

## LEAN ALL THE WAY IN

Final Week of the 3-Week Series, "The Success Principles"

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So an old wild west fort knew that an attack was coming. And they wanted to best prepare themselves of how to handle to defend themselves. So the wily old general sent for his trusty Indian scout, saying to him, *"You've to use all your skill, all your know-how -- every little trick you've got to try and help us estimate what kind of attack we're going to have so we can protect ourselves."*

And so the trusty Indian scout did a little prayer; then he laid down and he put his ear to the ground. And after a couple of seconds said, *"Large war party. Maybe 300 brave warriors. Four chiefs, two on black stallions, two on white stallions. All have war paint. Many, many, many guns. Medicine man also with them."*

And the general said, *"That's amazing! You can tell all that by just listening to the ground?"*

And the scout said, *"No, General; I can see under the gate!"* [Drummer does "rim shot" drumroll; congregation laughs] [Rev. Maraj laughs] Alright ...

So Thomas Edison said this. He said, *"If we did all the things we are capable of doing, we would literally astound ourselves."* Could you imagine me telling better jokes than I'm capable of doing? [Congregation laughs] How astounded you would be? [Laughs]

So how many people here know that there is so much more in you that you are capable of doing that you have not allowed yourself to do yet? How many people would ... And how many people know, if you had your life to live over again up until this point, you would achieve more the second time 'round than you attracted and experienced now? And how about this: How many people have at least one area of your life where you know you're not giving it your all? That you really could give more effort and put more into it?

And this isn't to make us depressed; it's actually to make us feel really good. To make us realize how much potential there is within us. How much brilliance; how much greatness; how much goodness; how much love; how much creativity is still in us ... but we don't always use it.

You know, life is kind of like a combination lock: we're trying to figure out the right numbers and the right sequence to unlock the potential that's in us. To unlock the creative wisdom and genius; to bring forth our most authentic self; to be the most loving being we could be, and to live the most fulfilling and meaningful life.

And so this is the third of our series called, "The Success Principles," which we're trying to use to unlock this potential for a fuller and richer life. And I believe that, regardless of what we want to do in life, there are certain principles of success that are the foundation and underly all true and lasting happiness and success.

The first week we talked about the foundational principle of **developing a peaceful mind**. The mind's a powerful thing, but sometimes we can worry and be distracted, and focus on a lot of negativity. So developing a peaceful mind that is more calm, that is more open, that is more positive, that handles situations better, and tends to be more creative ... It's an important thing to have a peaceful mind. It's the foundation.

Last week we talked about the second principle, and that is to **take 100% responsibility for your life**. We sometimes waste our time complaining and blaming, and giving our power away. And we need to not use our negatively against it; we need to reclaim our power! Responsibility isn't a burden; it's empowering and owning that we have the choice. We have the abilities! And one of the biggest responsibilities is to get clear on what you want to have and create in your life.

You know, everybody wants success, but we often miss the opportunities, because opportunities come to us dressed in overalls, and they look like hard work. [Congregation laughs] You know, the truth is: success in anything requires hard work. That's just a fact! And it's not just hard work, but we need to lean in to that work and do it wholeheartedly. We need to invest our spirits and our hearts into whatever it is that we're doing, that we want to achieve. We need to be engaged and embrace it.

How many people have ever done something half-heartedly? Anybody ever do something half-heartedly? [Congregation laughs] Anybody do something with somebody, and they were doing it half-heartedly? Or you ever mostly put your effort in, but you're always holding back? Or you know anybody who's always holding a little something back, and not giving fully of themselves?

We have this fear of giving ourselves wholeheartedly, of leaning fully into whatever it is. Because, at some level, we think we might lose ourselves. That we might get consumed or drained or burned out. That, if we put too much effort in one area, we'll ignore some other important area. And that's not it at all! It is about fully leaning in to put all of ourselves in the things we need to do when we are doing them.

Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, "*Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm.*" And we could easily say, "*Nothing great was ever achieved without leaning fully into it.*"

I'll bet every single one of us has an area in our lives where we could lean into it a little more. That we could invest more of ourselves and live and do it more wholeheartedly.

Today we're looking at principle three, and that is **to lean in all the way.**

And the first thing we need to lean into is: **we've got to lean into DOING THE WORK.**

How many people have ever wanted something, but you let the fact that you discovered it took hard work, made you change your mind and do something else? [Congregation laughs] Anybody let hard work scare you off a little bit? Think, "*I want that! Oh, that much work? Nah. I'll do something else, thanks.*"

Behind every bit of success and every great achievement, there is a story of hard work. There is a story of effort and dedication and practice and training and education and discipline and determination. You know, we can think and plan and organize and get all our ducks in a row, and get ready ... but the truth is: the only thing that will ever create progress and success is when we do the work. When we take action, and when we set things in motion.

You can talk all you want about how great exercise is. "*Oh, I'll get so healthy; I'll have all kinds of energy. It'll be so good for me!*" We could talk about it all day long! But exercise does not help unless you do it! [Congregation laughs] Unless you take action. I mean, it's just ... It's just a fact.

Einstein said, "*Nothing happens until something moves.*"

In the Book of James, it says, "*Be doers of the word, not just hearers, and you'll be blessed in your doing.*" James also said, "*Faith without works is dead.*"

And what they're all trying to say is that action causes things to happen. When you begin to move, there is positive energy; there's a greater momentum. Things begin to shift and change and come alive in us and our circumstances. But we must be willing to do the work.

Tagore had a beautiful line. He said, "*You cannot cross the sea by merely staring at the water.*" [Congregation laughs.] Although we wish it could be that easy! Anything in life you want to succeed in takes work.

I remember years ago I wanted to get into doing rental properties. I had some friends who were very successful at it. So I started reading and buying books about rental properties. My three friends - I would interview them. And I think I interviewed them several times. I think on the third or fourth interview with one friend -- I was asking him more and more questions -- he said, "*You just need to stop!*" He said,

*"You need to buy a house and rent it. You will learn more buying a house and renting it in six months than you will in five years of studying about it and thinking about it."* [Congregation laughs]

And so, thanks to my dad (who co-signed the loan), I bought it ... and, boy, did I make some mistakes! [Congregation laughs] Really, really dumb, horrible mistakes. But I learned, because I was in the arena doing the work, and doing my best. Gaining some wisdom and knowledge and experience. Nothing wrong with mistakes; if you're doing the work, you will continue to get better.

I owned the property for almost 10 years, and it was a great success. But it wouldn't have worked if I wasn't willing to jump in and start taking action and doing the work.

You know, Pete Rose once said, *"The harder I work, the luckier I get."* And the truth is: the harder you work, you'll get more understanding; more confidence; more wisdom. Things will get better, but you have to do the work.

One of the great examples, I always think, of seeing the evidence and the importance of work is with Olympic athletes. You know, we just saw the Olympics. I watched a whole bunch of snowboarding and stuff; it was really, really cool. Here's an interesting study: the average Olympian -- the average Olympian -- trains four hours a day for 310 days a year for six years before getting to the Olympics. That is a lot of work! But they're willing to put the work in. They're willing to do it.

Bruce Jenner, who won the 1976 gold medal in the decathlon, said this: *"I learned that the only way that you are going to get anywhere in life is to work hard at it. Whether you're a musician, a write, an athlete, a businessman, there is no getting around it. You have to do the work."*

Stephen King, the great novelist, wrote this. He said, *"Talent is cheaper than table salt. What separates the talented individual from the successful one is a lot of work."*

And, finally, Oprah said, *"There is no secret! Whatever it is you want, you can have it, but only if you're willing to do the work."*

What's that book after the four Gospels in the Bible? What's that called? [Congregation shouts out answers] The Book of Acts! Correct! But notice they have the four Gospels -- which means the "good news." So it's good news, but the good news isn't beneficial unless we use the Book of Acts ... that we take the actions.

