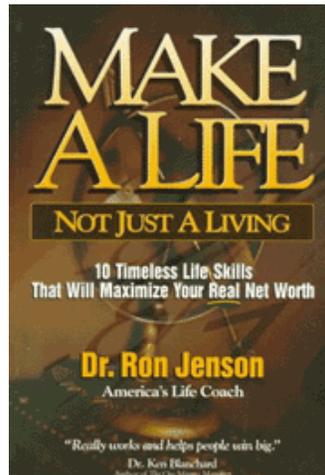


Make A Life, Not Just A Living

10 Timeless Life Skills That Will Maximize Your Real Worth



By

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Broadman & Holman Publishers
ASIN 0805419845
232 pages

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THE BIG IDEA

This book provides us with a healthy number of principles and wisdoms to live by, in order to be happy and truly make a life, especially in today's highly materially oriented world. These principles on how to live happily and contentedly, according to Dr. Jenson, the book's author, are intended to serve as a map or a model in order to look at life afresh and where it matters.

Make Things Happen

In Irwin Shaw's beautiful short story about trying to recapture past success, a formerly promising football player wallows in his failures, thinking, on a perfect day many years ago, how life promised to be all grand and pleasant. Waiting for something just around the corner is merely reacting to life. If you are going to be a difference-maker, a maximizer, you need to be assertive and proactive in your thoughts and actions. You need to make things happen – and not just wait for them to engulf you! You need to take responsibility for your life and future.

A Civilization of Victims

Today, like never before in history, much of the world is becoming a civilization of blamers and "victims." We blame our past, our parents, our society, our heritage, our "dysfunctionalities," or anything else we can think of for our existing personal problems.

Be Proactive, Not Reactive

Your decision to take charge of your life is the seed of your cusses. Another way of saying "taking charge" is "being proactive." This word – proactive – is a simple combination of two familiar words: pro, meaning "for," and active, meaning "doing something." In other words: Don't just sit there! Do something! You and I get into trouble routinely by focusing on items over which we have no control – will this meeting be positive, will my child be safe, will people like me, will I close the sale, or will I be happy? What good is it to focus here? None. In fact, it is harmful, often resulting in worry, fear and manipulation. Instead, you need to focus on those items you can control: (the roots) right attitude, right beliefs, and right commitments. By so doing, you will use your emotional energy in a positive way and actually move forward more quickly. Reactive people focus on the result. Proactive people focus on the principles.

Be Disciplined, Not Lazy

We begin to make things happen when we become disciplined. We don't accomplish anything in life without self-discipline. Richard Shelley Taylor, in his book "The Disciplined Life," defines self-discipline as "the ability to regulate conduct by principle and judgment rather than impulse, desire, high-pressure, or

social custom.” You see, discipline is the ability to consciously control your circumstances. It is the ability to control your life – to put things in a proper order.

To maximize your personal and professional effectiveness, you need to develop and cultivate right patterns through constant, arduous repetition. How do you do this? You must learn two major skills: First, work hard. Second, develop right habits.

Action Steps

- How do you view yourself – as victim or victor? Do you believe you are stuck and helpless, or capable of making right decisions and gaining control of your thoughts and attitudes? How? Identify some examples.
- What areas of your life are most disciplined? In what areas do you lack discipline? Write out one example each.
- Identify one area in which you can improve by working hard. How would you like to change in that area?
- What habits are holding you back from authentic success? Make a list. Now, circle the most persistent one. How can you change this habit by “taking charge” of it?

You Are Significant

Oliver Wendell Homes said: “The biggest tragedy in America is not the great waste of natural resources, though this is tragic. The greatest tragedy is the waste of human resources. The average person goes to his grave with his music still in him.” What about you? If you were to die today, would you go to the grave with your tune still unplayed? Are the instruments of your life – your talents, skills, and abilities, relationships, the resources you’ve been given – starting to blend into beautiful music, or are they silent? Is the real you being stifled or held back?

