Chapter One: Climb into the Driver's Seat

In his best-selling book “The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People”, Stephen R. Covey explains that the first habit of people who accomplish what they set out to do is that they’re proactive. That is, they take responsibility for the results that they get and they see themselves as being the creators of their lives. They don’t identify themselves as victims of external conditions, and they don’t allow others to dictate their fate.

If you’re going to make a serious commitment to creating and achieving your life list, you need to identify yourself as the Creator of your life. That is, you need to fully embrace the fact that your life is being created by you. A lot of people take on the role of Victim in their life by deciding that they can’t have what they want for a variety of reasons.

Here are some examples:

- Their boss is a jerk who takes credit for their work and doesn’t want to see them succeed.
- Their parents always struggled financially and they’re doomed to repeat the same pattern
- They’re not smart enough.
- They’re too old.
- They just don’t have the time or energy to do what they want.
- The last relationship they were in completely destroyed their self-confidence and self-esteem.

“Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show.”

~ David Copperfield

“Destiny is not a matter of chance, it is a matter of choice; it is not a thing to be waited for, it is a thing to be achieved.”

~ William J. Bryan

“Success is a tale of obstacles overcome, and for every obstacle overcome, an excuse not used.”

~ Robert Brault

“People are always blaming their circumstances for what they are. I don't believe in circumstances. The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want, and, if they can't find them, make them.”

~ George Bernard Shaw
They’ll never have the money that they need.

They’ve made so many mistakes, and they’ve failed so many times, that there’s just no way to repair the damage.

They were bullied and made fun of when they were in grade school.

They don’t have any special talent or ability.

The complaints and excuses that people come up with of why they’ll never be able to achieve their dreams could fill an entire book, which we can entitle as follows:

• “Why I’ll Never Be Able to Have What I Want”; or

• “The Book of Lamentations”.

When a person focuses on all of the reasons why they can’t do something, they’re immediately filled with a sense of paralysis, hopelessness, and helplessness. People who are serious about living their dreams need to make a shift from being a Victim to being a Creator. As a Creator, they begin to develop the capacity to envision outcomes and take steps—small steps, if necessary—toward manifesting these outcomes.

David Emerald refers to this same principle of moving from a Victim Orientation to a Creator Orientation in his book “The Power of Ted”. As David explains, a Creator knows that he/she always has a choice, regardless of circumstances.

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MAKE THE SHIFT FROM VICTIM TO CREATOR

If you’ve been playing the role of the Victim—coming up with excuses that explain why you can’t get what you want, blaming others for the things that are wrong in your life, constantly complaining but doing nothing to remedy the situations you complain about, and so on—you have to become a Creator.

A Creator does the following:

• They decide what they want.

• They believe in their ability to design and create their own life.

• They keep focused on their vision, regardless of outside events and circumstances.
• They take consistent action toward achieving their goals.

• They know that sometimes they have to change course because the winds have changed; when this happens, they simply adjust their sails and look for a different route to reach their intended destination.

• They keep going despite temporary setbacks.

• They see mistakes as feedback. They assess what they did wrong, they modify their approach accordingly, and they try again.

• Each time that they fall they get back up again.

• If someone else gets in the way of the achievement of their goals, they see that person as a challenge that needs to be overcome.

• They don’t listen to anyone who tries to tell them that they’re out of the game.

• They don’t give their power away.

• They know that it’s not about getting others to change.

• They give themselves permission to go after their dreams, instead of waiting to get permission from others.

• They make their own decisions; they don’t allow others to make decisions for them.

• They know that sometimes the going may be slow, but they’ll get to their intended destination nonetheless.

• They constantly ask: “What do I want to happen here?”, and move toward it by choosing, instead of reacting.

• They do what they can, with what they have, where they are.

• They focus on the present and prepare for the future, instead of constantly reliving their past.
CREATORS ACT WITHIN THEIR CIRCLE OF INFLUENCE

Covey explains in “The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People” that you should imagine a circle that contains everything that you’re concerned about. This can include taxes, the state of the economy, your family’s health, and so on. This is your Circle of Concern. There are probably many things within your Circle of Concern which you can’t do anything about. However, inside your Circle of Concern there’s a smaller circle, which contains the things which concern you, and which you can do something about. That’s your Circle of Influence.