So my question is: What do you want to create and have and experience in your life? But the bigger question is: Are you willing to do the work for it? Are you willing to invest yourself into it? Are you willing to do it wholeheartedly and literally just lean into it? To do whatever it takes to learn, study, grow, try, experiment ... whatever it is. Because anything it is that you could possibly want -- to be healthier and be fit; to have a better relationship; greater finances; deal with an addiction; learn to speak a new language; go and get a degree; whatever it is -- it takes work. The question is: Are you willing to do the work?

What area of your life is calling for you to give more effort to it? And to invest yourself more in it? To lean into the work means to be committed to doing the work, but there's another thing. It's not just the work, but it's the work with intention. Some people call it "deliberate work."

Arnold Schwarzenegger said an interesting thing. He said you could do certain exercises and lifting weights, and it's going to benefit you. But what'll benefit you even more is to work with intention. That, when you're lifting with the intention that you are getting strong; that every muscle you focus your mind and intention with the action. And he said something like: it's three times more effective. I don't know what the number is! But I think we'd all agree that working with intention absolutely makes a difference.

Ericsson had a theory called "The 10,000-Hour Theory." And it's the idea that it takes about 10,000 hours to become a genius in something. It seems overwhelming. But what he's saying is that, over time. And the principle isn't just work, and it isn't just time. It's work with intention over time changes and

transforms things. You can get better, and you can reach levels of success and greatness, but you have to be willing to lean into it, and give it your all.

You know, when it says, "*Faith without works*," what he's saying is faith and works go hand in hand. You have to do the inner work of tuning into your faith and having to expand and do the outer work of the actions. You have to do both of them. That's what brings things to life.

So what do you want enough in your life that you're willing to work for it? That you're willing to work with intention? That you're willing to work with effort? That you're committed to it, and you're willing to do it over time? Because the truth is: the elevator to success is broken. You have to take the stairs. [Congregation laughs] You've got to do the work, and you've got to lean into the work.

The next one is: **you've got to lean in BEYOND YOUR COMFORT ZONE.**

Here's what Michelangelo said; Sisten Chapel, the statue of David by Michelangelo. he said, "*The greatest danger for most of us is not aiming too high and missing; it is aiming too low and reaching it.*" He said the greatest danger in life is not to fail, is not to fall; but it's to play it safe. It's to play small. It is to never risk; to never reach beyond your grasp; to never take a chance; to never dare. But to consciously and consistently choose to play small; to stay in your comfort zone in all areas of your life.

Thoreau shares his consequence. And he said the consequence and the danger and playing it safe is coming to the end of your life, and realizing that you haven't really lived. You didn't live the life you came to live; you didn't do the things you came to do.

One of my favorite Biblical stories is the one where Jesus sent the disciples in a boat ahead of him. And then there was a storm, and they got all freaked out and scared. And they saw Jesus walking on the water. And Peter said, "*If it's you, Jesus, call me!*" And so he calls him out, and he steps out of the boat. And Peter initially stays on the water, walking on it. And then he gets freaked out and scared, and he starts sinking. And he calls to Jesus to scare him ... ah, ah, ah ... to save him. [Congregation laughs] He did scare him, too! But ... [Congregation laughs]

And then Jesus said of him right after that, "*Oh ye of little faith.*" But later he said of Peter, "*You are the rock upon which I will build my church.*" And here's why: because Peter was willing to step out of the boat in his faith. To step out and go beyond. And when you step out of your comfort zone, something amazing happens in you. It changes you; it expands you. If you really look at it, all of Jesus' ministry was to stretch people from thinking. Stretch their hearts; stretch their awareness; stretch their faith; stretch their love. When Jesus said, "*He who is without sin cast the first stone*" -- because they had that tradition of stoning someone who committed adultery or other crimes. And so he wanted to stretch their minds to compassion; to kindness; to faith and believing in greater things.

