

PRAISE FOR *YOUR EXCEPTIONAL LIFE*

“I have had the opportunity to be interviewed by Marcus a number of times as well as have him in attendance at one of my signature seminar programs, The Breakthrough Experience. His dedication to self-mastery and his work uncovering the lives of the men and women outlined in his new book *Your Exceptional Life* is exactly that, exceptional. It is a masterpiece for creating a magnificent life. If you would love to master your life as *The Exceptionals* have demonstrated and desire longevity, inspiration and an extraordinary fulfilled life, this book is for you.”

**Dr John Demartini – International bestselling author
of *The Values Factor***

“This book is going to change lives!”

Laura Barry – Teacher and parent

“You can tell Marcus has dug incredibly deep to bring this book to the world. *The Exceptionals* are inspiring, the memoirs are so vulnerable and authentic, and the pathway laid out is well researched, practical and achievable.”

Kate Raines – Psychotherapist and personal trainer

“*Your Exceptional Life* illustrates what it means to live an extraordinary life, by beautifully bringing to life the stories of some incredibly inspiring people. But inspiration isn’t enough anymore. Marcus distils this inspiration into some simple but practical easy steps. It’s like having a personal concierge for every aspect of your life so that you too can make the rest of your life the best of your life.”

Peter Lennon – Father to five, coach and host of *The U Matter Project*

“Only special people can see what Marcus sees. The way he educates from his interpretation of the data is genius-like. The stories he tells and the adventure he takes you on in this book will have you reading and rereading this incredible piece of work over and over, so that you can take positive strides towards becoming the most exceptional version of yourself.”

Damian Kristof – Naturopath, nutritionist, chiropractor and co-host of *100 Not Out*

“Marcus Pearce personifies exceptional. In his book he highlights people who have lived exceptional lives. He also gives you the blueprint to be exceptional. I know Marcus. He is happy, healthy, wealthy, witty, enthusiastic and charming. What better narrator and teacher is there than one that lives an exceptional life. Reading *Your Exceptional Life* is life-changing.”


Cyndi O’Meara – Founder and creative director of *Changing Habits and The Nutrition Academy*

“The delivery of Marcus’s vast wisdom is delightful, entertaining and always inspiring.”

**Bronnie Ware – International bestselling author of
*The Top Five Regrets of the Dying***


“‘Extremely good or impressive in a way that is unusual’ is the dictionary meaning of ‘exceptional’ and Marcus Pearce has encapsulated the exceptional meaning wholeheartedly in this phenomenal new book. Far from being the predictable monotone of the thousands of self-help books available, Marcus has managed to use compelling real-life stories and principles to help the reader feel truly inspired and able to implement change with ease. His unique delivery masterfully propels you to want to make the rest of your life the best of your life. It is the number one book every exceptional human will be devouring.”

**Kim Morrison – International bestselling author
of *The Art Of Self Love* and founder of *Twenty8
Essentials***



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EXCEPTIONAL
LIFE**

**MAKE THE REST OF YOUR LIFE
THE BEST OF YOUR LIFE**



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MARCUS PEARCE

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*For Maya, Darby,
Tommy and Spencer*

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FOREWORD

I remember it like it was yesterday. The year was 2008, and I had just arrived back in Melbourne from five years in New Zealand, where I had been studying and hosting a healthy weight loss TV show called *Downsize Me!* I had launched a new breakfast brand and was travelling the country to present a seminar called *The Power of Food*. I was approached by Marcus and his wife, Sarah, to give this talk in regional Victoria. Unbeknownst to me at the time, this connection would become one of the most rewarding friendships of my entire life.

Marcus, arguably the most enthusiastic person I had ever come across, was set to send me down the rabbit hole of health and wellbeing at a time when I thought I had learned everything I needed to know. Having spent the best part of a decade studying nutrition, naturopathy and chiropractic, I felt as if I was bursting with knowledge. But boy oh boy, was I about to be shown how much I still had to learn!

