



should not want it more than they do. Sure, you should desire the fruits of your labor. You can even want it a lot. But if the person or organization whom it most benefits wants it less than you do, then you need to reevaluate your position on the task at hand.

Don't confuse "want" for "ability to perform." Lots of times, especially when volunteering, we do things for others who cannot do that thing themselves, which is likely why we are there in the first place. However, if that person desires this task to be completed less than you do, then you need to think about how much of yourself you should be putting into this. After all, you are there for their benefit, not yours.

Maybe it is your involvement that is too high, or perhaps it is the beneficiary's enthusiasm that needs some attention. Is the effort you're making a worthwhile effort? Will the results be sustainable? If you want the task completed more than its beneficiary, then the answer to these questions should be a resounding "no."

The same is true for those who might be helping you. If you can get some influencers to mentor you, they will quickly go away if they feel the engagement is coming more from their side than from yours. So don't pursue these relationships without some plan in mind. Luckily, you already have a great plan written down! Share your Life Goals and 20-Year Plan, in their entirety, with those who inspire you. They will be impressed with your organizational skills and that you have a personal vision written down.

Often, these mentors can help you along your path in many more ways than you (or they) realize at the onset.

## **Follow through**

When you receive suggestions or to-do items from a mentor, be sure that you do them. Otherwise, say you won't upfront. If you won't, then also clarify why you won't complete these items. Is it lack of understanding? Lack of ability? Lack of time? Hopefully, not a lack of interest, but if so, then you can probably acknowledge to yourself that you're in the wrong place at the wrong time.

I am confident that 99% of the time that you actively reach out for advice, and receive said advice, you will take action on it. Right? Well, it happens less often than you'd think. Follow-through is very important. If you're going to get some of a person's most valuable resource, their time and their mind, be sure you do your part to follow through.

## **Follow up**

Imagine it has been a few days or weeks since you met with your new mentor, and you have either completed or at least started the actions they encouraged you to try. Let them know how it is going. This is so important for developing the relationship.

You don't need every detail completed. Under many circumstances, it might be ok that you've not even started taking action on the steps yet. But you should still follow up and give a status report.

Do you have obstacles with the tasks? Let them know. Get more advice. That is the whole point of the mentorship, after all.

## Mentorship

Your mentors are qualified as such because of their expertise and experience. Do not allow yourself to get caught up in all of their accomplishments. They have been working at it for longer than you have, and what you see are just the accolades and results. Few things come easy in life, and the rewards most worth celebrating often occur after long hard work.

Learn about your mentors' path, how they overcame obstacles, and how they got their start. It is in this way that you can best learn from their mistakes and build your successful path to living your *what if*.

## LIVE the *if*; don't just dream about it

Now comes the critical part. Once you have identified your *what if* and have a few key sources of inspiration

and support, you now have to go out and live it! Doing this can feel overwhelming at times, but those tangible Action Items which you wrote down as ways to accomplish each of the contributing objectives in your 20-Year Plan will serve as a great directional tool.

Are you working toward any of those action items already? What is holding you back? How can you measure when the action item is complete or is ready to advance to the next level? I believe that most of the time, these questions will be answered either with time or by merely contemplating them for a little while.

You are a smart person, you've come this far, you will know when things are working out or not. So get out of your way and let yourself be you.

There is a question I get asked more frequently than any other. All of my friends have asked me this. After spending a year in Germany at age 17, half a year in Brazil at age 18, playing music on the Vegas Strip over a summer break, quitting my job and moving to London on nothing more than a prayer, this one question always came back to me. I was asked many times, "Judson, how do you get to do all this?"

I never really understood this question. I certainly never gave a satisfying answer to this question. In response to the travel experiences, I would unsatisfactorily respond, "I bought a plane ticket, and I went!" I didn't understand what the big deal was. I couldn't perceive how others did not see these opportunities as clearly as I did.

The fact is, the real question they were asking me was, “Judson, how do you live your *what if*?” Many of those who asked were not living their own *what if* for one reason or another. Sometimes the reasons were more legitimate than others. My failure to provide proper context and encouragement to my friends and peers to go out into the world, take risks, and to live their *what if*, is the reason I started the #whileyoung <sup>9</sup> section on my blog and decided to write this book.

Solo backpacking across Brazil for six months when I was right out of high school did not happen “just ‘cause.” There was a thought process and a plan there. There were numerous rounds of evaluations and a cost-benefit analysis for the decision to go. I had to weigh the decision on which place would be my destination. The competing country was Australia, and it was hard to decide between the two locations. In the end, learning about the funnel-web spider in Australia helped me decide I would go to Brazil. Of course, that is silly, since Brazil has some of the biggest spiders in the world. But at the time, it was all the information available to me, so no regrets there.

