

ACTION!

Also by Robert Ringer

To Be or Not to Be Intimidated? That Is the Question.

Looking Out for #1

Restoring the American Dream

Million Dollar Habits

Wordasaurus Quick-Answer Guide

ACTION!

***Nothing Happens
Until Something Moves***

Robert Ringer

M. EVANS

Lanham • New York • Boulder • Toronto • Oxford

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*To Ester and Andrew,
the two purist souls on earth.*

Contents

Introduction

Chapter 1: The Action Phenomenon

Chapter 2: Truth-Based Action

Chapter 3: Value-Oriented Action

Chapter 4: Virtue-Based Action

Chapter 5: People Taxes and Action

Chapter 6: Freedom and Action

Chapter 7: Self-Disciplined Action

Chapter 8: Adversity and Action

Chapter 9: The Endgame of Action: Happiness

Introduction

OVER THE PAST DECADE, I have become increasingly and consciously aware of a remarkable tool that is not only at my disposal, but is available to every member of the human species. It isn't that I was not previously familiar with this tool; on the contrary, I have employed it quite effectively throughout my adult life. What has changed is my heightened awareness of its preeminent role in steering the course of events.

The tool I am referring to is *action*. Its supreme position in the universal scheme of things—action on a purely secular basis, in determining to what extent human beings succeed or fail—did not come to me as a sudden revelation. Rather, it was an accelerating evolution. Further, I am convinced that action is still evolving today. What I believe triggered my mind to begin focusing on action as the key ingredient in a meaningful life is a quote I happened to run across by the nineteenth-century German playwright, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Said Goethe, “Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it.” (I will be dissecting this quote in detail in [chapter 1](#).)

Goethe's words had such a dramatic impact on my thinking that they inspired me to go back and review my earlier self-development books in search of the word *action*. What I found is that each of those books is filled with anecdotes and stories about action, but the idea that action is the very essence of life is not addressed.

Today, I am absolutely convinced that neither success nor happiness is possible without action. Further, I firmly believe that there is a direct link between action and spirituality. These conclusions are not based nearly so much on all that I've read about action, but on firsthand experience. My increased understanding of the importance of action has resulted in a dramatically expanded insight into how life works and has given deeper meaning to my personal philosophical beliefs.

Because of this, the skeletal structure of this book is based on a previous work of mine, *Getting What You Want*. While I was pleased with the content of that book, I was dissatisfied with the title and the publisher's orientation of my material. Fortunately, I was able to have the book taken off the market at an early date, and was subsequently successful in acquiring the rights to it.

As it became ever more clear to me that action is the key factor that determines how an individual's life plays out, it also became obvious that this was the precise orientation that was needed for much of the material in *Getting What You Want*. In addition, I have included some material from another one of my books, *Million Dollar Habits*, which has added clarity to a number of important issues.

I believe that the incorporation of this material will be especially helpful to first-time readers who are unfamiliar with my philosophy. I learned early in my career that an author should never assume that a reader has knowledge of everything he has previously written, particularly when it comes to material that is foundational to what the author is currently writing about. On the other hand, if you are already familiar with my writings, I trust that any repetition herein will serve as a beneficial review for you in much the same way that it has for me.

Cliché as it may be, writing this book was a true labor of love, and the reason for it became obvious to me early on. Clearly, it was because the book was based not only on what I most often speak about in public appearances, but on the way I live my life on a daily basis. Thus, with the publication of *Action!* my thinking, living, writing, and speaking are almost perfectly aligned.

Normally, the last words of a book bring feelings of relief and exhaustion. With *Action!* however writing it was such a joy that it was the first time I can recall not wanting to see a book project come to an end. Hopefully, you will feel the same way when you finish reading it.

On a separate note, you will find a somewhat self-deprecating character known as “The Tortoise” popping up in a number of illustrations on the pages ahead. The Tortoise entered the world through my first book, *Winning through Intimidation* (now rewritten and retitled *To Be or Not to Be Intimidated: That Is the Question*). I adopted him as my alter ego, so to speak, because so many of the anecdotes in that book were reminiscent of the legendary tortoise-and-hare tale.

The Tortoise is the classic antihero, the unglamorous plodder who always seems to find a way to come out ahead no matter how harshly life treats him along the way. Flash isn’t his stock in trade; his strengths are consistency, perseverance, resiliency, and resourcefulness. He’s the kind of reptile who, upon being told that he can’t play in someone’s game, simply goes out and starts his own league.

Above all, The Tortoise demonstrates that the outcome of most situations in life are decided over the long term. Quickly getting out of the starting blocks may get people’s attention, but all that counts is where you are when the race is over.

The Action Phenomenon

Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do.—MARK TWAIN

I HAVE ALWAYS BELIEVED that the difference between success and failure—in any area of life—is nearly as great as most people might suspect. I have also been consistent in my belief that the slight difference between the two is primarily a result of whether or not one practices certain successful “habits” that are based on universal wisdom, or, in simpler terms, *common sense*.

As the years have passed, however, I have increasingly zeroed in on action as *the most important* success habit when it comes to determining how an individual's life plays out. This life-changing conclusion evolved as a result of four key insights that gradually fit together in my mind like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. These insights, which have had a dramatic impact on my life, work in concert with one another to make action an awesome tool that gives a person the capacity to overcome virtually any obstacle in his* path.

Insight No. 1: Nothing Happens Until Something Moves

“Nothing happens until something moves” are the words of the greatest scientific mind of the twentieth century, Albert Einstein. The Theory of Relativity may have been Einstein's most important contribution to science, but these five simple words—“nothing happens until something moves”—comprise his most important contribution to *me*.