In 2013 and on the eve of my 40th birthday, Marcus suggested that we could do a podcast together on ageing well. Marcus, an already keen longevity enthusiast and researcher, had a genuine fascination with living your best life. In fact, his *modus operandi* had become living an *exceptional* life. I was becoming more and more daunted about the

prospect of turning 40 and ‘over the hill’. I was scared that my best years were behind me and felt myself succumbing to some ‘stinking thinking’ that the future would not be as good as the past.

In preparation for our podcast, Marcus sent me an ABC documentary *The 100+ Club* and a variety of book summaries, news articles and more that all began to subtly inform me that I was miles away from getting or even being old. I was hooked and so began the *100 Not Out* podcast, our journey and exploration into what we reverently refer to as mastering the art of ageing well.

In the first 10 or so episodes, it became crystal clear that my understanding of longevity, nutrition, lifestyle, family and values was about to be turned upside-down. Australia’s oldest man, Dexter Kruger, told us that he enjoyed coffee and cake twice a day with friends before having another coffee at midnight! Centenarian Ruth Frith was winning World Masters Games gold medals and told us her exercise routine was more important than her diet, especially because she did not eat vegetables! Dr Walter Bortz, author of *The Roadmap to 100*, had also proclaimed that movement was more influential on graceful ageing than nutrition.

Time and again, the life experiences of our guests were shattering my long held beliefs about ageing. The tipping point came in 2016 when Marcus and I hosted our first 10-day Longevity Experience on the Greek island of Ikaria – colloquially known as ‘the island where people forget to die’. After immersing myself in the lifestyle of the Ikarians, I decided to rip up my own book manuscript. I had come to realise that almost everything I was taught in spending a decade at college and at seminars was not necessarily wrong – but not necessarily right either. There were more pieces in the puzzle of living a healthy and long life than what budding health professionals were being taught at university.

What you’ll discover in this book is the complete set of puzzle pieces. Marcus calls this the Exceptional Life Blueprint, and *The Exceptionals* featured in this book are the roadmap to help you live your own magnificent life.

You are about to go on a journey of discovery as to how you can transform and improve your life to be exponentially better than what it is

right now – even if you absolutely love your life. You won't find complex solutions that are impossible to achieve; instead the book you hold in your hands will return you to a simplicity and ease many of us believe is no longer possible. I promise you, having transformed my own life and belief system and witnessed it in thousands of others, living an exceptional life is yours for the taking.

This book is your opportunity to elevate the areas of your life from what you consider to be mediocre or sub-par to exceptional. I am fortunate in my life to have been able to learn much of this with and from Marcus. However, in reading this masterpiece, I also realise that the life perspective Marcus has is one not many people do. Only special people can see what he sees. How Marcus educates from his interpretation of the data is genius-like. The stories he tells and the adventure he takes you on in this book will have you reading and rereading this incredible piece of work, so that you can take positive strides towards becoming the most exceptional version of yourself.

Take care,

Dr Damian Kristof

Chiropractor – Naturopath – Nutritionist

damiankristof.com

YOUR EXCEPTIONAL LIFE

PREFACE

From Red Bull and Cigarettes to Ginger Tea

Like many Australian children in the 1980s, I grew up on a daily diet of Rice Bubbles and two pieces of Vegemite toast for breakfast, two Mint Slices for morning tea, a stale white bread margarine-lathered peanut butter sandwich for lunch, Barbecue Shapes for afternoon tea, pasta for dinner, and ice cream with Milo for dessert. I have no memories of drinking water as a child; instead I was constantly sipping on super sweet lemon cordial and soft drinks.

Ask 100 people born in the 1980s in Australia and I'm sure you'll find my childhood diet, whilst definitely unhealthy, was not uncommon for an Australian child growing up at that time.

