

FOREWORD BY DANICA PATRICK

CUSTOMIZE

BREAK FREE FROM ORDINARY

YOUR

AND CREATE A LIFE

LIFE

YOU'LL LOVE TO LIVE

TONY & FRANCES PAPPALARDO

WITH JESSE BARNETT

“Tony and Frances Pappalardo are the real deal. Not just in the sense that they exist... a lot of people do that. No, Tony and Frances, live! Their lives boldly and honestly put the principles found in *Customize Your Life* in full color before us all to see. These principles are why they live such an amazing life. And because they live these principles, this book lives to help us all become more alive. *CYL* is readable, but challenging...fun, but full of depth. I think you will love *CYL* and love the life it helps you live.”

—**R.D. SAUNDERS,**
*Director of Advancement, The John Maxwell Leadership
Foundation and EQUIP Leadership*

“What sets Tony and Frances apart is their forward-thinking, comprehensive, *maverick* leadership. They know that it’s not merely business savvy that creates success; it’s things like vision and ability to carry it out, integrity, emotional awareness, financial responsibility, and knowing one’s self on an intimate level so that each individual’s purpose can align with the larger, life vision. They call it, “Customize Your Life”. A great concept with great potential and great vision and responsibility. Tony and Frances are a uniquely gifted and powerful couple, who operate out of deep caring for the people they lead, not for personal recognition and power. Their humility is a great key to their success and prosperity, and I am fortunate and blessed to work alongside them.”

—**BILL HOFFMAN,**
Licensed Pastoral Counselor, Clinical Member—NCCA

“If you are looking to organize your life for success, and maybe even more importantly—significance—*Customize Your Life* is a must-read. Take your time reading this book because it is filled with just what you need to know to gain control of your life and live your dreams.”

—**SAM SILVERSTEIN,**
CSB, Past President, National Speakers Association
Author of No More Excuses & The Accountability Circle

“‘We are all weird.’ That’s a quote from Seth Godin, but I think it really sums up what it means to customize your life as Tony and Frances Pappalardo describe it. The mass-produced world most of us grew up in is defined by processes to take whatever shaped peg we are born to be and shave it down to fit into whatever sized holes society has available for us. That life will *never* be fulfilling no matter how many ways we try to numb the pain of a life lived inauthentically. Customizing our lives means not only understanding who we are and learning to love ourselves for it but living deliberately and putting value into society, our country, the world—and ultimately a universe that often feels meaningless. Only humans can intentionally add value to others without looking for a return. Only humans can live generously. Each of us is born to become something much more unique and special than the systems around us will ever recognize and reward us for being. Each of us is born to put more into the world around us than we take from it, to create true wealth. The only way to find true happiness that will give us deep joy is by finding our special purpose and then putting

every ounce of energy we have into creating the life we want rather than the one someone else is trying to define for us. It is hard work, but when it is our passion and we master it, the journey fulfills our soul's longings in ways that material rewards could never imagine."

—**DAVID VANDERVEEN**,
*Husband by marriage, Father by birth, Entrepreneur by vocation
and Surfer at heart.*

"Tony and Frances have done the hard work of living, struggling, and persevering through the pain that produces the wisdom found in *Customize Your Life*. Mentorship is the acceleration that occurs when you can receive in *moments* what cost the leader *years*. The importance of this book in the lives of those who don't just read it, but apply it—is incalculable."

Don't conform; customize.

—**MIKE SIGNORELLI**,
Lead Pastor and Founder, V1 Church

Frances and Tony have worked extremely hard to build the customized life that they now live today. The way they live aligns with my philosophy of LEARN IT—LIVE IT—GIVE IT.

Learn it—They took the time to learn what was needed to live the life of their dreams.

Live it—They applied all that they learned and were able to turn their vision into reality (this is rare & valuable).

Give it—A main focus for them now is mentoring others on the *exact* process they used to build the customized life of their dreams and guide them to experience the same freedom, purpose, and adventure in their own lives.

If you have a vision and are struggling to find a way to turn it into reality, Frances and Tony are two of the best at helping you make it happen!

—**JAIREK ROBBINS,**

Author of Live it: Achieve Success By Living With Purpose

As visionaries and revolutionary change-makers in these unprecedented times, Frances and Tony give us this soulfully crafted life manual for customizing a wholehearted life of purpose—especially in the wake of uncertainty and despair. Their vulnerable stories from childhood to adulthood take the reader to the root of what motivated each of them to reflect on their circumstances with curiosity, harvest the wisdom both gifted to them and hard-earned, to tend to their inner lives with compassion and sow seeds of generosity in these times of great need. Frances and Tony’s support to their readers is a honed collaboration of love and a belief in humanity; an invitation for transformation that is already changing the world.