If a Creator is negatively impacted by an external event, they focus on those things which are within their Circle of Influence. That is, they place their attention on those things over which they have control, instead of worrying about things they can do nothing about. By acting within their Circle of Influence, they gradually expand the circle until there are more and more things they can have an impact on.

Mohandas Gandhi—the man who led India to its independence from Britain—is an excellent example of someone who achieved great things by asking himself at each step of the way what he could do within his Circle of Influence. Gandhi didn’t hold political office. He started his movement by going out into the rice paddies in Indian villages, and quietly talking to the field laborers. In this way, he gradually expanded his Circle of Influence—by showing compassion, by fasting, by practicing nonviolence, and through moral persuasion—, until his influence was so great that the British granted India its independence.

Frank W. Gunsaulus is someone else who was able to expand his Circle of Influence by doing what he could with what he had at the moment. Dr. Gunsaulus was a clergyman. One day he announced in the newspapers of Chicago that he would preach a sermon the following Sunday morning entitled: “What I Would Do If I Had a Million Dollars!” The announcement caught the eye of Philip D. Armour, a wealthy meatpacker and grain merchant, who decided to attend. In his sermon, Dr. Gunsaulus pictured a trade school for the practical arts and sciences in which the students would be taught to “learn by doing”. The clergyman said the following: “If I had a million dollars, I would start such a school.”

After the sermon Mr. Armour walked up to the clergyman, introduced himself, and offered him the million dollars to start the school that he had described. That was the beginning of the Armour Institute of Technology (now the Illinois Institute of Technology). Dr. Gunsaulus did not have the money to start the school he envisioned. However, he had a vision, he had great oratory skills, and he had a pulpit to preach from. By utilizing what he had, he was able to pull someone who did have a million dollars into his Circle of Influence.

THE MINDSET OF A CREATORS

The mindset of a Creator is “I am responsible for me, and I can choose.” In any given situation you can quickly shift to a creator mindset by applying the 20-part test below:
• What do I want to happen here?
• Is there another approach?
• What are my options?
• What if I had an hour to come up with 100 ways to solve this problem or improve this situation?
• Can the rules be changed?
• What assumptions am I making? What evidence is there that these assumptions are true? What experiment can I conduct to test my assumptions?
• Who’s had this problem before, and how did they solve it?
• Who can help me with this?
• What would my role model do if he or she were faced with this situation?
• What if I looked at this from a different perspective?
• How can I change my feelings or my attitude toward this situation?
• What’s the most effective thing for me to focus on at the moment?
• What would I do from a position of power?
• What lessons have I learned in the past which I can apply to this situation?
• What baby steps can I take to begin moving toward what I want?
• How can I get the money so that I can do this?
• What knowledge do I need to solve this problem? How can I acquire that knowledge?
• How can I face the direction that I want to be moving in?
• What else can this mean? How can I reframe this situation?
• How can I turn this around?

Whenever you’re facing an obstacle toward attaining the things that you want in life, and you feel tempted to wallow in victim-mode, shift from Victim to Creator by going through the twenty questions above.
A lot of people harbor rescue fantasies when it comes to achieving their dreams. Be honest with yourself: is there an area of your life in which you’re passively waiting for a stroke of luck or for someone to come out of the blue and save you? Are you telling yourself, “Someday, when this or that happens, I’m finally going to be able to . . .” Are you waiting to win the lottery, receive an unexpected inheritance, or win the jack pot in Las Vegas so that you can afford to do the things you want to do? Stop waiting for a rescuer or for some chance event to take place, and begin taking steps to rescue yourself.

Nathaniel Brendon, widely regarded as the world’s foremost expert on the subject of self-esteem explains in his book, “The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem”, that self-esteem is made up of the following two components:

- **Self-Efficacy**: The confidence that we have in our ability to cope with the basic challenges of life.

- **Self-Respect**: The feeling that we are worthy of happiness and success.

In turn, we can enhance our self-efficacy and our self-respect through six practices. One of these practices is self-responsibility. When it comes to self-responsibility, Branden explains that we all have a need to experience a sense of control over our own existence. This requires that we be willing to take responsibility for our actions and the attainment of our goals. Branden adds that self-responsibility is essential to our self-esteem.