This trip to Brazil was possible for me because I purposefully worked and saved money for it. I sacrificed my high school senior year after-school activities so that I could work at a Sears retail outlet and sell car stereos to my peers. I dropped my extracurricular classes (band and music in particular) so that I could accelerate graduation

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<sup>9</sup>Moore, Judson. “A guide for how to do it while you’re young, whatever it may be.” Judson L. Moore, September 1, 2019, <https://www.judsonlmoore.com/whileyoung/>

by six months. I missed prom and my graduation ceremony so that I could be in Brazil on a grand adventure.

To me, this was the most logical decision possible. To my peers and school guidance counselors, they thought I was making a mistake and missing the “most important experience of my life” by not walking across the stage to get my diploma. I thought they were crazy for advising me not to go to Brazil. I don’t think we ever came to share the same opinion on this one.

Even producing the final destination contenders of Australia and Brazil was informed by my previous experience as a Rotary Youth Exchange Student in Germany, where I met many other students from around the world, notably from those two countries.

As you can see, this did not “just happen.” I did not “just buy a plane ticket and go.” I had a plan. I weighed my choices. I lived my *what if*.

I cheated my friends for years because I did not do a sufficient job of explaining how I came to these decisions and led such an adventurous lifestyle. I hope they will forgive me and that I can win back some positive karma for sharing my story now, with you. My greatest desire is that you will go out and live your dreams after reading this book.

## Stagnation

“Go mode” is not the default. There are times when we will stall out. The Plan will take a backseat to the realities of our life. We all have obligations with friends, family, work, and community that can slow down and even alter the course of our own lives. That is ok, that is life, and you can also celebrate the slow times as well.

But we can't just sit around the campfire and sing Kumbaya forever. If we did that, eventually, the fire would run cold, and someone would have to chop more firewood. Those action steps you wrote down are like the wood for your Life Plan's fire. You always have to be gathering more wood, or the fire runs out.

When you find yourself stagnating, or feeling like you're not getting anywhere in your life's ambitions, it is time to make some assessments. Try to identify the reason or reasons why you are not making progress.

Are you becoming disenchanted with your topic of study? Maybe what you have learned is that you don't want to be the thing you are studying for when you grow up.

Is your job no longer challenging you and providing you with opportunities to grow?

Do you lack support or inspiration in some part of your life or even the community where you live?

Are your friends, or maybe a roommate, black holes who suck all the energy and inspiration out of you? It can

be harsh to think about, but maybe your social group is holding you back.

If you can identify the place or places in your life that are not helping you rise to the occasion, then it is time to make some changes. Change, especially worthwhile change, can be challenging to make in the beginning.

If you are in your final year of university and realize that you need a drastic change in your studies that will delay graduation, that is a tough decision to make. But isn't it better to make it now than to graduate with a degree which only opens doors which will make you unhappy?

Similarly, how long do you want to be in the comfort of the steady job that is going to get you nowhere?

Changing your social group may feel impossible, but there are always ways in which you can alter your daily routines, extracurricular activities, or surroundings so that you become exposed to new people and ideas.

Change often appears to be a sudden thing to outside people, but to you, this is a process which can, and sometimes should take quite a while to implement. After identifying that a change needs to come, you can spend a significant time seeking out the adjustments that make the most sense. It is good to investigate options, but don't let the abundance or lack of apparent possibilities hold you back from making a change once you know you need one.

If you find that the change you made was not the best,



that is fine, because then you get to make another change and will be all that much more well-prepared to choose wisely. This iterative learning process is a natural part of life and will come back into play later when we go into a more in-depth discussion regarding decision-making.

## Multiple “ifs” balance

So far, we have been having a singular discussion about one primary life goal and the steps to accomplish that goal. However, it is more often than not the case that we have a variety of life goals.

So now what?

You might be thinking that accomplishing just one life goal sounds complicated enough, so how do you succeed with two, ten, even one hundred life goals? Well, I advise you only to apply the same steps we have already discussed toward each one of those.

Some of the goals may complement one another, while others may be so vastly diverse that you need an entirely different set of action steps to make progress toward those other goals.

Prioritization will help with sorting this out. Which goals are most important? Which goals require more immediate attention and effort? Which goals are time-sensitive and either require that you act today, or perhaps

you must wait until a later stage in life before you can adequately address them?

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, I first had a goal to write this book about seven years ago. I wrote the working title, a simple outline, and had a general premise, then I shelved the project until three years ago, wrote the full outline and drafted the first three chapters, and stalled out again. I've had the writing of this book as a goal for a long time, but I also understood that I was not yet ready to write what I wanted to say. I required that a few more life experiences happen in my own life so that I could learn, grow, reflect, and eventually share a higher quality of learnings with my readers.