While his observation is an indisputable scientific fact, there is no doubt in my mind that it applies to all other aspects of life as well. Ideas can be precious commodities that can change the world, sound preparation is invaluable, and knowledge and wisdom are essential when it comes to giving one an edge in the pursuit of great achievements. But ideas, preparation, knowledge, and wisdom are all but useless without action, because action is the *starting point* of all progress.

In other words, an idea, of and by itself, has no intrinsic value. It must be accompanied by action. It is action that cuts the umbilical cord and brings an idea out of the womb. I can assure you that Fred Smith, founder of Federal Express, wasn't the only person to come up with the idea of starting an overnight delivery service to compete with the woefully incompetent U.S. Postal Service. The reason I can make such an assurance is that I myself thought about the concept for years, especially whenever I would have to send a secretary cross-country to hand deliver a document that needed to be in someone's office the next morning.

Further, I do not for a second think that I was the only other person to ponder the idea of a

overnight mail-delivery service. In fact, I would be surprised if literally thousands of other entrepreneurs weren't simultaneously mulling over the same idea. What made Fred Smith different from the rest of us was that he didn't just think about the idea; he took *action*. Action converts an idea into an experience. Action creates reality. In Fred Smith's case, he brought his college thesis on the subject to life by applying action to his written words.

The same story has been repeated thousands of times through the years. To give a more recent example, I doubt that Jeff Bezos was the first person to envision a business like Amazon.com, probably the biggest company ever built in such a short period of time. Talk about a simple idea. What could be more simple, more obvious, and more dull than selling books on the Internet?

Once he had begun, Bezos did not allow a little problem like not turning a profit for years to slow him down. Instead, he kept taking action on two fronts: increasing Amazon.com's greatest asset—its customer base—and repeatedly convincing Wall Street to invest more millions of dollars in that asset. If you've ever tried to raise additional capital for a money-losing venture, you can appreciate the enormity of Bezos's feat—and it's a feat he has repeatedly accomplished.

As a final example, I recall some years back ago watching what appeared to be a rather uninspiring interview with singer/songwriter Paul Simon of Simon and Garfunkel fame. Simon had just come out with a new album based on the tribal sounds of Africa. The interviewer asked Simon how he felt about the pounding he had been taking from critics in the industry whose position was that "anybody could have taken existing African sounds and packaged them into an album."

His bland response to the interviewer's question was, "Maybe it's true that anyone *could* have done it, but I *did* it." On the surface, Simon's retort seemed to be rather unremarkable, but it certainly caught my attention. I may be the only person in the world who remembers that uneventful interview, but it had such a huge effect on my thinking that I have quoted Simon's response scores of times over the years. The moral is self-evident: It's not what you *can* do; it's what you *do*.

Nolan Bushnell, founder of Atari, put it bluntly when he said, "The critical ingredient is getting off your butt and doing something. It's as simple as that. A lot of people have ideas, but there are few who decide to do something about them now. Not tomorrow. Not next week. But today. The true entrepreneur is a doer, not a dreamer." Translation: The successful implementation of one good idea is worth more than a thousand good ideas not acted upon.

As I have narrowed my focus to the phenomenon of action, it has become ever more apparent to me that the very essence of life is action. Inertia—resistance to action—is anti-life. Except in horror films, corpses tend to be extremely inactive.

I don't recall where I first heard the following parable, but it certainly is profound and appropriate to any discussion about the importance of action.

Every morning in Africa, a gazelle wakes up. It knows that it must run faster than the fastest lion or it will be killed.

Every morning in Africa, a lion wakes up. It knows that it must run faster than the slowest gazelle or it will starve.

It doesn't matter whether you're a lion or a gazelle; when the sun comes up, you had better start running.

As human beings, we find that we, too, had better start running at the crack of dawn if we're serious about making life a meaningful journey. A stress-free life sounds nice in theory, but in reality there is an inherent urgency to life. For one thing, life is finite, and you don't even have the advantage of knowing when your finite supply of time will run out. Second, life is competition. No matter what the situation, you're always competing with other human beings. You compete for a prospective spouse, you compete for a place on an athletic team, you compete for attention from others, you

constantly compete in numerous ways that you don't even think about. If you don't want the competition to leave you in the dust, you can't coast. You've got to take positive action and make progress every day of your life.

THE BEST DAY IS TODAY

There are two basic kinds of actions. One is *proaction*, which puts you on the offensive and, all other things being equal, gives you a great deal of control over events. The other is *reaction*, which puts you on the defensive and relegates you to an inherent position of weakness.

An interesting way of looking at inaction is that it's really just a negative form of action—a sort of black hole of action that sucks energy away from you much the same as the black holes of the universe pull matter into the deep recesses of their cosmic bowels. This is why inaction often yields to consequences by default. Nothing happens until something moves, so if you wait for something, someone, to act *on* you, you likely will be unable to control the consequences.

Homeostasis, a trait that all human beings possess to one extent or another, is (in psychological terms) the tendency to live with existing conditions and avoid change. Which is ironic, because resistance to change defies both the laws of nature and the laws of the universe. The earth, the universe, and life itself are in a perpetual state of change, and so, too, is secular life. Weather changes; laws change; the economy changes; the reigns of power change; technology changes; and, perhaps most significant of all, your age changes every second of your life. In addition, with the generation and dying of cells in our bodies, each of us is in a constant state of change physiologically, from birth to death.

Homeostasis is the ultimate defense against taking action, which is why most people stubbornly resist change, particularly major change. Outwardly, of course, we fabricate excuses that attempt to justify why we aren't able to take action just yet, the most common one being that “the time is not quite right.” Someday, we insist, when all the pieces of our lives fit perfectly together, we'll be in a better position to take action—change occupations, go back to college and get an engineering degree, get out of a bad marriage, start working on that big project we've thought about for years, move to the city of our dreams, or begin writing the novel that we've always believed would be a best seller.