—**LYDIA ATKINS,**

Co-Founder of Wild Ground

Customize Your Life will change your outlook on life for good. Its message is simple: to succeed in life, don't surround yourself with successful people, don't surround yourself with rich people. Surround yourself with good people. I encourage you to surround yourself with the words of Frances and Tony in *Customize Your Life*, because they are the epitome of good people.

—**GABRIELLE RUIZ**,
Actor, Producer and Champion for the arts

CUSTOMIZE YOUR LIFE:

Break Free From Ordinary and Create
A Life You'll Love to Live

TONY & FRANCES PAPPALARDO



*Customize Your Life: Break Free From Ordinary and Create A Life
You'll Love to Live*

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Published by CYL Press

ISBN: XXX-X-XXXXXXXX-X-X. First edition.

Interior illustrations by Laura Schaeffer and Kyra Johnson

WE DEDICATE THIS BOOK TO:

God, for putting us together, creating in us a desire to help others, and planting the seeds of this message deep in our hearts.

Our parents, for giving us life and becoming our heroes through the battles they've fought and won.

Our siblings, for inspiring, encouraging, and sharpening our resolve to be the best we can be and therefore shaping our philosophies.

Our mentors, for demonstrating what's possible in life and showing us the way.

The CYL Community, for daring to do the work and boldly living out their customized lives.

Our peers and leaders in business, for helping us refine our message and craft our CYL philosophy. The message wouldn't be the same without you.

Our kids, for being the greatest joy in our customized life! You light up our world and we love you to the moon and back.

May the message of this book guide you all through your lives.

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FOREWORD

Picture this. You're standing around a party and someone asks you the inevitable icebreaker that's probably started more conversations than any other—*So, what do you do?* You've probably asked that question yourself. We ask because we want to be able to put people in a box; it helps us understand them, and we use that box to form perceptions to guide our interactions.

People almost always answer the same way—with their job. Makes sense—it's the normal way to answer. One person says, *I'm a real estate agent*; another says, *I'm a lawyer*; another *I'm in sales*; still another, *I'm a stay-at-home mom*.

But no one is *just* their job; we are all much more than that.

Now, imagine getting asked the same question, but giving a different answer.

What if you could say, *I'm a huge fan of nature, so I like to hike*. Or, *I love to read, so I spend at least an hour a day reading a great book*. Or, *I'm a parent, so I love spending intentional time with my kids and seeing the world through their creativity*.

You would begin to see the puzzled looks start as you don't quite answer the question the way they are used to, but imagine you keep going. You might say, *I also love to travel and see amazing parts of the world, so I'm planning my next trip right*

now! Or, I love to cook, so I'm learning a new recipe every week. You decide to let people down easily and say, I do a lot of different things. Was there anything in particular you were curious about?

That scenario was one of the first stories I heard Tony and Frances tell when we initially met. I remember thinking to myself, *What a brilliant way to answer that basic question that so many people ask!* Of course, what most people mean when they ask the question, *What do you do?* is this: *How do you make money?*

As Tony and Frances would say, *We can answer that, but it's probably the least interesting thing about us.* But that's the problem, isn't it? Far too many people connect their identity with their vocation and then lose track of the other parts of their life.

I can certainly understand that. For years, I have been Danica Patrick, the race car driver. I've been racing cars since I was ten years old, but is that all that I am? Of course not. No one is just their job—whether that job is racing cars, teaching kids, practicing law, selling clothes, serving food, or any other thing you can think of.

That's what makes Tony and Frances's message in *Customize Your Life* so transformative. It causes you to ask a new kind of question that will change the way you live. They have the credibility to challenge you to customize your life because they are living examples of what they teach.

Tony and Frances are two of the most real, transparent, honest, vulnerable, fun, funny, sweet, energetic, thoughtful, and big-dreaming people I know. This isn't an accident. It is a result of having huge hearts and a willingness to *do the work*.

As you dive into this book you will see that neither of their lives has been easy.

When this is the case you have two options. One, you can let your challenges put you into a victim-and-blame pattern. Or, two, you can shift into radical accountability. Clearly seeing your patterns and the conditioning that holds you back is half of the battle. In fact, it may be even more.

Most people spend their entire life blaming others. This is a result of subconscious programming from childhood and conditioning from your environment. Navigating your way out takes bravery and time. As the saying goes, “Rome wasn’t built in a day.” Sometimes you find a resource that brings you to a turning point in your life—a moment or day or breaking point we come to where we say, *Enough is enough!*

This book is that kind of resource. It will give you all the tools you need to become the architect of your life. It may help to picture it like a recipe. All of the ingredients are in it to create the life you have always dreamt of, but *you* have to actually *make the meal*.