The only thing that makes me happier than to have succeeded in my goal of writing this book is that you are reading it! A tremendous **thank you** for being part of my journey.

# Do it while you're young

*“Of all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these,  
‘It might have been.’”*

*John Greenleaf Whittier*

After many years of travel blogging, I grew tired of writing about me, my life, and the corners of the Earth with which I was getting acquainted. These stories felt more like showing off and less like I was making an impact on people's lives.

Were people traveling more because of my writing?

Doubtfully.

Were people's experiences at destinations altered because of some tips I offered up?

Rarely.

Was I engaged in a valuable feedback loop with my audience and learning from them as they learned from me?

Nope.

So then why was I spending so much of my creative energy writing about my latest trip, rather than making efforts to make a real impact on people's lives? This thought had been itching the back of my brain for some time, but it took me a long time to arrive at a eureka moment.

I spent a few days buried in a subterranean apartment in Washington, D.C., during the Snowpocalypse of 2016<sup>10</sup> that covered the East Coast in over 3-feet of ice and snow. While waiting out the storm, I suddenly realized I needed to write not about *what* I have done, but *how* I have done it. More of the back story. More of the rationale behind opportunities. All the opportunities for me, started *while young*, which, as I will explain, was the single most crucial factor in my future successes.

I spun up a new section of my blog and called it #WhileYoung<sup>11</sup>. I wrote about my experiences from the view of age, rather than location. *Youth* is an asset. Perhaps the most valuable asset anyone has, for it cannot be purchased at any price, and once spent, it is gone forever from this universe.

But why? When we are young, we have more flexibility in the way we spend our time. Of course, we still have obligations with school, family, extracurricular events, friends, ...and the list goes on and on. But most of these things are somehow flexible when we are young.

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<sup>10</sup>"January 2016 United States blizzard." Wikipedia, September 1, 2019, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/January\\_2016\\_United\\_States\\_blizzard](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/January_2016_United_States_blizzard)

<sup>11</sup>Moore, Judson. "A guide for how to do it while you're young, whatever it may be." Judson L Moore, September 1, 2019, <https://www.judsonlmoore.com/whileyoung/>

As I wrote in the first chapter, I grew up in a fairly typical suburban neighborhood in a medium-sized American city. I had a loving family with two parents and a brother. I received an excellent public education, and I grew up with the Internet Revolution. Throw a little white privilege on top of my good fortune to be born male in a Western culture, and it is easy to think that I had all of the world's advantages.

However, unless you skipped both the introduction and Chapter 1, you know that not everything was perfect. Just like all people, I had my own set of stresses to deal with and challenges to overcome. From a global perspective, I indeed had some inherent advantages, but by and large, I was a relatively unextraordinary American kid.

A defining moment in my life came during the summer that I turned 16 years old. I was attending a youth camp<sup>12</sup> organized by the Rotary Clubs<sup>13</sup> in my area. Part of the camp schedule included daily presentations from various community and business leaders.

One of the speakers was a woman representing the Rotary Youth Exchange Program<sup>14</sup>. This program is a comprehensive global exchange program for high school students to study abroad for up to one year, all expenses paid.

The speaker informed us that the program paid all flights,

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<sup>12</sup>"Rotary Youth Leadership Awards." Rotary International, September 1, 2019, <https://www.rotary.org/en/our-programs/rotary-youth-leadership-awards>

<sup>13</sup>"Rotary International." Rotary International, September 1, 2019, <https://www.rotary.org>

<sup>14</sup>"Rotary Youth Exchange." Rotary International, September 1, 2019, <https://www.rotary.org/en/our-programs/youth-exchanges>

insurance, necessary living costs, and it vetted and organized host families with whom to live. As exchange students, we would attend local schools, have local friends, and participate in local events. Possible destinations were anywhere you could imagine.

The call to action at the end of the presentation was that any interested camper should simply come to talk with the presenter and express interest.

I thought to myself, “that is a LINE I must get in!” When the presentation concluded, I prepared to elbow my way to the front of the room. To my amazement, there were no obstacles in my way. All of the other campers ran outside to play a game! I was the only one who approached the program representative to express interest. As a result, a year later, I found myself on my first airplane, headed to Germany, where I would live for one year as an exchange student.

That experience started by merely expressing interest and has shaped every day of my life since.

I've shared this story for years as an anecdote about showing up. In many ways, showing up is the key to all of life's successes, which is why I dedicated all of chapter 5 to the topic. Before we get to that, I first want to impress upon you the reasons why showing up is best done sooner rather than later.