The self-delusion of trying to disguise procrastination as a responsible attitude that is just waiting for the “right” time brings to mind a fascinating essay titled “The Station,” wherein the unknown author metaphorically describes all of us as being on a mythical train of life, rolling relentlessly down the tracks toward the future. As we travel on this train of life, we keep believing that just around the next bend we're going to arrive at The Station, a beautiful little red station house that will signify the panacea moment when everything in our lives will be in perfect order. When we arrive at The Station there will be a big crowd cheering, flags will be waving, bands will be playing, and that's when all our troubles will vanish and we can finally take action.

There's only one problem with this picture: It's a fantasy—a pure fantasy—because the reality is that *there is no station*. It doesn't exist. The perfect moment never quite arrives. There's always one more piece of the puzzle that has to fall into place before we're ready to take action.

The truth of the matter is that, with few exceptions, the best day to take action is today. You *can* make a sales call today. You *can* start working on that important project today. You *can* begin to pick up the pieces and start a new life today. The issue isn't about today being the first day of the rest of your life; the real issue is that today could be the *last* day of the rest of your life.

When people cling to the excuse that the time isn't quite right to move forward with a plan

change of one kind or another, it's often because they get caught up in the "how" of the situation. No one is omniscient. ~~No one can foresee every problem and know, in advance, how to resolve it.~~ The reality is that all start-ups are dysfunctional. What makes a person an entrepreneur is that he has the determination, perseverance, and resourcefulness to overcome the dysfunction of a new enterprise. Paul McCartney put it well when asked in an interview how the Beatles got started. Said McCartney, "Nobody knows how to do it. You just start a band."

In the same vein, people often fail to take action because they confuse the word *hard* with *impossible*. It's not impossible to change occupations right now; just hard. It's not impossible to move to another city right now; just hard. It's not impossible to terminate a bad love relationship right now; just hard. Hard is the very thing that gives value to an objective. Everything worth accomplishing is hard.

If you're waiting for everything to be just right before taking action, you are in possession of a foolproof excuse for failure. Don't fear change; embrace it as one of the most exciting aspects of life. Think of action as an opportunity to make mistakes, mistakes that give you a front-row seat in the Theater of Learning. Carlos Castaneda explained it succinctly when he said, "A warrior lives by acting, not by thinking about acting, nor by thinking about what he will think when he has finished acting."

WHEN IT COMES TO HAVING THE COURAGE to make a major change in one's life, my memory takes me back many years ago to a chance meeting in Palm Springs, California, where a friend and I happened to stop in at a hotel lounge one evening. Without fanfare, the act for the lounge was introduced—stunningly beautiful female singer (hereafter referred to as "Dionne"). She bore a striking resemblance to the legendary Lena Horne, and carried herself with the style and grace of royalty. From the moment she began singing, patrons in the small lounge were mesmerized. In this unlikely venue, Dionne received numerous standing ovations, including several encores. I had never seen anything quite like it. There was no question in my mind that I was witnessing the birth of a star.

After finishing her act, Dionne sat at a table and chatted with some acquaintances. Being the young and impetuous tortoise I was, I scribbled a note to her on the back of my business card, asking whether she had a manager, then had a waiter deliver the card to her. To my pleasant surprise, she sent back a note saying that she, in fact, did not have a manager. After a couple more notes back and forth, I set up an appointment for Dionne to meet with me in my office later in the week.

Our initial meeting went very well, and, after a couple of weeks of negotiations, I succeeded in signing her to a management contract. Among other things, the contract called for me to finance a demo tape, arrange for the production of an album, and use my marketing skills to promote her talents. In the course of filling out a variety of forms, Dionne told me that she was thirty-two years old, which surprised me, because I had guessed her age at about twenty-seven or twenty-eight. I wondered why someone with her beauty, presence, and, above all, extraordinary talent was not already a household name by age thirty-two.

Dionne explained to me that she had studied classical music in college but had not pursued a career, opting instead for marriage and the life of a traditional housewife. She described the hunger she had felt inside her for so many years, believing that her purpose in life was far different from the way things had unfolded for her up to that point in time. She knew that she had been given a gift at birth, and a little voice from within kept telling her that it was wrong not to use that gift. Finally, one day, she made up her mind to take bold action to change her circumstances, and thus began a belated singing career.

But the most impressive thing Dionne said to me was in response to my warnings about how tough the music business was and how fickle and unpredictable the public could be. In a characteristically self-confident manner, she smiled and told me that if she never became famous—if she was relegated to playing in small lounges the rest of her life—it wouldn't matter to her, because she was doing what she loved. The stage, no matter how small, was her world, and an appreciative audience, no matter how sparse, her reward. I was totally impressed with her purist attitude and passion for performing.

As things progressed—cutting a demo tape, making an appearance on a national talk show, and preparing for an album—it occurred to me that, considering the large investment I was making in Dionne, I had better take out a life-insurance policy on her. When I explained that she would have to take a physical exam, she wavered a bit, but, because it was called for in our contract, she had no choice. However, when it came time to fill out the insurance application form, she asked if she could first speak with me in private, so we set up a time for her to come to my office.

When Dionne walked through the door, she brought along a surprise—two surprises, in fact. Malcom and that two *very tall* surprises. I assumed that one of the twin towers was her boyfriend and the other her acquaintance, so when she introduced them to me as her *sons*, I nervously chuckled and waited for a more serious introduction. Alas, her first introduction *was* a serious introduction. Stunned, I asked everyone to sit down and enlighten me as to what this was all about.