Inside, you will learn about financial empowerment, cultivating your personal tribe, how to select trustworthy advisors, the importance of self-care, auditing your relationships, building your life blueprint, and my personal favorite—BELIEF.

No one can create belief for you, and it’s not as easy as it sounds, but wait and see what happens when you start believing in yourself and getting into alignment with your truth! I can attest to the power of being in this space. You will start seeing things just fall into place!

Tony and Frances lead with love, and that's what makes them the force that they are. Nothing in our emotional world is more powerful than love. They have done the work to love themselves and the life that they have created, and this empowers them to love others well—even you, the reader of this book.

I will close with another example of the character of the two beautiful souls who wrote this book. A while back they sent me a fun little gift pack, and in it was a book called *Anam Cara* by John O'Donohue. I started reading it on my pilgrimage through Egypt. Appropriate timing, I must say!

I learned that *anam* is the Gaelic word for *soul*, and *cara* is the word for *friend*.

Soul Friend.

That's what Tony and Frances have become for me—soul friends. And in the pages of this book, I believe they'll become soul friends for you, too. If you'll open your heart and mind to a new view of life, these two people can guide you there. The outcome? A life that's customized to bring you the joy, love, and success you have been seeking.

What are you waiting for?

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Danica Patrick', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Danica Patrick,
Scottsdale, AZ
July 8, 2021

| INTRODUCTION |

No matter when you are reading this book, one thing is certain—you can't forget a year like 2020. There's something about a global pandemic that leaves its mark on you.

We are no different.

In fact, we started working on this book well before the world shut down in the spring of 2020. But in a way, what the world went through because of COVID-19 actually caused us to double down on the message you are about to discover in this book.

But before you get started, we'd like to talk a little bit about what "Customize Your Life" means and tell you how the name originated. Several years ago, we were invited to speak at a conference for entrepreneurs where we were able to catch up with a West Coast entrepreneurial friend of ours, Dave Vanderveen, who was there to speak, too.

The evening after the first day of the conference we ended up hanging out together, sharing a room service meal, and catching up on the day's events.

We kicked around ideas, talked about what we'd heard, and more importantly, began brainstorming what we might be able to accomplish together. He used a phrase that immediately

struck a chord deep within us and continued to resonate the rest of the night. Over a bite of food, he said, “Essentially, what we’re talking about here is *customizing your life*, or, to be more specific, helping other people customize *their* lives.”

Bingo.

That phrase took up residence in our conscious minds and hearts from that point forward. It became the heartbeat for how we began to formulate our work. That phrase, *customize your life*, dropped itself into our messaging effortlessly, and even more so into our DNA.

We are very big on giving credit where it’s due because everything we know we’ve learned from someone else. They lived (and shared) their lessons; we’ve simply digested, absorbed, and metabolized it our own way. So to Dave, we simply say, *thank you*.

In this book, we’re going to talk about surrounding yourself with the right voices...the ones that inspire you, encourage you, and help you get to the next levels of your life. Dave and his wife Sarah have been just that. Not only are they two of our greatest friends, but they’ve also served as mentors, guides, and encouragers. *Customize Your Life* wouldn’t be what it is without their friendship.

Which brings us back to 2020 and back to you.

Like so many that year, we struggled with being separated from family, watching businesses close down, and having friends and family pass away. We also dealt with a cancer diagnosis for Tony and a painful late-term miscarriage. All along, though, we’ve continued to beat the drum to the tune of *Customize*

Your Life. And through the difficulties of that season, we battle-tested the CYL message. We taught it to others. We watched (many times over Zoom calls) as relationships were transformed, wounds were healed, childhood scripts were rewritten, debt was demolished, wealth was generated, and lives were changed.

The message of *Customize Your Life* is more than a mindset—it's a movement.

It's what happens when people decide to do something that radically redirects this day and all their days going forward. So to you, the reader, we'd like to say thank you for taking the time to read this book. We appreciate you more than you'll ever know. And we're grateful for your willingness to trust us to be your guides on the journey. We don't take that responsibility lightly.

Our hope for you is that when you put this book down, you'll be energized about customizing *your* life in a way that helps you live it out with purpose, make an impact on those you love and respect, and weather any future storms ahead.

Here's to your *customized life*.

—Tony & Frances Pappalardo

CHAPTER 1

Whose Life are You Living?