Gay Hendricks has a concept that I really love that I use. And he says, "Every one of us suffers from a ULP -- an upper limit problem." Every one of us has some limit and says, "*Oh, I couldn't experience that much success; that much responsibility; that much money; that much love.*" Every one of us, we have it -- whether we think we do or not -- we have a limit in certain areas where we just can't seem to break through that glass ceiling. And our work is to stretch beyond what we currently believe for ourselves: to move beyond it. To expand ourselves in greater ways.

Neale Donald Walsh says, "*Life begins at the end of your comfort zone.*" So my question for you is: Where in your life are you being called to stretch? Where in your life are you being called to expand? Where in your life are you being called to love deeper? Where in your life are you being asked to step out of your comfort zone? To try something new? To live more boldly or daringly? Or to step into a higher and greater version of yourself? Where is life calling you to dream bigger?

So, many years ago ... Most of you know I was paralyzed in a car accident. And for a long time I was focused on things I couldn't do, and I was scared to do a whole bunch of stuff. And my first year when I was an associate minister in North Carolina, they had this little community gathering, and we all had to share about ourselves, about something you'd like to try. And I said, "*Oh, I'd like to try skydiving.*"

Then afterward, a guy came up to me and said, "*Hey, I'm the captain of the U.S. Skydiving Team.*" [Congregation laughs] I didn't even know they had a skydiving team! And he said, "*I could take you this afternoon if you want.*" And I was like, "*Well, you know, uh, bah, bah, buh ... buh!*" [Congregation laughs] Freak me out, man!

Took me three months to get the courage to go. And it was tandem; I was attached to somebody; it was 14,000 feet up in the air. And I'm getting queasy and having second thoughts, and thinking, "*What in the world was I thinking?*" And so they start walking me out, and I'm trying to tell the guy, "*Nooooo! Stop!*" [Congregation laughs] But he couldn't hear me. Jumped out of the plane -- 14,000. Feels surreal! Totally surreal! And then, when the canopy deployed, it was so peaceful and quiet. Looking out on the world; it was incredible. And I don't know how many minutes that lasted, but it was absolutely amazing. Came down, did our landing.

And when I was driving home, I just started to cry. I just started to weep, because I never thought I'd do a whole bunch of stuff, particularly something like that. And what was amazing for it was: it wasn't just about skydiving. But going beyond your comfort zone helps you break through fear. Because we all hold ourselves back in some way. We all limit ourselves in some way. And so any time we stretch beyond our comfort zone, it's not just the thing we're doing; it's we're breaking through a deeper level of fear of what holds us back from truly living.

So what is your comfort zone stretch right now? Could be just saying, "*No,*" and setting a boundary in a relationship that hasn't been healthy. It could be saying, "*Yes!*" to some opportunities that scare you. It could be being more honest with yourself about what's really going on, and telling your family or the most important people what's happening with you.

And maybe it's to move. Maybe it's to go back home. I don't know what it is! But I guarantee you there's something calling you to stretch. Something calling you to move out of your comfort zone. Because the more we're willing to do that, guess what? We discover of what's in here. We unbundle and unlock the brilliance and the potential and the incredible individuals we came here to be. But you've got to be willing to lean in to stretching beyond your comfort zone.

The final one is: **you've got to lean in to ENJOYING YOUR LIFE NOW.** Enjoying the journey now.

Culturally, we're kind of trained: "*I'll be happy when I get rich; I'll be happy when I get that promotion; I'll be happy when I lose that weight; I'll be happy when I meet that person.*" We've got all kinds of things. "*I'll be happy when I get a new hairdo. I'll be happy ...*" Whatever we think. And we keep deferring happiness. We keep deferring our lives until something other than what's going on happens.

And we don't need to do that. We can beat the rush, and be happy now. Be happy now, and be happy along the way! Not just waiting to some end. Because if we can't be happy now, I guarantee we probably won't be that happy then, either. We've got to practice being happy now. We've got to practice being happy now!

Anybody remember that Seinfeld when the "Serenity now!" The "Serenity now!" [Congregation laughs] We should probably just enjoy life now. "Enjoy it now; enjoy it now!" Remind ourselves to enjoy our lives right now.