You Must Deal with Your Soft Spots

To establish significance, we must also deal with our weaknesses, which we often chose to ignore. We all have soft spots, such as bad temper, impatience, or a gossipy tongue. Contrary to popular practice, denying your weaknesses or hiding them under the rug is not an effective way to deal with them. Also, these weaknesses are not difficult to change. You can even benefit from your weaknesses if you admit to them, look for opportunities to grow, and you keep adjusting.

Maximizer’s Creed

I will take charge of my life and make a difference
I will live my life with a sense of dignity
I will embrace problems as positive opportunities
I will center my life on universal principles
I will passionately pursue my mission

I will keep all areas of my life in balance
I will put others first and honestly serve them
I will cultivate my character and spirit
I will keep adjusting to needs
I will never, ever, quit

Accept Problems

Don't deny problems. It's a simple reality that life is difficult. Richard Leider, in his book "The Power of Purpose," wrote: "The fact is that life is either hard and satisfying or easy and unsatisfying." What you make in life depends on the challenges you choose to accept or seek. Small house, small problems, big house, big problems. And you ultimately do choose. Do you want a satisfying, challenging life, or do you want to sit back and accept and unsatisfying life?

1. Learn from your mistakes

Poet Lois Cheney says it well here: We tend to dodge our emotions, avoiding the difficulties and substituting anything else that will keep us from our true feelings. Yet when we do this, we miss the joy of growing and life. And we never move on.

2. Choose Joy

Tim Hansel, an articulate, creative writer, and a disciplined, motivated leader, fell down a mountainside during one of his climbing expeditions. Although in constant pain, he has written a delightful and uplifting book, "You Gotta Keep Dancin'." Hansel begins one of his chapters with a quotation from Lewis Smede: "You and I were created for joy, and if we miss it, we miss the reason for our existence. If our joy is honest joy, it must somehow be congruous with human tragedy. This is the test of joy's integrity. It is compatible with pain. Only the heart that hurts has a right to joy."

3. Take Risks

If you are going to learn from your mistakes and failures, you first have to be willing to fail. You must be willing to take risks. Don't play it safe; learn to live on the edge. If you are willing to accept difficulties with maturity, you will take risks – not foolish risks, but calculated ones. You should not fear failure when you take risks. Rather, you should see risk taking as an opportunity to be stretched and to grow.

Believe the Best

As we think, so we act. Therefore, you must take control of your thought patterns by believing the best about the following areas: yourself, life, problems, people, time and God.

Action Steps

- What is the major problem in your life right now? How are you handling it? Write down your feelings, thoughts, and previous actions related to this problem.
- Choose joy. Write down how you will respond as you embrace the above problem as a friend, rather than treating it as an intruder.
- Choose an area in which you should believe the best.
- Choose a person in your life to whom you can be accountable to practice the above changes for one month.

Verify Your Own Values

You need to determine just what value is directing your life. It's important from the outset to distinguish between principles and values. Basically, a value is your perception of where you're going in life. Your values may change, but principles do not. Your principles are the absolute. They are always true in every circumstance. Your values may change as your understanding of absolutes increases.

Learn the Right Perspective on Issues

Merely discovering what motivates your actions is not the end of this exercise. All of us need to continually look for the truth. We need to make some actual demonstrations about right and wrong, about the ethical and unethical, about the moral, amoral, and immoral. And there are absolutes – universally accepted natural law principles that govern the universe and how people should live.

1. Is it legal?
2. Is it balanced?
3. How will it make me feel about myself?
4. Is it right?

Evaluate Your Growth

To become truly ethically centered, spend time evaluating your efforts on a daily basis. Keep a journal on your growth for one week, taking time at the end of each day to ask the following questions related to your stated values:

- Did I schedule my principles and philosophy into my daily planner?
- Did I keep my schedule as I planned?
- How did I spend my idle time?
- Where did I spend my money?
- What did I daydream or dwell upon?
- Did my values inside match my values outside?