This is as true in everyday life as it is in battle: we are given one life and the decision is ours whether to wait for circumstances to make up our mind, or whether to act, and in acting, to live.

—OMAR BRADLEY

You know the sounds of his life's work even if you don't necessarily know his name.

The imposing two-note “Da-dum, Da-dum” of *Jaws* is now a universal sound to indicate danger is coming. The soaring trumpet of *Indiana Jones* causes you to sit up in your seat and be on the lookout for sarcastic comments, booby traps, bad guys, and hard-to-reach treasure.

The chilling *Imperial March* that accompanies Darth Vader as he enters the scene in *The Empire Strikes Back* is one of the most recognized pieces of music in cinema and indicates the First Order is on the move. The uplifting sounds of *Jurassic Park* delight you with the wonder of a world where dinosaurs have

come back to life, and the mystical opening notes of Hedwig's Theme from *Harry Potter* tease the magic that is just around the corner and harnessed in the heart of a boy-wizard.

The echoes of his work are likely ringing in your ears even as you read these words. And the list goes on.

If you've ever been moved to tears as you've watched *Schindler's List*, stirred at the sacrifice of the men who stormed the beaches at Normandy in *Saving Private Ryan*, wondered if there's life out there after watching *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, laughed at the hijinks of Kevin McCallister in *Home Alone*, wished for the ability to be faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive, and able to leap tall buildings in a single bound after seeing Clark Kent turn into *Superman*, listened to the intro before sitting down to *NBC Nightly News*, gathered with your friends to cheer on your favorite team on the gridiron before *NBC Sunday Night Football*, or listened to Kobe Bryant narrate his short film *Dear Basketball*, you've been a witness to his work.

With a resume like that, it's no surprise that he's won 25 Grammy Awards, seven British Academy Film Awards, four Golden Globe Awards, and, next to Walt Disney, he's the second most-nominated individual when it comes to Academy Awards, with 52 to his name so far (he's won 5).

To say he's prolific in his field is an understatement, but probably no surprise to those who know him best. He may be one of those rare people who knew from early on what he was destined to do and the life he was made to live.

His father was a jazz drummer and percussionist who played on CBS radio shows in the 1930s but then moved his family to

Los Angeles in the late 1940s. After being drafted into the United States Air Force, it's no surprise that he gravitated to the part of his assignment that utilized his gifts: playing piano, brass, and conducting and arranging music for the U.S. Air Force Band.

After his service was up, he moved back to New York where he studied at Juilliard and played jazz piano in the city's many clubs. He moved back to Los Angeles and began working on developing scores for various television programs and movies.

In 1967, he received his first Academy Award nomination. And in 1974, he connected with Steven Spielberg. A few years later, Spielberg would recommend his services to his friend George Lucas, who was working on an ambitious epic space film called *Star Wars*. For the next several decades his movie scores would resonate with millions and bring movies to life.

You might not know him if he was standing next to you, but at eighty-eight years old, renowned composer John Williams has spent a lifetime captivating audiences with his work.

When it comes to life and legacy, Williams says it best, "So much of what we do is ephemeral and quickly forgotten, even by ourselves, so it's gratifying to have something you have done linger in people's memories." ¹

But his life's work is even more than that. As Steven Spielberg said in a speech, "Without John Williams, bikes don't really fly, nor do brooms in Quidditch matches, nor do men in red capes. There is no Force, dinosaurs do not walk the Earth, we do not wonder, we do not weep, we do not believe." ²

How amazing it is to know from a young age not only what you want to do with your life but also *what kind of life*

you want to live. For most of us, it's not quite that simple. Our journey takes some unexpected turns before we get where we want to go.

Wouldn't it be amazing to *know* that you are living your best life, the life meant for you, the life that only you can live, and that in doing so, you leave your mark upon the world?

That's a melody that we can all hope to sing.

RIGHT IDEA, WRONG QUESTION

What do you want to be when you grow up?

I (Frances) remember when I was in first grade and my teacher asked me the question. I walked up to the front of my class to proudly give my answer. The teacher asked each student to give three reasons why they wanted to be what they wanted to be. Since she asked us to dress up (something little kids love to do), I wore a little orange vest and cargo pants.

I got out of my desk that day and walked past the colorful pictures hanging on the wall that captured my imagination each day and brought the world to life. I walked past the bookshelf and corner reading area with the soft, brightly colored rug on the floor. I could see the bookshelf stuffed with books of stories teaching life lessons. Some helped you deal with your feelings. Others showed you what kind of jobs adults held.