Almost everything Dionne had told me was true—her study of classical music in college, initially playing the role of the traditional housewife, then pursuing her destiny as a singer, and the fact that she had no manager. The part of the story that had not been true, however, was her age. Given that I had thought she looked younger than the thirty-two years of age she admitted to, it would be an understatement to say that I was not prepared to hear her *real* age. Knowing that she was required to put her age on the insurance application, Dionne had decided she would first break the news to me as a person. As it turned out, she was not thirty-two, and certainly not in her late twenties as I had originally supposed. Dionne was *forty-seven years old*—a female Peter Pan! Put another way, she was a medical miracle.

After the paramedics revived me, Dionne, her twin-tower sons, and I had a warm chat, saturated as you might have imagined, with a number of humorous one-liners about her age. The twin towers particularly liked my tongue-in-cheek barb about taking mom on the road and making a fortune by having people place wagers on her age. I suggested that if we got started right away, we could all be rich before Dionne was confined to a nursing home.

As things turned out, my relationship with Dionne lasted only about a year, chiefly because I couldn't afford to continue the level of investment I felt was required. The music business gives no meaning to the term *dirty*, and it became apparent that, despite Dionne's talent, it was going to be a long, hard road to the top—and long was something that was in very short supply in her case.

When we parted ways, Dionne reaffirmed her feelings that even if she never became famous, she would be more than satisfied just doing what she loved. I haven't seen her in more than twenty-five years, and the thought that she is now nearly seventy-five years old is unfathomable to me. And so, too, is the thought that she may even look almost forty by now.



“And now, I give you my latest and greatest discovery—the young, the beautiful, the exciting . . . Dionne!”

Dionne knew in her heart what was right for her, but I believe that’s true of most people. What made her unusual was that, notwithstanding her age, she had the mental toughness to *take action* and change the course of her life. She made a shambles of the overused excuse of millions of people who insist that it’s too late for them to make major changes in their lives. I would be surprised if she isn’t still on stage, still smiling, still knocking ’em dead, still getting standing ovations by the bushful at small lounges across the country.

DIONNE’S BOLD ACTION SHOULD BE AN INSPIRATION to those who make the mistake of playing it close to the vest and waiting for something to happen. If you want something to happen, *make* it happen! You don’t have to wait for the perfect pitch in the hopes of hitting a grand-slam home run. Grand-slam home runs don’t come along very often. Striking out swinging is a noble action; striking out with the bat on your shoulder represents a pathetic lack of action. Take more swings at pitches that aren’t perfect, and get your share of singles and doubles every day. Singles and doubles make it possible for you to still be at bat when that perfect pitch finally arrives. Then, if you’re prepared, you’ll be in position to hit one out of the park.

Put another way, life is the sum total of many successful years; a successful year is the sum total of many successful months; a successful month is the sum total of many successful weeks; a successful week is the sum total of many successful days; and so on with hours, minutes, and seconds. The formula is quite simple: The more action you take, the more results you get. Remember, nothing

happens until something moves.

Insight No. 2: God Helps Those Who Help Themselves

To discuss the concept of God is a precarious endeavor, at best. Since so many people have such strong views on the subject, it is guaranteed to cause a lot of anger. Let's face it, a significant percentage of the world's population is not rational when it comes to discussing God.

Fundamentalism, in the generic sense, is the strict adherence to a set of ideas, and is, by definition, at odds with objectivity. This is true whether it be fundamentalist Christianity, fundamentalist Islam, or fundamentalist atheism. All too often, fundamentalists begin their arguments by masking their conclusions as premises. For example, if someone starts with the premise that the Bible is the word of God, or, in the alternative, starts with the premise that there is no God, his premise really is a personal conclusion. The fact that he feels the need to disguise his own conclusion as a premise merely demonstrates a lack of belief. God—if He exists—is certainly powerful enough to withstand serious investigation.

Though I am well aware that to begin to do justice to this most important of all topics would take a thousand pages and a lifetime of research, I ask you to indulge me as I attempt, as a layman, to abridge my own thoughts in a matter of a few pages. For our purposes here—i.e., to explain why I believe that “God helps those who help themselves”—there are a number of possibilities with regard to the existence or nonexistence of God that deserve to be addressed.

QUIETISM

Quietism is the most far-out and gruesome way of viewing the universe. It is the belief that the past, present, and future are all illusions of our consciousness, and that, in reality, they are one and the same. In this view of the universe, nothing can be changed, either by God or man; everything is permanent. If so, there is no reason to try to better one's existence, because there is no future. Since quietism gives us a universe where everything is already in place, the universe is, in effect, dead.

As a philosophy, however, quietism is a moot point. If all of life is but an illusion, we may as well try to be the best we can and reach for the highest goals possible. After all, if we're really just part of a cosmic dream, we'll never know it for certain anyway. However, in the (likely) event that quietism is not an accurate portrayal of the universe, those who live life on the assumption that secular events are real, and that what they accomplish matters, are certain to be far better off than those who believe that life is nothing more than an illusion.

ATHEISTIC RANDOMNESS

Most atheists believe that we live in a random universe. On closer inspection, however, we find that the term *randomness* is really a misnomer. It would be more appropriate to call it “atheistic predestination,” “atheistic fatalism,” or simply “predestined chaos.”

Why? Because the atheistic-randomness advocate generally believes that the so-called Big Bang—the massive explosion from whence evolved today's known universe—somehow happened without the aid of a Supreme Power. And if there was and is no Supreme Power in the universe, everything that has been, is, or will be said and done throughout history was precisely determined approximately 13.8 billion years ago.

billion years ago by the nature of the Big Bang.