Principle Development

1. What are the principles with which you want to form the map for your life? Begin to write these down. Place them prominently before you begin to build them into your life as your code of conduct and organizing principles.
2. List at least one person who can form a support group to help you flesh out your values and walk your talk.

The Power of a Mission

A sense of a mission gives meaning and significance to our lives. David Rae, past president of Apple Canada, often says that if a man has a “why” for living he can stand any “how.” In other words, if someone has a sense of purpose, he can endure all the problems he faces in getting to his goal. A mission also helps produce cognitive dissidence, that is, you set goals that will stretch you beyond what you normally would do.

How Did We Get Out of Balance?

Linda and Richard Eyre, in their book “Life Balance,” wrote, “With industrialization came urbanization. People began living closer to each other and comparing themselves in more ways with more people. Mass media and advertising came along to help our wants outpace our needs. Picking out one little thing and trying to know more about it and do better at it than anyone else became the most predictable path to newly revalued prizes of prominence and prosperity.

Results of Imbalance

We see the downside of imbalance in our culture today, ranging from extreme burnout to a lack of passion about life on the other. As one author said, burnout is when “a job is a job is a job is a job.” Christina Maslach, one of the earlier researchers of this problem, says the burnout is “a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal achievements that occurs among individuals who do people work of some kind.”

Balance Priorities

The most common area discussed in regard to balance is priorities. Most of us know it is a difficult chore to balance work with the other areas in our lives. If you’re going to balance business and other basic relationships, you need to take some definite steps:

1. Rule your Impulses
The starting point for balancing your priorities is to take charge of your internal drives. You can rule your impulses only by being disciplined.

2. Reorder your priorities

The second skill needed in balancing priorities is to place your priorities in the proper order.

3. Readjust your schedule

The third ingredient to balancing business, family, and other basic relationships is to let your priorities determine your schedule. Look at your schedule and keep changing it to reflect your reordered priorities. You can do this early in the morning, late at night, or anytime throughout the day.

Teamwork

“Zeroing in on Caring for People” is the key to developing intimate relationships and to changing people’s lives. How we change others will be in direct proportion to the level of love we put into our relationship with them. Unabashed caring is the essence of “teamness,” which is fundamental for powerful families, friendships, communities, and entire cultures.

Uplift One Another

The place to begin developing unity in relationships is to learn to build up other people. There are two Greek words, para and kaleo, from which we draw much of this concept’s meaning. Para means “alongside” and kaleo means “to call.” Together, these words simply mean, putting your arm around someone, calling him alongside, and encouraging him. It means helping to change another’s attitude so he or she is willing to go back into battle. It means encouraging, exhorting, and stimulating a person into positive action.

Need One Another

The second major principle in UNITY is to develop a healthy interdependence through needing one another. There are healthy and unhealthy ways to relate to individuals, and you should take all of these into account when you do your daily affairs, and interact with people. Needing people, and not being ashamed to admit it, is very necessary to get ahead.

Trust One Another

The hinges on the door to intimate, unified relationships are greased by the level of trust you have in and with those around you. This principle is simply about “believing the best” about people. It doesn’t demand that you abandon your discernment of inappropriate behavior. In fact, you must consistently clarify and address conflicts and problems. Trust underscores the need not to develop harmful imaginations about others – misreading nonverbal communication, misjudging motives, and making false accusations. Forming preliminary assumptions is a sure way of closing another’s spirit – not only stopping present communication but hardening the arteries of its future flow.

Why is Energizing Our Inner Life so Critical?

1. It's the Source of Our Strength

Your life is energized by your character. Your power and ultimate success will flow out of your character – that is, who you are inside – which is profoundly influenced by your spiritual depth and maturity.

2. It's the Basis for Enduring Societies

Consider America's spiritual roots. Its significant decline as a country can be directly attributed to its increasing abandonment of spiritual roots. A helpful starting point is to remember where it has come from. According to the great Abraham Lincoln: "The only assurance of our nation's safety is to lay our foundation in morality and religion." The point is obvious: Character-centeredness flowing from spiritual roots is the ultimate source of power individually, institutionally, and societally.