In those books, you would see a lady in her nurse's uniform helping a sick child. Or a man in a police uniform directing traffic. You'd see a construction worker wearing a hard hat and building a tall building or operating heavy equipment.

The veterinarian was surrounded by animals in a red barn. The astronaut was wearing a space helmet and floating in space, with sparkling stars all around. Children's books are filled with depictions of "grown-ups" working in their various jobs.

This is how kids start to make sense of the world, and I was no exception.

I made the final few steps past the small table where we did our art projects. The look and smell of the colorful boxes of Crayola crayons, stacks of thick construction paper, plastic-handled safety scissors, and glue sticks are still etched in my mind.

I took my place at the front of the room and with unwavering certainty, I declared my plan for the future and told the class I wanted to be a construction worker. As a kid, I loved the *Give Yourself Goosebumps* book series by R.L. Stine because I could map out how the story ends based on my choices. Perhaps I was using this same logic in my own life.

A construction worker seemed like a very logical choice, at least for a first-grader. I liked the color orange, and all the workers in the books wore orange safety vests. I liked to stay up past my bedtime, and I noticed that construction workers seemed to work at night a lot. It also looked like a party because there were loud noises and bright lights.

But maybe most importantly to me was one fact: *I hated pantyhose*. In most of the clip art professions in my workbook, the ladies had to wear pantyhose. My aversion to pantyhose was so strong that my mom could never get me to wear them. In fact, any time she would come near me with pantyhose, I'd go limp, like a protester being removed from a demonstration. I

have a daughter now who does the same thing to me (payback!), and it's almost impossible to get skin-tight tights on a twenty-five-pound inert lump with no muscle tone other than just enough to fight back at the mere thought of wearing pantyhose.

Construction workers didn't have to wear pantyhose.

First-grade Frances was sold. It was the job for me.

I walked back to my seat, confident I'd made the right choice. My teacher reinforced that idea when she rewarded me with an A+. It sounds inconsequential, right? I was just a little girl having fun playing dress-up and picking out *what I wanted to be when I grew up*, but some part of that stuck in my brain because those were my most formative years. The next eleven years of my life would be spent trying to solve that question and make sure I was *on the right track*.

What would have been really interesting is if my teacher had said to me, "Okay, Frances. It's wonderful that you want to be a construction worker. Now tell me this—*how do you want to live?*"

You see, *that* is an entirely different question.

Honestly, it's a *better* question and really at the heart of this book.

The people who report living the fullest lives know that their *vocation* is only part of the equation. The people who live the fullest lives have identified the *life* they want to live. What they do for work is only one piece of that equation.

What do you think I would have said in first grade to the question *how do you want to live?*

What would you have said?

In first grade, if you were asked to describe the *life* you wanted to live, you're going to speak in abundance. Your whole life is ahead of you, and anything seems possible. In your mind, work is something grown-ups do because they've lost the ability to have fun. At that age, your life is all about not being bored.

When I was a kid, I loved the idea of traveling. My mom had a set of encyclopedias on the bookshelf in our house, and I'd open one up, flip to Italy, look at the tiny photo, and imagine myself there. Same thing for Tokyo, Paris, London, or Sydney.

My favorite outfit was a red turtleneck I wore under a vest. It had prints of stamps from around the world. I grew up in Alabama, but even as a kid, I just wanted to see the world. Every time I put that vest on (which, to be honest, was most of the time), I would quietly tell myself, "I'll do this one day."

The life I wanted to live was a life of adventure—filled with far-off places and new experiences, surrounded by interesting people, with a superhero-like sense of adventure in saving the world.

If my teacher had asked me that second question, I might have answered it differently—or at least changed my thinking. The truth is, I would probably never get to see the world the way I wanted to if I'd stuck with my decision to become a construction worker.

Most people are less concerned with *how* they want to live when they grow up and more concerned with *what* they want to do when they grow up, even if they don't realize it at the time.

To be clear, we believe some people were really born to do certain things, and they do them exceptionally well. You may

know someone who was born to be a teacher, or a nurse, or a doctor, or a farmer, or a pilot. For these people, this is the life they were meant to live, and they *are* living the life of their dreams. What they *want to do* and how they *want to live* align perfectly.

But what if you are not living the life of your dreams? Is it too late to start?

When you answer the question *What do you want to do?* you get a job and consistency.

When you answer the question *What life do you want to live?* you get mission, impact, balanced values, and if you do it right...adventure.