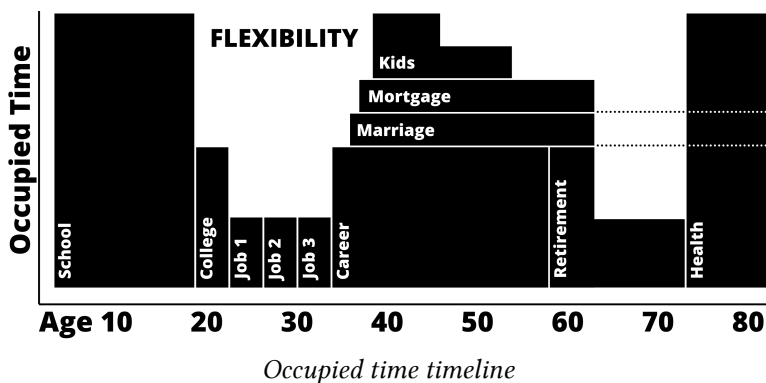
## **Youth = flexibility = opportunity**

When we are young, we have more flexibility in the way we spend our time. Of course, we still have obligations with school, family, extracurricular events, friends, ...and the list goes on and on. But most of these things are somehow flexible when we are young.

As a student, I was able to leave home and study in another country for one year. My family obligation was a bit flexible and allowed this. On the other hand, what do you think would have happened if my parents decided to leave me at home alone while they went to live in Europe for a year? That was much less likely to happen! As a young person, I had this flexibility in a way that my parents did not.

To help visualize the flexibility we have while young, take a look at the chart fig 3.1. Everyone's life is different, and not everyone will pursue the things laid out in this diagram, the point should still be apparent.

As we get older, we have more responsibilities and pressures that take up our time. It does not matter if what you want to accomplish in life involves leaving the place where you grew up or not. As we age, we accumulate more and more responsibilities that occupy our time and make it more challenging to focus on a big goal or to change course altogether.



Imagine you want to travel for one year, or maybe you want to take some time off work to write a book, but you have a mortgage and three mouths to feed. You probably cannot quit your job and abandon your bills and family. Nor would I ever endorse such a decision. That is why you should focus on living your *what if* before you attain those responsibilities, i.e., *do it while you're young!*

Many people delay travel until their retirement. However, certain activities become more difficult as health conditions change, and knees get weaker if you even have the good fortune of living that long. I had knee surgery two years ago, so I am particularly sensitive to this topic.

Let's talk for a minute about the obligations in this chart. Again, not everyone will live this cookie-cutter diagram, but in one way or another, this flow of responsibilities vs. flexibility is representative of many people's lives.



## School

Primary education is, indeed, a primary responsibility for both you and your parents. Some laws penalize parents who don't send their kids to school. Other laws punish kids who choose not to go. More importantly, this formative time of life is full of wonder and exploration of the mind. But you get very little flexibility to make your own schedule or to set your own priorities. One could argue that a lack of autonomy at this age is even a good thing. It is likely beneficial to have structure provided to you at this age.

As we get a little older, we gain some freedoms. We can pick our sports, extracurricular activities, how we express ourselves in the way we dress, and the music to which we listen. We can choose how to spend the weekend. Start a small business, become a creator on YouTube, volunteer in the community. There are many open doors.

In America, we can drive at 16 years of age, still while having a few years left in school. In other parts of the world, it might be easier to travel alone on public transit or go out on weekends to clubs.

There are always opportunities if you think creatively and seek them. Just find a path that works for you and pursue it rigorously with all the resources you can find around you.

I was so surprised when I lived in Germany when I was

17 years old that I could travel across Europe, and no one thought it was weird at all. “Youth hostels” are a thing, after all.

**Example:** When I was 14, I got involved in community theater. My first production was Rodgers & Hammerstein’s *South Pacific*<sup>15</sup>. I attended rehearsal every day after school for months, and then we performed to hundreds of people every night for two weeks. As this was community theater, everyone on stage was a volunteer. They came from all walks of life, were all ages, and we all shared a passion for music, community, production, and fun. The theater was all great fun and taught me many valuable lessons, including getting me over stage fright, very useful for a career in public speaking!

## Gap year

A gap year is a year taken between high school and university, or between university and going to work, in which you pursue some other endeavor. Many people use this time to travel or to pursue some other life goal.

Before college and directly after college is a great time to pursue your life goals. You might feel pressured to go straight from school to university, or from university to work, but these are times when you do genuinely have a choice.

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<sup>15</sup>“South Pacific (musical).” Wikipedia, September 1, 2019, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South\\_Pacific\\_\(musical\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Pacific_(musical))

**Example:** I streamlined my high school senior year classes and dropped my extracurriculars so I could graduate a few months early. I got a job and worked every day after school and saved money. Then, I spent six months solo-backpacking Brazil before I started university.

That experience was the most life-impacting, self-defining, and educational experience of my lifetime. It taught me more than any schooling ever could, and it was critical in guiding my choices regarding what to study at university.