In the chapter of the book which Branden devotes to self-responsibility, he has a section that’s titled, “No One is Coming”. In that chapter Branden explains that after having worked with so many people in helping them to build their self-esteem, he’s always looking for that moment in which a “click” seems to occur in the client’s mind and new forward motion begins.

Branden adds that one of the most important such moments is when the client grasps that no one is coming. That is, no one is coming to make things right, no one is coming to fix their problems, and no one is coming to rescue them. If they don’t do something themselves, nothing will get better. Here’s a quote from Branden:

“The dream of a rescuer who will deliver us may offer a kind of comfort, but it leaves us passive and powerless. We may feel ‘If I only suffer long enough, if I only yearn desperately enough, somehow a miracle will happen’, but this is the kind of self-deception one pays for with one’s life as it drains away into the abyss of unredeemable possibilities and irretrievable days, months, decades.”

Take responsibility for yourself; rescue yourself. No one is coming. Chris Gardner shares a similar message below.
Chris Gardner—the man whose life served as the inspiration for the movie “The Pursuit of Happyness” (starring Will Smith)—has a video up on YouTube titled “The Cavalry Ain’t Coming”. In the video, Gardner recalls that when he was small, one day he was watching a Western on TV with his mother. Toward the end of the movie, it seemed that all was lost for the good guy. He had no horse and no sidekick, and he was running out of ammunition. At that point, the good guy looks out across the desert, and there’s nothing but tumbleweed and cacti.

Gardner’s mother turned to him and said, “See that, the cavalry ain’t coming.” She wanted Gardner to understand that the cowboy was on his own. He was going to have to save himself. In the end, the cowboy did save himself. But the point was that his resolve and ingenuity did not kick in until he accepted that no cavalry had been sent to bail him out. He had to become his own cavalry.

Accepting that “the cavalry ain’t coming” is a state of mind. It’s an attitude. The process is as follows:

1. Take stock of where you are.
2. Understand how you got there.
3. Take the steps necessary to get to where you want to be.

Gardner adds the following: “When the road gets tough, and you find yourself gazing hopefully out toward the horizon, remember this: the cavalry ain’t coming.” Brian Tracy, Philip C. McGraw, and Frank Winfield Woolworth would all agree with Gardner. You’ll be reading about them next.

Brian Tracy writes in his book “Goals! How to Get Everything You Want--Faster Than You Ever Thought Possible” that when he was twenty-one years old he was broke, he had a job working construction, and he lived in a small one-room apartment. One night he was sitting at the table in his tiny kitchen and he had a sudden flash of awareness that changed his life: “No one was coming to the rescue.” He realized that everything that happened to him from that moment on was completely up to him. He was responsible for his life.

In his book, “Life Strategies”, Phillip C. McGraw (Dr. Phil)—the man responsible for getting Oprah into the right mindset when she was subjected to a multi-million dollar suit by the powerful Beef Industry--cautions that if you don’t accept responsibility for yourself and for your life you will misdiagnose every problem and will therefore mistreat every situation. He indicates that you need to stop attributing your pain to an external source; instead, start concentrating on the thoughts, behaviors, and choices which you can change to get a better result.

Dr. Phil indicates that you need to remember the following:
You choose where to be.

You choose how to act.

You choose what to say.

You choose whether to go or stay.

You choose whom to be with.

You choose what to concentrate on.

You choose what to believe.

You choose what behaviors to take in reaction to different stimuli.

You choose what to say to yourself about the circumstances you find yourself in.

Napoleon Hill is famous for having spent two decades conducting research in order to organize a Philosophy of Personal Achievement. He created a formula for success by conducting interviews with over 500 people of the caliber of Henry Ford, Thomas Edison, Alexander Graham Bell, John D. Rockefeller, George Eastman, William Wrigley Jr. and Charles M. Schwab. Hill discovered that one of the most important ingredients of success was having personal initiative, and he used Frank Winfield Woolworth as an example.

Woolworth was born on a meager potato farm; however, he wanted to succeed in life, and he recognized that success was something that he was going to have to achieve for himself, without someone else telling him what to do, or how to do it. While working in a dry goods store in Watertown, N.Y., Woolworth had the idea of opening a store in which everything would sell for either a nickel or a dime. He then acted on his own personal initiative in putting his ideas into action. Although his first store failed within weeks after opening, soon afterwards he opened up another store. Eventually he had a chain of “Five and Ten” stores which yielded him a fortune.