Most people make choices when they are young about what they want to do, and they don't fully understand how that connects with the life they want to live. They simply hope they end up happy. It's wishing-well thinking. Pull a shiny penny out of your pocket, make a wish, and toss it in the well. Maybe things will get better. Hope is a wonderful thing, but it alone is not much of a full-out strategy for living your life. A better choice would be to define what you want out of life and then spend your life pursuing it. That is far from the mass-produced way of thinking, but it can be learned; it just takes a proven system.

What do you want to be when you grow up?

Chances are pretty good that you, too, were asked that question when you were in elementary school. But now you realize that this question wasn't really the *right* question. At least not the way we are typically taught to answer it. And now you can see the disconnect between the life you are now living and the life you expected to have.

Many people go into a job or career because it's something they had a passing interest in once upon a time. Or maybe because they thought they had a natural aptitude in that area or could make a lot of money.

For some, this decision leads to a wonderful life that exceeds their expectations.

For many others, though—perhaps even the majority of people—this is hardly the case. They don't feel like they are living out their dream. Instead, they feel like they are going through the motions of life. Things aren't going according to plan (a plan they may have chosen as a child), so they feel adrift. They expected more from life and feel as if life somehow let them down.

It's a frustrating place to be, and quite frankly, one we've felt before. This kind of mass-produced life is why Thoreau wrote, "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation."³ If you are feeling that way, here's the good news—you were meant for more.

You were meant to live a bigger life.

It's never too late to ask the right question and change your direction.

It just takes courage and a willingness to act.

MASS-PRODUCED LIVES

If you grew up in the United States in the last seventy-five years or so, you probably attended your twelve years of government education. It may have felt like drudgery, as it did for Tony, or it may have been with your Lisa Frank Trapper Keeper for all

your notes, pencils, and drawings, like Frances. From the first day the yellow school bus picked you up to the day you walked across the stage and received your diploma, you were being programmed to live a certain kind of life.

Now don't get us wrong. Education is critical. The challenge is with the *way* the school system was developed. It was developed during a particular era—the industrial revolution. Before about 1837, the school system was a one-room schoolhouse where people learned to read, write, and do arithmetic.⁴ Kids would go to school when they weren't needed to help on the farm.

When the Industrial Revolution began, people moved from the country to cities to work in factories. As they moved, educational needs changed. In a factory model, they needed a nation of workers, not necessarily a nation of thinkers. Factories needed people to buy into the idea of clocking in and clocking out and repetitively doing their job for their shift—day after day, week after week, year after year. They didn't need inquisitive workers to ask too many questions. They just needed you to train to do your job for an allotted amount of time. Then, you'd clock out and the next worker would slide into your space. Automation ruled.

You can imagine the challenge of taking someone who had been a farmer, carpenter, blacksmith, or store owner (essentially an entrepreneur) and trying to squeeze them into the mold of a factory worker. Add a little good old-fashioned American individualism, and you had a challenge that required some serious behavior modification.

How better to do that than to modify the way children were taught in school?

This wasn't necessarily a good or a bad thing. It actually built an incredible infrastructure for our country. What those guys did—the Carnegies, Rockefellers, Vanderbilts, and others—is amazing, and it transformed the country. For what they were looking to do, automating humans made sense.

But now, over a century later, the world has changed, while the educational system has largely stayed the same. So you were formatted through this whole system to *act* a certain way and *think* a certain way in order to produce certain predictable results.

The question is, in our modern day and age, are those the results you want driving your life? If the diverse group of people we've coached and mentored are any indication, then the answer is probably not. If you don't want the same results, then you're going to have to act and think in a different way.

In school, you were trained to get to class on time or you'd be counted tardy. You were trained to sit down for 45 or 50 minutes at a time, perform a task, get up, take a quick stretch break, sit down, and do it again. You had a bell that essentially told you when to move, when not to move, when to eat your lunch, how many times you could use the bathroom in a day, and when you got to go home and be with your family.

The next day, you did it all again.

Can you see the similarities to the way most people *work* today?

On Monday morning, you battle traffic to commute to work. If you don't get there on time, it either comes out of your

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hourly pay or you get dirty looks from the boss as he taps his watch. You take a seat at your cubicle or in your office, and you start your week. You know the week is going to be a grind, and you'll have to do some things you don't want to do, but that's the routine. So you work really hard and bust it out for another five days so you get your paycheck on Friday.

Just like in school, you put in your time so you can get a reward (your paycheck, the weekend), and then it's back to work on Monday to repeat the process. It's not surprising that so many people feel like a hamster stuck in a spinning wheel, always moving, but staring at the same disappointing view. Effort doesn't always equal opportunity.

The kids' books never showed a person stuck in a hamster wheel. So where did we go wrong?

| WHAT DO YOU NEED TO UNLEARN?