## College

Attending university offers us a great experience with autonomy. We choose for ourselves what we will study, who we will spend our time with, and what extracurricular activities or jobs we will have to fill in the gaps. All colleges have vast door-opening opportunities with internships, study abroad programs, and career development programs. Utilize these programs to the best of your ability; after all, you're paying for them already!

**Example:** I joined a wide variety of student organizations that covered every topic I could imagine at the time. But the most meaningful series of events is what led me to action after Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans in 2005. I went to the local American Red Cross chapter<sup>16</sup> in the middle of the night and began a sequence of

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<sup>16</sup>"The American Red Cross in Louisiana." American Red Cross, September 1, 2019, <https://www.redcross.org/local/louisiana.html>

volunteering activities that somehow led to full-time employment. During my two years as an emergency response planner, I sat at the table with local, state, and federal policymakers as the Red Cross's representative. Together, we shaped policies that would impact the state for years to come.

## **Jobs**

Long gone are the days of finishing your schooling, landing a job, and keeping that job until you retire. Instead, you will likely find yourself with a lot of flexibility to move around to different employers and experiment in diverse professional environments. At this stage, it might not be extraordinarily comfortable to quit a job and take a risk on something else, but it is certainly possible.

Opportunities are all around us. We need only look for them and work hard to get the doors open. Patience is a virtue, but being young and flexible is an asset that will not last much longer. Use your early career to gain as many experiences as possible. Building your library of professional skills and life experience will serve you well until your dying breath.

The first jobs you have after school are a perfect time to reach out for mentorship. You shouldn't feel shy about this! Senior people expect that you are smart, ambitious, and hard-working. They do not expect that you know everything and that you have all the answers. No matter

your educational background, you do not know it all, and you have not learned yet what the job will teach you.

When you are in your early career, you are expected to be a bit ignorant. Don't hide from this. Promote yourself by asking questions and being inquisitive. Asking questions is one of the best traits you can show your peers and managers. (By the way, this never changes, you will learn new things for the rest of your life!)

**Example:** During the first week of starting a new job, I always ask everyone who interviewed me, "Why did you hire me, and more importantly, why were you thinking *not* to hire me?" I ask this because I want to know what parts of my character I should promote as a strength, and what parts of my skillset I should improve. It is better to get this feedback on the first day than at the end of the first year. I recently landed a great opportunity that I was not quite qualified for on paper. When I asked them my question, they replied that my lack of experience in *this job* was a concern for them. However, the decision to hire me seems to have been an easy one for them to make. What made me the obvious choice was not my experience in that same role, but rather all of the years I spent in other roles. My diverse experience left the hiring managers feeling that I would bring a different thought process and some needed empathy for the team. My "nomadic lifestyle" made me an even more attractive candidate than those who had more traditional experiences.

## Career

Now things are getting a bit more serious. You're a little older. You've gained some more experience. You've found the professional path that makes you the happiest, or at least seems to be the right direction for your life. Excellent! But now more than ever, you have to stay the course and put in your time at work.

This company has invested in you and expects to get a return on that. Likewise, you need to establish your professional stability by not having an update to your resume every six months. Now you are putting all of your life's learnings to the test.

The period when you get to do meaningful work that makes you happy is a wonderful time of life. As you can imagine, however, your ability to just up and change everything in your life is becoming more and more difficult.

**Example:** My strategy from an early age was to live my 20's gaining as many diverse experiences as possible, and then spend my 30's focusing those learnings into a stable career. Coincidentally, I finished service in the Peace Corps one-month before my 30th birthday and then got recruited into a tech company. I've stayed in tech ever since and have worked a variety of jobs. Being inside the ecosystem taught me a lot and helped me find what I wanted to do professionally, which is product management. I've now been doing that for a few years,

and I am confident this is what I will stick with (along with writing books, of course!) until I retire.

## **Marriage**

You've found the love of your life, and now you're set to spend your life together. It is a huge milestone. But now, you have two sets of life goals to balance — two careers to consider. Two schedules to coordinate. To make some significant life change or travel the world, now two of you have to make adjustments simultaneously to many parts of your life for it to work out. Flexibility is fleeting.

**Example:** I am not married, and so this is an area where I can't offer a story from my own life. One of my friends who had lifelong ambitions to travel was studying German in preparation for a road trip around Germany. Suddenly, he met the love of his life, married rapidly, had children quickly after that, and although he has the passport, it remains void of stamps.

## **Mortgage**

Your career is advancing. You are living in a community that makes you happy. The person you want to spend the rest of your life with is by your side. The time has come to make a long-term investment in some property and have an asset in the future. These are all great things, but now you have to pay a bank some significant sum of money

every month for the next 30 years. Now, quitting your job is not an option. Making any super drastic changes in your life is not going to come easy, if at all.