At the first instant of that colossal explosion, every atom was sent flying on an eternal voyage that was predetermined by the intricacies of the explosion itself. If there is no Supreme Power to intervene, then nothing can be changed by anybody or anything. Every detail of every event has already been set on an unalterable course. It is the ultimate fatalistic view of the universe. There is no one in control and there is no purpose to life.

Purists of the philosophy of atheistic predestination believe that if you say, "But I can make a conscious decision right now to buy tickets to the Yankee game today," not only is your free will to make such a decision an illusion, but so, too, is your belief that you *think* you are acting out of free will; i.e., even your perception that you are making a decision to buy baseball tickets was predetermined 14 billion years ago. That's because the Big Bang propelled into the universe the atoms that formed your brain in such a way that it would *think* it was making the decision to purchase baseball tickets today. Likewise, atoms formed your vocal cords in such a way as to express your very words about buying baseball tickets at this precise moment in time.

In short, atheistic predestination is the most extreme form of fatalism. Not only can nothing be changed, but everything has already been decided. However, as with quietism, the question of atheistic predestination is a moot point. If everything has already been decided, we will never know it for certain anyway. So, again, we may as well go ahead with pursuing our secular goals, and, in our ignorance, keep right on believing that they're important. If atheistic predestination turns out to be incorrect, when the end comes you don't want to be caught scratching your head while those around you have been taking action all their lives.

DIVINE FATALISM

Divine fatalism, or divine predestination, is the belief that some or all of the future has already been determined by a Divine Power. If that Power caused the Big Bang, but has not intervened and does not intend to intervene beyond His initial act, then we might properly refer to Him as the Cosmic Designer. This leaves us with a pilotless universe that appears in many respects to operate in a precise fashion, but in other ways appears to be as random as the atheist's fatalistic universe.

One could speculate that the results of the Cosmic Designer's predestined universe would be the same as if the Big Bang happened by itself, which, in turn, would lead one to wonder why He would bother to set off the initial cosmic explosion in the first place. Regardless, in either fatalistic scenario the course of events has already been determined, which renders man impotent. Thus, while events may seem random, in reality they have been predetermined by an outside force, either God or a massive, mindless explosion.

However, if God not only designed the universe (either by virtue of the Big Bang or by some other means with which we are not familiar), but remains at the controls and intervenes in secular life, it might be more appropriate to refer to him as the Cosmic Pilot. A Cosmic Designer doesn't make house calls; he just sits back and observes his creation. A Cosmic Pilot stays on top of things. So whether God set everything in stone at the outset or is still at the steering wheel is of monumental importance in our lives.

Since we can never prove which scenario is correct, again it would seem rational for one to forge ahead with pursuing his goals through an action-oriented life.

HUMANISTIC SELF-DETERMINATION

As with fatalism, there is both an atheistic and a divine version of self-determination. The atheistic version encompasses the belief that human beings are in total control of their destiny, and that man reigns supreme. I do not reject this belief on religious grounds. I reject it on the basis of firsthand experience, logic, and fact.

Humanists believe that science invalidates God, in that God becomes irrelevant in the face of scientific explanations of the nature of the universe. But does He? Increasingly, a growing number of astronomers and space physicists seem to be expressing doubts about a random universe.

For example, science can explain *how* gravity works, but it cannot explain *why* it works the way it does. We know that gravity makes the planets, stars, galaxies, and other cosmic bodies act on each other in certain predictable ways, but this does nothing to explain how the principle of gravity came into being. Similarly, scientists know *how* molecular formation works (e.g., under the right conditions two atoms of hydrogen will always combine with one atom of oxygen to form a molecule of water) but they don't know *why* it works the way it does. They know *how* wind works, but they don't know *why* it works the way it does. And so on.

In his book *God and the Astronomers*, Robert Jastrow, founder of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies, put it this way: "For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries."

Clearly, the chasm between theologians and scientists seems to be narrowing toward a middle ground belief that science is not in conflict with God, but, rather, is a gift of God. Consider, for example, evolution. Let us assume, for purposes of discussion, that evolution is not just a theory, but a fact. Does this invalidate God? No, on the contrary, quite the opposite. It provides strong mathematical support for the idea that there is a Supreme Power at the controls of the universe.

As Guy Murchie points out in his book *The Seven Mysteries of Life*, an intellectual, long-standing argument for a random universe wherein a seeming miracle such as evolution could take place on its own is that, given enough time, anything—including the evolution of human beings from inanimate matter—is possible. This argument, says Murchie, is based on the premise that if you could sit enough billions of chimpanzees in front of computers for enough billions of years, random chance would allow them to write all the great works of literature.

Which sounds nice until you consider the mathematics involved. There are approximately fifty possible letters, numbers, and punctuation marks on a computer keyboard, and there are sixty-five character spaces per line in the average book. A chimp would therefore have one in fifty chances of getting the first space on the first line correct. Since the same is true of the second space on that line, the chimp would have one chance in 50×50 , or 50^2 , of getting both spaces right (meaning just the first two letters of the first word of just *one* of the great works of literature). For all sixty-five spaces on the first line, the figure would jump to 50^{65} , which is equal to 10^{110} .

How big is 10^{110} ? According to physicist George Gamow, says Murchie, it is a thousand times greater than the total number of vibrations made by all the atoms in the universe since the Big Bang!

Conclusion: It doesn't matter how many chimpanzees or how much time you allow, not even one line of one great work could come into existence through pure chance. Given that you are infinitely more complex than one line of a book, what are the odds that you, with all your billions of precisely specialized cells, accidentally evolved from rocks and dirt over a period of a few billion years? Evolution in a random universe—i.e., a universe without a Cosmic Pilot—would appear to be

mathematical impossibility. As with wind and gravity, it would seem that the only way that phenomenon such as evolution could have come into existence is through the work of a Supreme Power that is beyond secular comprehension.