Have you ever thought about the way you learn? Most of the time, we think of learning as adding or expanding our knowledge. When you pick up a musical instrument, you have to add an understanding of the music notes. When you learn a dance, you have to add the right movement and steps. When you learn a new language you have to learn to read, spell, and speak new words.

We've been taught our whole lives *what* to think. It's time to talk about *how* we think.

Not all learning is addition. Sometimes, we learn best by subtraction.

If you want to grow into a new life, you may have to “unlearn” something.

Maybe it’s something you always thought was true, but then someone showed you a different way, so you have to unlearn it. Or maybe your perception needs to change. Perhaps it’s doing something you’ve always done but in a different, more effective way.

If you Google “life hacks” right now, you’ll find dozens of articles to show you easier ways to do common things. Some examples include using a toothpick to clean out the lint in your phone’s charging port, drilling holes in the bottom of your plastic trash can to make it easier to remove the bag, or wrapping plastic wrap over the end of bananas to make them last longer.

If you try a new way of doing something, it involves *unlearning* what you used to know and learning to do it differently. Here’s an example. Try folding your arms over your chest. Notice the position. For most right-handed people, you placed your left arm over your right. Now try to switch positions and place your right arm over your left. It feels a little awkward, doesn’t it?

The trick to unlearning is to push through the awkwardness until the new habit feels natural.

Habits help us do repeated things effectively, but they can also constrain us to behaviors that are no longer effective. If you want to lose weight, it may make sense to get in the habit of limiting your carbohydrates. But if you want to run a marathon, that habit may actually get in the way of you having enough energy to finish the race.

Most people need to unlearn some things before they can begin to customize their lives. It may be difficult, but it doesn't mean you can't make it fun. If everything in your life has been based upon what you *do*, that literally has become a part of your self-image and identity.

When your life is about what you do, it puts you in a hierarchy. You're less of a person or more of a person based upon your job. Like it or not, people have perceptions about plumbers, doctors, lawyers, janitors, construction workers, entrepreneurs, and every other title in between. The reality is the work you do is only one part of who you are.

Let's be honest—when you hear someone's answer about what they do, does it change how you respond to them? How might your body language change when they respond that they're a doctor or lawyer versus them saying they work at the local Post Office? Does your voice change in pitch? Do your shoulders roll back more to up your posture? Do you show more interest in one or the other? Have you ever really wondered why that is? Should career/profession really be the deciding factor of how we treat people? Of course not.

Let's really start to hack our thinking about why *what we do* has to be the most interesting piece of our identity. It's good to be proud of what you do, and it's important to add value to the world around you. But when your work becomes your sole identity, it can quickly become a measurement of your self-worth. You get too wrapped up in it, and you have nothing else to round out your life.

■ A BETTER QUESTION, A BETTER LIFE

In the spring of 2021, we received an opportunity to see firsthand what it looks like to ask the right question so you can build a better life. We were invited to Necker Island, Sir Richard Branson's private home in the British Virgin Islands, to gather together with twenty-two other entrepreneurs and philanthropists from all over the world to do what Richard calls "forming impact".

Richard Branson is one of the most interesting entrepreneurs in the world. His biography is captivating if for no other reason than because of his sheer audacity. He struggled in school at a young age because of undiagnosed dyslexia. He was bullied, beaten, and abused by both kids and adults. He was good at sports but then suffered an injury that sidelined him from playing. As a teenager, he was already learning to be an entrepreneur, and when he dropped out of school at 17, his headmaster told him, "I predict you'll either go to prison or become a millionaire."⁶

It turns out that one of those predictions came true.

Richard, now a billionaire, has made it his mission in life to push the envelope, try new things, learn from failure, and along the way reach incredible heights. He's been a disruptor in industries like publishing, air travel, and even space travel. There's no one quite like him.

But the one thing that's incredibly apparent when you spend time with Richard Branson is that *he loves his life* and makes you want to do the same. Now, you may be thinking that it's probably not that hard to enjoy your life if you're a billionaire, but he started customizing his life long before he had a bunch of zeros backing up his portfolio.

He told us a really powerful story of when his kids were young and he was just getting started. At the time, he and his family lived on a houseboat. As he related the story to us, you could get a sense of how strong the memory was for him. He said he would sit at his little desk in the cramped confines of the boat, working on business ideas, planning meetings, and dreaming about a successful future. At his feet, his kids were playing with their toy tug boats and crawling in and out of his legs. His lovely wife, Joan, would have to steal them away into their small boathouse bedroom to keep them quiet if an important call came in. Many of the fondest memories he shared with us that week occurred during the time period that he was building his companies. It's ironic that people often miss the joy in the journey. It isn't the island or the things he's accumulated that have brought Richard the greatest of joys...it's been the pursuit, the journey, the betting on himself, and customizing his life.