**Example:** My best friend from high school still lives in our small hometown. He never wanted to stay there. He was even much more ambitious than me to leave. He waited, very nobly, so as not to leave his father all alone after his mom had died. He didn't want his dad to be lonely. My friend is a hero. But my friend also inherited the house and the bills that came with it. He doesn't even care about the house anymore, but he is stuck there. He can't quit his job, he can't risk bankruptcy, and he has to work, work, work, to make the mortgage. There is no relocation in his foreseeable future, and there is little chance for pursuing his dreams until he can relocate.

## Family

It's time to fill those extra rooms in the house with some kiddos! Having children is one of the greatest achievements in many peoples' lives. To have a family is an extraordinary thing. But it also means that most of the next two decades are solely about those little humans.

If you thought it sounded challenging to balance the schedules of two people, just you wait! Sure, you can travel with kids. People do it all the time. But they are now priority #1, and moving as a unit comes with extra stresses (and costs). Any significant life change during this period has to consider their best interest.



**Example:** I recently visited a friend of mine living near the Baltic Sea, where he and his wife have two young children. Before the kids came along, the pair had traveled extensively around the world. When I asked him how the kids have impacted their flexibility, he confirmed my suspicions that the joy of children comes with embracing more spontaneity and reduced flexibility to do whatever you want for yourself. The kids are priority number one, now. That said, the travel has only slowed down marginally. Because the newly-minted parents had already mastered the ins and outs of travel, it meant that they could travel more easily with their kids. By leveraging the years of flexibility between finishing school and having children to hone their own skills, the parents are now better prepared to guide their kids through the adventure of life.

## Retirement

If you have planned well, saved up, and are in good health, then retirement can be golden years for pursuing your life dreams not yet accomplished. However, there are a lot of boxes to check for this period to have maximum flexibility. Many things will need to have gone just right throughout your life for retirement to be the time when you can do all you'd ever hoped to do in your later years.

**Example:** Some people retire early. Some people retire late. Some people never make it to retirement. The person

whom I most admire in retirement was a fellow Peace Corps volunteer with me in Kyrgyzstan. Many people think that the Peace Corps is for the young, but in fact, there is no upper age limit. The oldest volunteer in my group was in her 70's. She was a retired teacher, and so joining the Peace Corps was a perfect opportunity for her to share her skills and knowledge while having an incredible experience. As a volunteer, she didn't have any expenses. I can imagine that allowing pension, social security, and other retirement benefits pile up in the bank made her later retirement that much sweeter. She has gone on to travel the world for months at a time several times now. She is one of the most impressive people I know, and probably one of the luckiest as well.

## Health

As we age, health becomes more complicated. Health issues do not need to be blockers, but they can certainly slow down the things we do. Often, health issues steal long-sought flexibility people hoped to have later in life.

**Example:** Two years ago, my mom came to visit me in Germany. We had a grand ole' time touring around castles and museums. She did extra training in advance to ensure she would manage all the extra walking for those two weeks. It all paid off because I have to admit, she had more energy than me! I'm so grateful we had this trip when we did because six months later, she fell at home and hurt her back. The result was a tremendous

pain in her feet that has prevented her from walking any substantial distance ever since. If she had waited just a short while longer, then I'm afraid that trip to Europe would have never happened at all. I love you, Mom.

## **Impact your life before you live it**

Now that we have discussed some of the typical phases in life, let us take a look at what experiences while young can do to shape those periods.

As I mentioned above, I solo-backpacked Brazil for six months before beginning university. While in Brazil, I witnessed first-hand some of the world's most extreme poverty and harshest living conditions. I also met some amazing community leaders and people working to improve the conditions of Brazil's bottom 1%.

While visiting favelas during volunteer and community impact projects, I met with people living in these slums. They had nothing and lived in a constant state of struggle. They were not ignorant of their place in the world, and many had a sense of self that was as acute as any you'd find elsewhere.

What struck me most about the people I met in the favelas was that they were happy. I mean, they were utterly happy. I come from America's consumption culture, where we are programmed always to seek more.

We never have enough stuff, and we are not satisfied until we get more. This vicious never-ending cycle makes sustained happiness elusive for many Americans. But in the Brazilian favelas, where people had nothing, they were happy. They chose happiness. They lived happiness.

*It was incredible to me.*

The kids, who kicked around a clump of trash as a soccer ball, even they were happy. It was an extraordinary thing for me to experience. As one who was born in a community that offers so much social and economic mobility, being in the favelas really checked my privilege.