SELF-DETERMINATION AND THE COSMIC CATALYST

As the years have passed, I have become increasingly impressed with two phenomena. The first is the remarkable capacity I possess to determine the outcome of my life. For those of us who are not humanists, our secular consciousness (which includes our ability to observe and interpret both history and our own experiences) clearly suggests that we are able to exert a considerable amount of control over our destiny.

The second phenomenon is the outside forces that always seem to come into play whenever I take action. The bolder my action, the more powerful these outside forces seem to be. If man has the power to play a major role in controlling his own destiny, logic would dictate that he also has to have a power *source*. Secularly, most people refer to this power source as “God,” “Allah,” “Yahweh,” and a variety of other names that are language based. You could just as well refer to it as the Big Guy in the Sky, and it would not change what He is or what He does. Because I have no secular explanation for this power source, I choose to refer to it as the *Cosmic Catalyst*. This is just another language-based way of describing what I perceive to be His relationship to human action.

Though I believe that the Cosmic Catalyst is also the Cosmic Designer and Cosmic Pilot (i.e., for reasons we do not fully understand, He intervenes), on a day-to-day secular level I see Him as the catalyst that precipitates results from our actions. In this view, the Cosmic Catalyst designs, then stays on the job at the controls. What it gets down to, then, is a combination of predestination and self-determination. The Cosmic Catalyst predetermines some or most events, but not all. And because man possesses free will, he can make choices that alter those events that are not totally controlled by the Cosmic Catalyst. Religionists refer to this ability of man as “free will,” and the debate over the concept will surely continue until mankind ceases to exist. It is one of the greatest mysteries of life yet its existence—at least from a secular point of view—seems self-evident.

The question that the middle-ground position of self-determination and predestination (and/or Divine intervention) leaves eternally unanswered is: If the Cosmic Designer/Pilot predetermines some events and intervenes in others, which events are left for man to alter? It is this unanswered question that makes it sound like a contradiction when a self-reliant, positive person makes a statement such as “If it’s meant to be, it’s meant to be.”

For purposes of this book, the subject of fatalism versus self-determination constitutes far more than just an interesting intellectual discussion. It gets at the very heart of the justification for taking action. If you believe that only some things are predetermined, I would suggest that you not spend a lot of time worrying about which things are inevitable and which things are within your control. It makes a lot more sense to just pitch in and help the Cosmic Catalyst work His wonders—from when He comes the saying, “God helps those who help themselves.”

In simple terms, “God helps those who help themselves” means that God helps those who take action. This is a predictable phenomenon, given that you are always connected to the Cosmic Catalyst. The reason you don’t have to tap into His infinite powers is that you are permanently connected to Him from the time you are born. And because the Cosmic Catalyst has infinite power and knowledge, He can provide you with a solution to every problem—real or imagined—that you encounter.

You are undoubtedly familiar with the little parable about “footprints in the sand” wherein a man

says to God (in a dream), “I don’t understand why, when I needed you most, you would leave me.” is merely a poetic way of expressing that God is always standing by, ready to help. The only unknown is whether or not *you* are going to take action. The vast majority of the time, if you do your part, the Cosmic Catalyst will come through on His end.

Insight No. 3: The Law of Averages

The Cosmic Catalyst has blessed us with a powerful universal principle that provides an accurate method for projecting results. The principle I am referring to is commonly known as the *Law of Averages*, and, like all other universal principles, it never fails to work. Further, it applies to every aspect of life—from finding a spouse to closing a sale to applying for college admission.

The Law of Averages itself is passive; i.e., it is not driven by action. It just sits invisibly in the background and operates impassively. Without outside action, it is nothing more than a mathematical tool. Insurance companies use it to compile actuary tables, sports teams keep statistics on all phases of their games, and, of course, gambling casinos put the fate of their enterprises totally in the hands of the Law of Averages, which never fails them over the long term.

However, even though the Law of Averages itself is passive, you can use it to achieve your objectives by applying action to it. When you do so, the Law of Averages is guaranteed to come through for you *over the long term*. Put another way, because the Cosmic Catalyst helps those who help themselves, the more you help yourself (i.e., the more action you take), the more help you will get from the Cosmic Catalyst via the Law of Averages.

Everyone is familiar with Woody Allen’s famous line that “90 percent of success is showing up.” It may be a slight exaggeration, but his somewhat tongue-in-cheek observation strikes a chord with many people. I find it absolutely fascinating how often good things happen to me when I do nothing more than “show up.” Just landing on someone’s doorstep can dramatically change a person’s success equation. This is not to imply that you will succeed every time you show up, but showing up is the *first* step toward success. Keep in mind that nothing can happen until something moves, so it’s nice to know that you are in control of whether you take that first step.

However, I would modify Woody Allen’s observation and suggest that perhaps only 45 percent of success is showing up, while another 45 percent of success is asking. Asking is the simplest, most efficient, and potentially most rewarding action a person can take. I’ve become such a believer in the power of asking that I am compelled to share with you my Ten Never-Fail Rules of Success:

Rule No. 1: Ask.

Rule No. 2: Ask again.

Rule No. 3: Ask again.

Rule No. 4: Ask again.

Rule No. 5: Ask again.

Rule No. 6: Ask again.

Rule No. 7: Ask again.

Rule No. 8: Ask again.

Rule No. 9: Ask again.

Rule No. 10: Ask again.

I never cease to be amazed by how many times I’ve achieved results simply because I took the trouble (and, in many cases, had the gall or audacity) to ask—and kept asking until I got the *yes* I wanted after. As I have repeatedly told my employees over the years, if you aren’t a *pain in the ass* to people who are lazy, negligent, and/or just love to say *no*, you aren’t doing your job properly.