3. It's the Secret to our Satisfaction

Character-centeredness is not only the source of real strength but also the key to a life of satisfaction. According to David Myers, happiness and fulfillment are by-products of certain attitudes and perspectives, and not significantly affected by externals.

What Does Faith Offer?

Why do researchers find such positive links among faith, mental health and happiness? Because faith and spirituality provide a place to belong (community), a sense of purpose (commitment), and a perspective on life (contentment).

Concentrate on Being

We are a culture and society now of people consumed by "having." We not only want to have material things, but knowledge and information as well. We even want to have the intangibles of love, inspiration, and happiness. Ownership seems to be the king of virtues, no matter what the commodity, and yet we are a society of notoriously unhappy people – lonely, anxious, depressed and dependent. If we're going to concentrate on "being," we need to begin with the internals – character. That's why we need to get back to character. We must live from the inside out.

Cultivate Spirituality

You may be a person who has never been religiously oriented. But what we are talking about here is "spirituality" not religiosity. Spirituality is about internal lives, internal issues, relationships with God and our relationships with others in light of that. It also includes progress and growing from the inside, openness and transparency.

How do we cultivate spirituality? Firstly, we must develop a way to get into our inner selves, which praying can provide. We must also meditate on great and time-tested principles, and from here, develop a method of expressing our inner system of beliefs, which is roughly what we may call faith.

Framing

Framing is developing your overall perspective and sense of parameters about any issues in life. Whenever you face a decision, you need to begin by forming your framework. What's your frame? What are your guides? What will give stability to any decision you make? It entails four major aspects, which become clearer if you can picture the four sides of a picture frame: your overarching *purpose* in this situation and in your life, your *priorities* in this situation and in your life, your *principles* and guidelines in this situation and in your life, and finally, your *peculiarities*.

Focus

Another principle that is important to address is that of focus. Focus is the ability to keep your eye on your goal and the task at hand, while at the same time being mentally agile in dealing with the various contingencies that come into play. This is the skill that allows you to remain directed and not be interrupted by the multiple messages or alternative opportunities that avail themselves to you. In other words, you must learn to focus while being aware of your environment.

Flexing

You must master the ability in any situation to adapt to change and to adjust to mistakes in an appropriate way. Flexibility, or mental agility, is what Charles Garfield defines in his highly popular book, "Peak Performers," as the [ability] to change perspective and do the creative thinking necessary to deal with challenges." We desperately need to learn the skill of flexibility today because of the unprecedented level of change in our culture. The new data we are receiving must be accompanied by a great ability to make rapid, midcourse corrections and daily adjustments, small or large, in light of these new facts.

Fight the Good Fight

One of the greatest tragedies of our day in materially wealthy countries is that an insidious apathy and comfort has settled in. Many people have forgotten the reality of life. Life is not meant to be a playground where personal ease and satisfaction are the goals and expected results. It is a precious resource to be invested for the good of others. The real war is for the good of people's hearts and minds. For as our minds go, so go our emotions and will. And there are forces around us daily that constantly push us away from what you call "rightness living" and woo us toward narcissistic self-destruction.

Be Faithful to the Principles

Faithfulness is one of the least revered and most needed qualities in our culture today. To be faithful is to “adhere strictly to the person, cause, or idea to which one is bound; be dutiful and loyal.” The concept of faithfulness is as old as culture itself. If you are to maximize your life, then you must dutifully and faithfully work them into your character by practicing them in both the big moments and the small.

Finish the Course

The primary skill to develop here is perseverance. To persevere is to “persist in or remain constant to a purpose, idea or task in the face of obstacles or discouragement.” Regardless of the circumstance, never ever give up.

Focus on the Future

Life is about concentrating on the roots and letting the fruit come as a result. Yet, as you concentrate on building these root principles in your life, you must forever keep in mind the future implications of each decision you make.