Seeing yourself as being the Creator of your life, recognizing that no one is coming to the rescue, accepting that success is something that you’re going to have to achieve for yourself, and making a commitment to creating the best possible life that you can by making the choices that are right for you is the first step toward creating and achieving your life list. If you don’t believe that ultimately you’re the master of your destiny, it’s going to be very difficult, if not impossible, for you to achieve what you want in life. Make the decision right now to see yourself as a Creator, regardless of what may be going on in your life at the moment.

“Managing the power of choice, with all of its creative and spiritual implications, is the essence of the human experience . . . Choice is the process of creation itself.”

~ Caroline Myss
EXERCISE 1: TAKE INVENTORY OF YOUR RESOURCES

You're going to take inventory of all the resources that you have at your disposal—including money, contacts, skills, knowledge, and so on. Go ahead and make a list of your resources in your Life List Journal:

**Inventory - Contacts:** Make a list of all the people you know and have a good relationship with. It can include your parents, your siblings, your boss, your co-workers, your banker, your customers, your friends, people from your alumni association, teachers or professors you got along with well, and so on. Once you've identified all of your contacts, you're going to go through your list to determine who can put in a good word for you, give you advice, connect you with somebody else who could be in a position to help you, or be of assistance in some other way.

**Inventory - Skills and Knowledge:** Make a list of all your degrees and all of the seminars you've taken. List every job you've ever had—including internships and volunteer work—and everything you learned in those jobs. What are your hobbies? List everything you know how to do, and all the problems you know how to solve. Don't discard any of your skills because you think that it's something that anyone can do; just because something comes easily to you does not mean that it comes easily to everyone else. And just because you've devoted time and effort to learning how to do something, does not mean that everyone else has done so as well.

**Inventory – Achievements:** Make a list of all of your past achievements. Analyze each one and write down what talents, skills, preparation, attitudes, and so on you relied on in order to accomplish these things.

**Inventory - Finances:** Make a list of all of your financial assets, including any cash you have on hand, any money in your savings account, any real estate you own, and your investment portfolio. Also, list any assets you own which could quickly be converted into cash. Having good credit is also a financial asset. Money can always come in handy, whether it's to hire a consultant, to get additional education, or even to hire an attorney if you have to.

**Inventory - Character Traits:** Sometimes your best resources will be your ability to persevere, your ability to stay positive, and your ability to choose your attitude, regardless of what else might be going on around you. Having the ability to look at a situation from several different perspectives is also a great asset.

EXERCISE 2: THE WISE CHOICE PROCESS

Right now, identify a situation in which you've been acting out the role of Victim, whether of circumstances or other people. Is there something you want but haven't been able to get and you're blaming someone else or some particular circumstance? Is there something that
you're always complaining about but aren't doing anything to try and fix? Take a few minutes to write about it in your “Life List Journal”.

Then, take the situation that you wrote about and follow the Wise Choice Process in order to make a decision on how to best proceed. The Wise Choice Process is a decision making model that asks you to answer the following six questions:

1. What is my present situation?
2. How would I like my situation to be?
3. Do I have a choice here? (Hint: For a Creator, the answer here is “yes”.)
4. What are my possible choices?
5. What’s the likely outcome of each possible choice?
6. Which choice will I commit to?

Remember to go back to the list of resources at your disposal that you created for Exercise 1 to help you come up with a list of your possible choices or alternatives. Write down at least five things that you can do with these resources, no matter how small, so that you can start shifting from being a Victim to being a Creator in the situation you've identified. Then make sure you take those steps.

In the next exercise you'll be expanding your Circle of Influence so that you can begin to have an even greater impact on this situation.

EXERCISE 3: EXPAND YOUR CIRCLE OF INFLUENCE

Expand your Circle of Influence by asking yourself the following questions:

- Who do you need to meet who could help you with the situation in which you’re currently trying to shift from being a Victim to being a Creator? How could you meet him or her?

- What skills do you need to acquire? What additional knowledge do you need?

- Do you need more money in order to be able to influence the situation? If so, start generating alternative for getting the money that you need.

- What else could you do? Do you need to start documenting all of the work that you do for your employer, the results that you’re achieving, and keeping track of positive comments you get from clients? Do you need to get an article published to get more recognition in your field? Do you need a life coach to help you plan out a strategy?