Don’t get me wrong; asking does not work 100 percent of the time. That’s not what it’s about.

Asking works *in conjunction with* the Law of Averages. The Law of Averages makes time your ally instead of your enemy. Asking is an incredibly powerful tool, and even more powerful if you understand the importance of asking *again . . . and again . . . and again*.

CLOSING ONE OF THE MOST UNLIKELY DEALS OF MY LIFE came about as a direct result of (1) showing up and (2) asking. I was trying to raise \$5 million for a software project I was working on, and, through my New York patent attorney, had made contact with a German investment banker who showed a great interest in the project—interest enough to begin a long, expensive undertaking of having a prospectus drawn up for some of his clients.

(Before going further with this story, I should point out that I had long ago learned that it's always a bad idea to wait for funding before starting a project. If you believe in something, move forward with it—*take action*—as quickly as possible. One of the best-kept secrets of raising money is that getting funding is always easier when a project is already underway. Conversely, the easiest excuse in the world for *never* taking action is to wait for a project to be fully funded.)

It became obvious to me that it was going to be quite a while before the investment banker would be able to raise the \$5 million, and I was nearing the point where I wanted to do some test marketing. My subconscious mind had started to think about ways to get some quick marketing money in the meantime. One day, during a telephone discussion with my New York attorney, he happened to mention that the investment banker was coming in from Germany the following week to meet with him on another matter. Unbeknownst to him, it was a call to action for me. I immediately decided that I would make arrangements to meet with the German banker while he was in New York.

My attorney thought it would be a terrible waste of both my time and my money to make the cross-country trip, assuring me that the investment banker would not be open to any further proposals until he finished the prospectus and presented it to his clients. I thanked him for his advice, but told him that I definitely would be making the trip to New York the following week anyway. I then called the investment banker and told him that I had a counterproposal I would like to discuss with him (even though I had *no specific proposal in mind* at the time), and *asked* if we could meet in my attorney's office when he came to the U.S. He agreed to do so, and an appointment time was set.

As I said, I didn't have a specific plan in mind; it was just those rapidly vibrating atoms in my brain subconsciously reminding me that nothing happens until something moves. The five-hour plane ride from the West Coast provided me with more than ample time to come up with several ideas to present to the investment banker. It's important to emphasize that I was not motivated to take the trip because I had already come up with some ideas; rather, I was motivated to come up with ideas *as a result of taking the trip. Action preceded motivation!*

The first proposal I made to the investment banker was the one I felt made the most sense from his standpoint. I told him that I would be willing to take one-tenth of the \$5 million (\$500,000) just to be able to start test marketing the product if he would be willing to bypass the prospectus for now and I would come up with the money personally. Then, if things went well, he could take his time and raise the balance of the \$5 million via the prospectus route. I emphasized that it was a great deal for him because he would be able to find out if the product was marketable before putting almost \$4.5 million of his clients' money on the line.

The investment banker asked a handful of questions, then told me that he would like to talk the matter over in private with his associate, whereupon the two gentlemen excused themselves and went to a conference room down the hall. In about fifteen minutes they returned to my attorney's office, expressionless, and sat down. Without pause, and in a calm, straightforward manner, the investment

banker said, "Okay, we'll go along with the proposal to put up the \$500,000. Can you wait until Monday for a check?" I had to restrain myself from jumping up and shouting, "Yes!" In suave, tortoiselike fashion, however, I kept my composure, cleared my throat, and casually responded, "Sure. No problem."

When I received the \$500,000 check, I recall thinking to myself that it never would have happened had I not taken the trouble to do two things: *show up* and *ask*. So much for listening to the advice of attorneys.

OF COURSE, NOT EVERY PAYOFF THAT RESULTS from the mere act of asking is as big as raising \$500,000 from an investment banker. Most, in fact, are on the small side. Nevertheless, when the payoffs come nearly every day of your life, they add up. One area where I have made it a habit to employ the simple act of asking is when I speak to customer-support-type people over the phone. When a company representative gives me a *no* to a request, I often thank him, hang up the phone, then immediately dial the number again and talk to another representative. More often than not, I end up getting a *yes* out of the second person.

As an example, I recently sent my Palm (the world's most overrated toy) in for repair. When it came back, I checked it out, then put it in the cradle attached to my computer. But the first time I tried to "HotSync" my computer's Palm Desktop address book into the handheld unit, I was stopped cold on my tracks. The Custom link in the HotSync dropdown list was disabled. This had never happened before in the more than three years I owned the Palm, so it was obvious that it had something to do with the repair job. I called the company and spoke to a young lady who told me that if the problem was with the Palm Desktop address book in my computer, it couldn't have anything to do with the repair of the Palm itself, because they never had access to my computer.

I tried to explain to her that common sense dictated that they must have caused the problem because I had never experienced it prior to this. "In any event," I said, "it must be a simple thing to correct, so I would really appreciate it if you would just quickly talk me through the steps."

She again insisted that it could not be the company's fault, and that she would have to charge me twenty-five dollars to provide "technical support" of this nature. I thanked her for her insight, wished her a nice life, hung up the phone, and immediately called the same telephone number again.

This time I got a support person on the other end of the line who didn't even bother to address the repair issue, and cut right to the chase. He immediately told me that he was very familiar with the problem I was having, and that he could quickly talk me through the steps needed to correct it. It was just a matter of clicking three or four buttons with my mouse, which took a total of about thirty seconds. Very pleasant, no charge, and, to boot, before getting off the phone he asked me if there was anything else he could do for me!