There are three things we can do to lean into enjoying our lives now.

And the first one is **appreciate life now**. What do you appreciate about your life right now? What things are going well? You know, what are the ways you feel blessed and supported? What are the things you enjoy? And what do you appreciate about yourself now? What are the things that you're handling well? What are the talents and gifts that you're making a difference in the world? Appreciating your life!

In 1 Thessalians, Chapter 5 it says, *"In all things give thanks, for this is God's will for you."* And God's will for you is that you give thanks and acknowledge and appreciate how wonderful your life is. It may not be perfect all the time, but there's a lot of things to celebrate and enjoy and give thanks in. Appreciate your life now; appreciate yourself now.

Let me ask you this question: What's stopping you right at this very moment from being joyful? Being thankful and happy? I would suggest nothing, except your own permission of letting yourself be joyful, thankful and happy now. and appreciating your life now.

The second one is to love up the people in your life now. It doesn't matter how much success and money we have; if we don't have love; if we don't have healthy relationships; if we don't feel cared for and cherished; and cherish and care for other people, we are missing the essence of a full and happy life.

You are probably more loved than you realize. We probably all are! Sometimes we need to remember and tell the people in our lives how much we love them, and tell them the difference that that are making.

You know, I think I've told you that my brother, Derek -- the oldest of the 10 of us -- has got pancreatic cancer in Stage 4. It's really progressing, and the tumors are growing. He's getting weaker; losing weight and all that stuff. But, I tell you, one thing I really appreciate about my family is that we're all sticking together and enjoying our time with him as much as possible. We flew from all kinds of different places in January. We had a Zoom birthday party; phone calls; all kinds of stuff. The ones who can be there are sending videos to us: dancing, and they were eating and drinking the other day. I mean, it was really cool! I'm really proud to see that.

And I wrote him a little note, and I said, *"More than anything else, if this is the time for you to go, the one thing I hope you realize is how loved you are. How much we really love you, and how much we've enjoyed your love. For whatever time we have left, let's just keep celebrating love."*

And nobody's got to be dying for that; that's in our lives every single day. We just need to remember and enjoy the journey by loving up the people who love you now.

And the last one to enjoy the journey now, and to lean into it, is to **laugh and lighten up a little bit**. In the Psalms it says, *"He will fill your mouths with laughter, and your lips with shouts of joy."* Life ain't easy, but I believe life is supposed to be fun. And we're the ones who give ourselves permission to not take it too seriously. To laugh. To rejoice. And to just lighten up.

I've got a little plaque on my desk and it says, *"Life is crazy good."* And somebody once said that, *"People don't stop laughing because they grow old; they grow old because they stop laughing."* And so we need to laugh at ourselves; laugh at life. And laugh at some really good jokes. [Laughs with congregation]

What a coincidence! I happen to have one! [Congregation laughs] These three guys die and all go to heaven. And at the Pearly Gates, St. Peter says, *"What would you like people to say when you're in your casket?"*

And the first guy says, *"I would like them to say I was a good doctor; that I was a good man; and I helped everybody that I could help."*

Second one says, *"Well, in my casket, what I'd like people to say is that I was a great teacher and a great father. I was a great husband. And, you know, especially that I was very kind to children."*

And he turned to the third guy and said, *"What would you like?"*

And he said, *"Well, in my casket, I'd like people to say, 'Look! He's moving! He's moving!'"* [Laughs with congregation]

You know, life is a great gift. It's not easy and it's not simple; it does take work. A friend of mine, Bob Kaler, says, *"On the day you were born, you were given the opportunity of a lifetime."* And the question is: What are you doing with your opportunity of a lifetime? How are you living this gift of life?

We all want to be successful; we all want to be happy. And we can be! But we've got to do the work. Lean into the work; lean into stretching beyond your comfort zone; and lean into enjoying and appreciating your life and loving the people in it right now.

You can have it all! The question is: Are you willing to lean in all the way?

God bless you all! [Congregation applauds]

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