Obviously, this was much different than a typical office, but it was somehow formative to him and made him who he is today. In fact, he's never had an office in any of his businesses because he didn't want work to happen in an office and life to happen elsewhere. Richard told us, "There is no work-life balance. It's all just an expression of who I am."

That's what we want you to see as you read this book.

What if who you are and what you do were combined into a life you love to live?

What if you woke up energized for *every* part of your life?

A lot of people sacrifice an amazing life because they settle for a good, safe, and secure life. They expect that life will always

be there, but as you well know, nothing is guaranteed. Things don't always work out as you planned.

Companies downsize. Recessions hit. Positions get eliminated. Industries capsize. Life happens.

We all experienced this in 2020 when COVID-19 turned our world upside down.

The aim of this book is to challenge you to unlearn that way of thinking because you are so much more than what you do, which is just a fraction of your life. What you can *become* is so much more.

If you are reading this, you are more than your job. You are more than the answer to the question—*What do you want to be when you grow up?* Let's redefine what it means to “grow up”. We should all keep that abundance thinking we had when we were children and let it guide us through life.

**Life should be fun.
It should be an
adventure. It should
be a joy to live.**

Life should be fun. It should be an adventure. It should be a joy to *live*.

So whether you are married, single, or divorced, this message is for you. If you have kids who are small, kids who are grown, or no kids at all, this message is for you. If you are an abstract and creative person or a concrete literal thinker, this message is for you. If you are an extrovert or introvert, this message is for you. It's for everyone who wants to truly live their life.

You are much more than what you do. You are the sum of all your parts.

Learning to live a customized life means that you discover each of those parts, embrace them, and empower them to

work together. In the next chapter, you'll see that we have gone through our share of struggles. It means having the courage to take the next step that moves you from where you are to where you want to be. It means learning to cut through the distractions and the noise of the loudest voices to find the quiet wisdom and truth you need. It means surrounding yourself with people who know where you want to go and can help you get there because they've gone there themselves.

When you change your thinking, you can change your behavior, and *that* leads to different actions. But be prepared for some friction. Anyone who walks to the beat of their own drum will stand out. Customizing your life requires uncommon courage. It takes a willingness to address areas that need work and do the work to make them better.

The question is, do you have what it takes to declare independence from the ordinary and live the life you've imagined?

What you do is important, but it's not everything.

Living your authentic life—however that looks to you—is.

For us, there is no work-life balance; it is all simply an expression of who we are and the life we have chosen to customize.

We're honored and excited to show you the way.



PRINCIPLES



TAKEAWAYS



ACTIONS



PRINCIPLES

- ▶ Above-average results require above-average thinking.
- ▶ It's never too late to ask the right question and change your direction.
- ▶ Customizing your life requires uncommon courage.



TAKEAWAYS

- ▶ If you don't want the same results, then you're going to have to act and think differently.
- ▶ It's not surprising that so many people feel like a hamster stuck in a wheel, always moving, but the view never changes because they aren't getting anywhere.
- ▶ The people who report living the fullest lives know that their *vocation* is only part of the equation.
- ▶ There is no work-life balance; it's all just an expression of who you are.
- ▶ Most people are less concerned with *how* they want to live when they grow up and more concerned with *what* they want to do when they grow up. It's time to flip the script!
- ▶ What things do you need to unlearn before you can begin to customize your life?.

ACTIONS

- ✓ **Give yourself permission to dream.** What kind of life do you want to live? You may have never been asked that question before. Now is the time to think about the answer. For the next week, let that idea bounce around your mind. Don't worry about where you are now or how you'll get there. Just envision the life you want to live, and open your mind to the possibility that you can have that life.
- ✓ **Declare independence from ordinary.** No one wants to be ordinary. We all want to stand out in our own unique way. But this takes courage. If you want to customize your life, you've got to declare your independence from the ordinary and aspire to more. Write your declaration of independence down somewhere you will see it every day, and let it serve as a reminder of the life you want to live.
- ✓ **Identify some things to unlearn.** Growth happens as much by subtraction as it does by addition. Chances are there are some things you need to unlearn before you can move forward. Find a quiet place to think, grab a sheet of paper, and brainstorm some limiting beliefs or ideas that you need to unlearn. Don't worry about how to unlearn them yet. The mind can not create and analyze at the same time. Just get them on paper so you can begin to think about what you need to do.