It was this experience that most-informed the mission statement of my life, which I discussed in Chapter 2, “to make a positive impact on people’s lives while working from the international arena.” This impact informed my decision to study political science and foreign policy at university. It distilled in me a greater sense of volunteerism and helping others, which led to my working with the American Red Cross after Hurricane Katrina. And later on to joining the Peace Corps and serving for over two years in Kyrgyzstan, developing media networks. My now lifelong pursuit of helping others is deeply grounded in that time I spent in Brazil.

If I had not traveled to live this *what if*, I would not have formed a direction for my life at a time when I desperately needed it. To have gone to university without inspiration for what I wanted to do with my life would have made the time, effort, and money of university a

little more than a waste. I took my classes much more seriously because real-world experiences influenced my chosen course of study. Additionally, I was able to pursue a topic that I was confident would serve me well.

We all have experiences in our lives which shape who we are and what we desire. Our upbringing, our friends, and our family all influence, for better or for worse, the path we are on. Our lives are our own, and the sole responsibility for making decisions in our life rests within ourselves.

What do you choose for yourself? On what path do you want to be? Is it the path you are on now? Do you need to make a change? I believe there is no other line of questioning more important than this.

*Carpe diem.*

Align your goals with the actions you are taking today. Of the things in your life that you do have influence over, which ones are distracting you from your goals? What steps can you take to better-align your day-to-day actions with the pursuit of your goals?

Find ways to have experiences today, now, which feed into these life goals of yours. By building up your experiences now, you will be better able to accomplish the end goals. Also, don't be surprised if, by having a few experiences, your goals change. It is natural for your interests to evolve. Many people change their field of study during university. Why do they do this? At university,

students get exposed to new ideas and possibilities. They learn that what they wanted when starting university is not the same by the time they finish. Higher education's aim is not only to teach skills and knowledge for your future career, but it is also about discovering what you *do not* want to spend your life doing. I argue that the latter is even more valuable.

With a few life-impacting experiences, you will be well-prepared to choose the path that is best for you. Knowing what are the specific actions to take from which you can base the foundation of your life gets easier and easier.

## Life without regrets

Regrets are among the saddest things we can have in our lives. Why are they so terrible? Because they are often avoidable. Let's define what precisely a regret is. "Regret" is a term that gets misused quite often, so let's first define what regret is.



**Regret** /rɪˈɡrɛt/ *noun*: A feeling of sadness, repentance, or disappointment over an occurrence or something that one has done or failed to do.

*Lexico English Dictionary*<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>"Regret." In *Lexico English Dictionary*. Oxford, 2019. Accessed 09/04/2019. <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/regret>.

I will make one edit to this classic definition. I do not believe that you should regret a decision just because it was the wrong decision. If you decide to do or not do something, only to later learn that it was the wrong decision, this is not regrettable. You should only regret something which you knew at the time of action or inaction to be wrong.

If, at the moment of making a decision, you choose to act in the best way possible based on the information available to you, then you should not regret the decision. Simply put: your life is full of decisions. If at the deciding moment you believe you are doing the correct thing, then you are. Anything you learn later about why that decision was a bad one, is simply an opportunity to learn and grow. And that, of course, is a good thing.

## **My only regrets**

I only have two regrets in my life.

The first is that it took me so long to visit Mexico. When I was an exchange student in Germany at age 17, there was another student from Mexico who was in my class. We even had the same host families (swapped mid-year). She and I are brother and sister. She is one of the most important people in my entire life. But it took me 15 years until I visited her in Mexico.

This was just unacceptable.

I traveled all over the world, but it took me a decade and a half to get to my neighboring country. I am sorry for that, Johana, but I am so grateful that in the last few years we have seen each other so many times!

The other regret in my life is a terrible story. The short of it is that I was too weak to end a relationship at the moment when it was clear it was over.

Once upon a time while living abroad, I was in a great relationship with one of the best people I have ever known. Then suddenly, I had to leave the country unexpectedly.

The situation was such that she could not come to visit or be with me. And I could not likely return to visit her. We weren't at a point in our relationship to discuss getting married, and now we weren't ever going to have the chance to get to that point.

So what was the point to continue?

I am miserable in long-distance relationships, and this was set up for disaster. We had frequently discussed that the day might come when I would have to leave, and here it was: this was the end. But in that moment at the airport when we last embraced, we were both too emotional to go through with the breakup. She asked me to stay with her, and I was too weak to rip off the bandaid and end it there.

One miserable year later, it came to an end over the phone. It was terrible. I've not seen her since that day at the airport.



It might sound awful, but I regret that I was not strong enough to stand by what I knew was right for me at that moment at the airport.

Though I wish I had acted differently in these two cases, I did learn from these regrets. I am more motivated to not have any more regrets in my life as a result of having experienced these, and for seeing the way that my actions impacted others. Just the same, it would have been better if I could have avoided these regrets all together.