Twenty-five dollars may not sound like a lot of money, but when you employ this kind of ask-and-get-it strategy as your standard operating procedure day in and day out, it adds up. And it doesn't always involve money; often it's just a matter of convenience and/or saving time. To cement this very important point, following are three other recent examples of similar incidents I encountered.

1. I called AT&T (the worst service company in the Milky Way Galaxy) to have the name on one of my phone accounts switched. The first woman I spoke to was testy, and insisted that I would have to sign a form, have it notarized, and send it back. On my second call, I spoke with an operator who made the change over the phone in about a minute. (Do these

representatives ever speak to one another? How many different sets of rules do dinosaur companies like AT&T have?)

2. I bought fifteen pairs of socks in a department store, at a price of three pairs for \$15, and decided I liked them so much that I went back to purchase more. The store didn't have the colors I wanted, so I called the manufacturer (Keyser-Roth) to see if I could order the socks directly. The salesperson told me that the socks I wanted cost \$6 a pair. I asked if they also sold them in packages of three pairs for \$15 like the department store did, to which she answered in the negative. I called back, got another sales rep on the line, and bought thirty pairs of socks at the price of three pairs for \$15. Quick, simple, no big deal. The first sales rep I had spoken to apparently just enjoyed saying *no*.
3. Two business associates and I went to a Spanish restaurant for lunch at around 2:00 P.M. It was a rather large restaurant, and because it was so late, it was about 90 percent empty. We told the hostess that we would like to sit at one of the corner tables by a window, all of which were unoccupied. She informed us that it wouldn't be possible for her to seat us at a corner table, because the restaurant's policy was to hold those tables back for parties of five or more. I sensed that it would be a waste of time to try to make her understand that it was 2:00 P.M., that the restaurant was almost empty, and that the chances of her running out of corner tables in the next hour was zero. Instead, I spotted a second hostess, approached her, and made the same request for a corner table. "Not a problem," she pleasantly replied, and immediately sat us down at the table of our choice.

On second thought, maybe I'll change it to my *Twenty Sacred Rules of Success*. If you aren't using this critical Law of Averages tool (i.e., asking) as a regular way of life, I strongly recommend that you start doing so post haste. When you see the day-in-day-out results, you'll wonder how you lived so much of your life without fully employing the simple power of asking.

"TIME AND I AGAINST ANY OTHER TWO," said Baltasar Gracián, the insightful and pragmatic seventeenth-century Jesuit priest. How right he was—provided you take continual action, whether it be the act of asking or any other form of action. It's pretty simple mathematics: If a salesman earns a nice living by making ten sales calls a day, the Law of Averages virtually assures him that he will make a nice living ten times two if he makes twenty sales calls a day.

That's the good news about time. The bad news is that, without action, time becomes the casino game of life. If you hesitate or procrastinate, time will ultimately wipe you out. If the same hypothetical salesman instead makes only two sales calls a day, the Time Casino will break him. Think of it this way: If a salesman makes \$1 million in a year, that's a lot of money. But if he makes 1 million over a forty-year career, that's an average of \$25,000 a year—virtual poverty! Moral: Time matters when it comes to the Law of Averages. The Law of Averages will never fail to do its part, but *you* have to supply the action.

Insight No. 4: Action Produces Genius, Magic, and Power

The words of nineteenth-century German playwright *Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*, "Boldness h

genius, power, and magic in it,” have had a great impact on my life. For my personal use, I have modified *von Goethe's* words to read, “Action produces genius, magic, and power.” “Boldness,” “daring,” “brazen,” and similar words clearly imply action. Boldness, for example, implies *bold action*, and I suggest that the bolder the action, the greater the genius, magic, and power that is likely to flow from it. You will note that I list power third in this sequence, the reason being that power is the culmination not only of action, but of the genius and magic that result from action.

There is something wondrous about action that is impossible to adequately describe. Action is the key to the brain's ignition. Contrary to popular belief, you don't need to be motivated to act. You simply necessary, *force* yourself to take action, and motivation will follow. It is the combination of action, genius, magic, and power that produces motivation, which, in turn, leads to ever more action.

Action stimulates both the body and brain cells. It brings you in contact with surprising things, unexpected events, and incredible people who have the potential to be crucial to your success. Take action *first*—even if it's just to explore possibilities—and your creative juices will rise to the occasion. Once that happens, you will become increasingly motivated to take more action.

Because genius, magic, and power are unique and integral parts of the action equation, they merit a separate discussion.

GENIUS

When it comes to the relationship between action and genius, some might view it as a chicken-and-egg situation. Does action produce genius or does genius produce action? I would say that it's a positive cycle wherein both are true; i.e., as with motivation, action produces genius, and genius, in turn, spurs one to take more action. However, you have to come down on the side of action as the first cause—the initial spark that sets the positive cycle in motion. Action, in other words, brings out the genius in a person before genius returns the favor. Action is life; action is energy; until something moves, nothing happens.

The genius I am referring to here has little to do with raw IQ. If anything, it is more closely related to “emotional intelligence.” Emotional intelligence has to do with creative thinking that leads to real-life results, as opposed to intellectual thinking that produces results on structured tests.

Action-generated genius results from a phenomenon I like to refer to as an “expansive mental paradigm”—i.e., the capacity to think beyond one's normal system of beliefs and tap into the infinite intelligence of the Cosmic Catalyst. I use the term *mental paradigm* to describe an imaginary box within your mind, a box that houses what you believe to be the world of the possible. Everything that lies outside the perimeter of this box represents the world of the impossible to you. It's the combination of what lies both inside and outside of this imaginary box that forms what is commonly known as your “system of beliefs,” i.e., what you believe is possible and what you believe is impossible.

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