



How to Create a Better Life

I want you to clearly see that the principles I teach, will help you in every area of your life – at work, at home, in school, in the community, etc.

I can't think of a better way to do that than to share with you how I used these same principles to build a successful business. Owning your own business is not for everybody, but it had always been a dream of mine. When the opportunity for me to own my own business presented itself, I, of course, jumped on it.

I've been in sales all my life. For a few years I sold copiers in Downtown Houston. Every top salesperson I have ever worked with had one thing in common. They invested in themselves. They realized that the better they were, the better their sales would be. Consequently, these professionals were constantly reading self-development books, listening to motivational and self-help audios, and attending success and sales seminars.

I did the same thing. I've always had an insatiable curiosity – an insatiable hunger for any bit of knowledge that would help me get better results. Over the years I've read hundreds of books and listened to thousands of tapes on sales, management, leadership, customer service, negotiation, etc. I've sat through countless seminars. My attitude was that if I came away with just one good idea, it would be worth it. Because one good idea acted upon can change your life.

Why should you invest in yourself as well? Simple, because in life you don't get what you want. You get what you are. If you want more, you need to get better. Tomorrow belongs to the people who are investing in themselves today.

About a month before the Salt Lake City Olympics something happened that changed my life. A fifth grade kid from my neighborhood came up to me and said, "Hey Ruben, when you get back from the Olympics, will you be my show-and-tell project at school?"

I told him, "Sure, sounds like fun."

After the Olympics, I went to his school, assuming that I would be speaking to a classroom of twenty-five to thirty students. Instead, the Principal walked me into the school's gymnasium filled with over two hundred kids – the whole fifth grade class was assembled. Show-and-tell for a classroom of kids had, somehow, turned into an assembly.

I wasn't necessarily nervous; just a little apprehensive. After all, I had never taken a speech class in my life! And, here I was, about to speak to over two hundred 11-year-olds for over forty-five minutes (a lot longer than I thought I would have to speak).

And then, something amazing happened: As I told the kids all of my Olympic stories, all the knowledge I had picked up from reading all those books, from listening to all those tapes, and from going to all of those seminars, started pouring out of me. Half the time, I didn't know what the next thing out of my mouth would be. I just put it on autopilot and poured my heart out to them.

These kids heard forty-five minutes of funny Olympic stories illustrating the principles of success they would need to follow in order to succeed in life.

After the talk, as I was packing my things, a group of teachers encircled me; a posse, of sorts, surrounded me. Each face had a look of astonishment and they said, "What do we have to do to get you to stick around for another hour? If you'll stay another hour, we'll pull the fourth graders out of class. They need to hear your story!"

I told my posse, "Hey, that was kind of fun, bring 'em on!" In the end, my second speech was a little better than my first.

Afterwards, the teachers said, “Ruben, you have a gift. You’re better than the speakers we pay. You need to do this for a living.”

Well, I thought about it. Sharing my stories with those kids was a blast. I was being 100% myself. It felt effortless. And the teachers said my story was impacting the kids in a very positive way.

Everyone has a unique ability or area of brilliance; a gift; a talent that is so strong that it makes work seem effortless. Most of the time, it is something that seems so natural to us that we totally discount it.

That is why it is important to give a lot of weight to the compliments that others share with us because other people can usually see our unique talents better than we can.

Totally by chance, I had stumbled onto doing something which used my greatest talent: connecting with other people to inspire and equip them to be their best.

For three days, I thought about everything the teachers had said to me. They said I had a “gift.” And, then, just like that, I quit my job. When I quit my job, we lost our health insurance. Quitting my job was a huge risk because, at the time, our daughter Gabriela was only one year old, and Cheryl is a full time Mom so my income was our only income. My thinking was, “If I can sell a copier, I can sell myself as a professional speaker. I know I can make it happen and I will make it happen.”

I burned my bridges. Burning my bridges forced me to commit 100% to making my new enterprise work. Burning my bridges put me in a position where it was going to be a “do or die” situation. Burning my bridges, instantly, created an urgency to get the job done – or else.

Since my first talk was at a school, I decided to call on more schools in Houston – over 700 of them – and market my keynote speech, “**Becoming Unstoppable: Success Secrets of a Three-time Olympian.**” I made it a point to speak with the Principal, the counselor, and the President of the PTA. I wanted to create a buzz. I called the schools eight hours a day and, in the evenings, I followed up with faxes and emails. I was desperate. After all, I had to speak to eat.

God honors commitment. After a while the schools started calling back. Elementary schools...middle schools... high schools... colleges...

Speaking to assemblies ranging from five hundred to a thousand high school students is supposed to be a tough gig. Being a big kid at heart, I did fine. My theory was that as long as I had fun and poured my heart out to them, they would have fun too. The teachers were amazed that I could hold their attention from forty-five minutes to an hour.

Business was great. I was working hard, marketing myself everywhere I went, and was completely focused; maybe a little too focused. Being so focused on calling on schools caused me to completely forget that the three summer vacation months would be totally dead months for me. I was so focused on schools that the thought of calling on corporations didn't even cross my mind.

The three summer months of 2002 were terrible. No speaking engagements. None. Both my family and Cheryl's (my wife) family loaned us money to make ends meet, however, we eventually we dried out those resources, as well. Actually, it got to the point where we didn't want to keep asking for money.