## **The secret to never regretting**

Living a life without regrets is very simple. Just follow your heart, live your life for you, and make the best possible decisions based on all the information available to you at the time of making that decision. When you do these three things, then you should never feel the remorse of a regret. Your conscious will be clear.

## **Time is the only thing you can't get more of**

There is a famous Mark Twain quote which I think lacks imagination, "buy land, they're not making it anymore." Well, that is not true. We have been constructing land via reclamation projects for ages now. Mumbai was originally seven islands, which are now all filled in. A

chunk of lower Manhattan stands on reclaimed land. Dubai is frantically building land in artful forms off of its coastline. China is building islands in the South China Sea to position itself more strategically in regional and geopolitics. The examples of building more land are seemingly endless.

Though it may come at a high cost, we *are* building more land. Lots of it. All the time. What no one can buy or sell at any price, though, is time. There is no other resource so abundant in its absolute infinite supply, but to which we as humans have such finite access. The time we have is all we get. Therefore, you should learn to make the most of the time you have.

I am pretty good at time management. I am obsessed with my calendar app. If something isn't on my calendar, then it may as well not exist. I am astonishingly good at estimating the amount of time it takes to travel between two places, and therefore am excellent at arriving at destinations on time. This punctuality keeps me sane, and I know others appreciate it as well. I am not a time management expert, though, so I encourage you to read some books on the topic. I've compiled a list of my favorite time management books at the URL below so that you can gain access to the advice which has been so helpful to me.

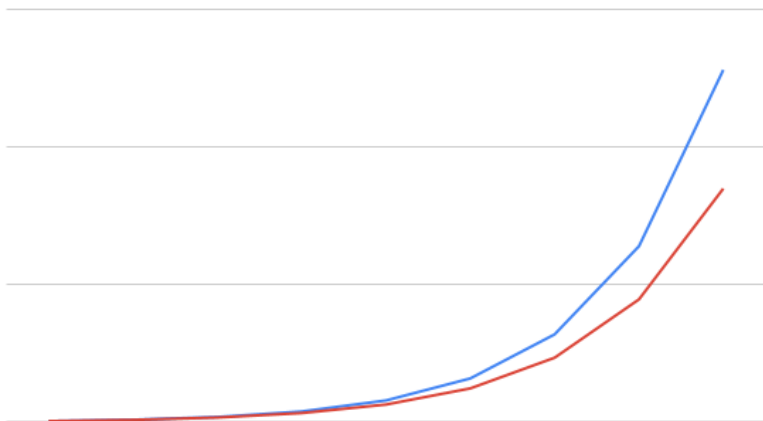
[judsonlmoore.com/readinglist](http://judsonlmoore.com/readinglist)

Wisely managing your time is super important. Please do check out some of the books I recommend and make time

management a priority. Remember, you don't get more of it! And for some things, such as travel or building your financial security, it does matter when you start. Earlier is more impactful than later.

## **Exponential happiness**

As I briefly mentioned in Chapter 1, economists refer to the interest paid on an investment's prior interest earnings as "compounding interest." Compounding means that over time, the growth curve of an investment rises exponentially, rather than in a steady climb. It is this principle that makes it so important to take advantage of your youth to start saving for retirement. When you begin saving for retirement very early, you can maximize this mechanism to gain free money later in retirement. The more years you let the investment grow, the more the magic of compounding interest will do for you. Starting while young is the key.



*The top line is compounding, while the bottom line is just 10% less input*

In the same way that compounding interest will benefit most those who start early, those who pursue their dreams beginning at an early age will experience “compounding happiness.” By pursuing your *what if* while young, you gain an irreplaceable advantage. Among the benefits is that you will experience and overcome many of the missteps everyone makes in life. The pursuit of happiness, knowledge, wisdom, relationships, and wealth is a process, and it is not always a smooth journey. When you start early, the bumps in the road are a lot less turbulent, and you recover from your mistakes much more quickly.

“

Compound interest is the eighth wonder of the world. He who understands it, earns it ... he who doesn't... pays it.

*Albert Einstein, theoretical physicist*

You will make mistakes. You will take steps backward. You will fail. You will have to start over. Recovering from the normal setbacks in life is much easier to do when you are a young adult. As you grow older, recovery from these things becomes more difficult.

Additionally, we learn from our mistakes. So start making those mistakes at a young age and learn from them sooner. The later you postpone that process, the more disservice you do to your learning.

Are you convinced yet? Are you ready to make your dreams come true? Are you feeling motivated to take the steps necessary to live your *what if* and to make your life as full of adventure, wonder, and success as possible? Then read on! In the next chapters, we will explore the nuts and bolts of decision making, taking the first steps, and much more!

# Making decisions

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# Showing up

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