We really had to tighten our belts. Figuratively speaking, it was macaroni and cheese time. Ramen noodles for dinner time. Things got so bad that we found ourselves three months behind on our mortgage. We almost lost the house. Cheryl didn't complain once. The whole time Cheryl was 100% behind me.

Right in the middle of that desperate summer, I was offered a marketing job that paid more than I'd ever made selling copiers. After discussing it with Cheryl, we both agreed that if I took the job, it would just keep me from building a successful speaking business. It would derail me. It would take my focus away.

We decided to gut it out. We figured that if, somehow, we could make it through the summer, the business from schools would pick up in the fall. In the meantime, I would start focusing on breaking into the corporate and association markets.

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By August, we could not even afford macaroni and cheese. At 6:45 AM on August 1st, 2002 I was outside the local welfare office about to sign us up for food stamps. Only five months earlier, I had been at the top of the world – competing against the best in the world at the Salt Lake City Olympics. And now I was struggling – humbled by my circumstances.

As I stood outside the welfare office, waiting for them to open up at 7:00 AM, I heard the unmistakable sound of a small airplane flying overhead. I love flying airplanes. I'm a private pilot with about 150 hours of flying time. Ten years ago, I had temporarily given up flying to pursue my Olympic dream.

Seeing that Cessna flying overhead inspired me. I pulled out a business card and wrote on it, "It's August 1st, 2002. By August 1st, 2003 I will be debt free, and will be flying again!" Next time you're down remember: if you can look up, you can **get** up!

I believe God put that airplane up there for a reason; to remind me that I was down, but not out. That airplane reminded me that I was bound to succeed big because I was willing to put myself through the struggle. It reminded me that I was bigger than my circumstances and that I just needed to fight. Just like the people in all those biographies I had read about: Dream – Struggle – Victory. It's the only way.

We struggled through the summer. But we had hope in the future and were willing to do whatever it took to make it. When there is hope in the future there is power in the present.

We prayed like it was up to God and worked like it was up to us. And you know, we didn't pray for God to take the struggles away; that would have been the wrong prayer, because the struggles were there to make us stronger. We simply prayed for strength and wisdom. Sooner or later, you have to grow up; sooner or later, you have to stop telling God how big your challenges are and start telling your challenges how big God is. We prayed and we worked, because what you do shows what you believe.

Knowing I could not do it alone, I surrounded myself with winners and relied on their belief in me to get me through, just like I had done on the road to the Olympics. I started meeting some of the most successful speakers in Houston. I became a mentee to Jim Jacobus, a very successful Houston-based speaker. Jim taught me the speaking business.

One thing Jim would always tell me was, “Ruben, done is better than perfect. Perfectionists rarely succeed because they think too much and act too little. Get out there and work your rear end off and you can always clean up the mess later.”

I followed Jim’s advice. I called corporations and associations all day every day. Meanwhile, I spoke at just about every Rotary Club and networking club in Houston. The plan was to get as many people in Houston as possible to hear me speak in order to create a buzz and to create some momentum in my home market. Little by little, I started getting more and more corporate work.

My business was growing steadily, and then, about a year after that awful summer, the floodgates opened. All of a sudden, I started getting calls from businesses all over the United States with requests for me to speak for them. Businesses like Oracle, Xerox, Continental Airlines, Dell Computers, Wells Fargo, Coca-Cola, Shell Oil, and Johnson & Johnson started asking me to open and close their events or to be their luncheon speaker. Every speaking engagement lead to others.

It seemed that there was always someone in the audience that wanted me to speak for **their** group. Incredibly, only two years after being my young friend’s “show-and-tell” project, I was sharing the stage with Zig Ziglar and Charlie “Tremendous” Jones, two of my heroes, in huge arenas all over the nation. That’s not a “Ruben thing.” That’s a “God thing.”

God honors commitment. There can be miracles if you believe and if you are willing to take massive action. But you have to be willing to go through the struggle if you want to taste the sweet taste of victory.

I see people everywhere seeking to live balanced lives. What they don’t realize is that the only way to move up to another level, the only way to achieve their dreams, is to get temporarily unbalanced. You have to temporarily give things up to get to the next level.

The faster you want to progress, the more unbalanced you need to get. We wanted to get it done quickly and we were willing to make the necessary sacrifices. We were willing to follow the example of the people in the biographies.

How about you? Are you playing it safe? Are you holding back? Or are you going for it? Unless you are willing to go for it I guarantee you that you'll **never** succeed big. You have to be willing to fail big to win big.

I'm just an ordinary guy. I just followed some success principles. If I can do it you can do it. You are worthy of your dream. You were created to make it happen. It's your purpose in life. It's why you're here. Let yourself have it. If you **don't** dedicate your life to the pursuit of your dream, you'll be cheating yourself and you'll be cheating the world of your gifts.

There's dignity in being willing to fight - dignity in being willing to take the journey. Embrace the struggle. Learn to love the struggle because the struggle will make you great and will bring you closer to glory.

Do you have the courage to succeed? I believe you do. Go ahead. Burn those bridges. Go for the Gold. Make your life an adventure. It's the only way.

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