My parents split up when I was 10, which was naturally heartbreaking. In hindsight it was the best decision they ever made. Ever since I can remember I knew I wanted to be a sports journalist. I studied journalism at university, worked in radio for five years before landing a plum job as Associate Producer of *The AFL Footy Show*, at the time the number one live television show in Australia. Whilst many closest to me may have felt this

was the next big step of a lifetime media career, I was about to transform in a completely different way.

I had fallen in love with an incredible woman who was different to me in almost every way you can imagine. Sarah (now my beautiful wife) was a health professional with a high value on eating well, work-life balance, and an overall healthy lifestyle. I on the other hand was a work-hard, play-hard journalist who loved smoking, binge drinking and had an ‘anything goes’ laissez-faire relationship with food.

And whilst the sparks of romance were flying in all directions, my decade-long smoking habit and ‘everything in generous moderation’ health philosophy was not exactly advancing our relationship. One particularly distasteful experience took place early each Friday morning. *The Footy Show* went to air every Thursday night, and I’d return home in the early hours of the morning smelling like cigarettes and beer. Too tired to shower, I’d crawl straight into bed next to Sarah. My girlfriend of a few months would be startled awake by the disgusting stench that had entered her peaceful slumber. It was not a good look! After a number of agitated Friday morning conversations, I decided to do something about it.

My love of statistics would help me quit smoking. My three-cigarette per day habit had to sound and feel a whole lot worse than that. I calculated that three cigarettes per day was in fact over 1000 per year, and more than 10,000 per decade. If I was going to enjoy a lifetime relationship with Sarah and have children with her (and be a great example to them), then smoking just simply wasn’t going to work. Without intending to oversimplify it, this understanding was all I needed to quit. I had to make smoking inconsistent with my identity.

My personal changes didn’t stop with smoking. I also went on a 30-day meat-free challenge, and as a result my nickname at work went from ‘MP’ or ‘Pearcey’ to ‘Mung Bean’! I swapped my morning tea Red Bull and cigarette for a freshly-grated ginger tea and cashew nuts, and the chicken schnitzel burger I once chowed down for lunch was now a chickpea curry and rice at the local Indian vegetarian café. By 2005 I was a non-smoking, five kilograms lighter vegetarian-soon-to-become vegan. I felt unstoppable. And at 24 years of age, I felt I’d reached enlightenment sooner than I

expected. The secrets to longevity and an exceptional life were as simple as removing animal products and cigarettes (or at least that's what I thought).

In 2006 I said goodbye to the media, travelled the world with Sarah for 18 months, returned home to live by the sea in country Victoria, founded a wellness centre, got married, and started a family.

Searching for the fountain of youth

By 2010 I was a raging vegan and truly believed that a vegan lifestyle (no meat, dairy, animal products of any kind – not even honey) was the official fountain of youth and key ingredient to a great long life. On top of that, I'd given up alcohol four years earlier and believed all alcohol was bad for you.

And then one night my world turned upside down. As a voracious reader and someone continually looking to have my views reaffirmed, I began reading a book called *Healthy at 100* by renowned vegan John Robbins (b. 1947). I expected this book to reaffirm to me that being a vegan was not only the best decision one could make in life, but also for longevity.

My beliefs were about to be slapped in the face.

Robbins grew up the heir to the throne of Baskin Robbins ice cream – a multi-billion dollar global ice cream franchise you have most likely enjoyed at least once in your life. Robbins grew up eating ice cream for breakfast, lunch and dinner, spending his summer holidays playing in his ice cream shaped swimming pool, and being groomed to take over the family business.

Robbins didn't like what he was seeing though. His uncle, and co-founder, Burt Baskin, died of a heart attack at 54, and his father, Irv Robbins had diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol. After renouncing himself from the family business, John and his wife, Deo, left for Canada, where they lived in a small hut, sprinkled cabbage seeds in the backyard, taught meditation and yoga for gold coin donations, and lived on their crops. In short, Robbins's life took a 180-degree turn, culminating in a career as an author of many books including *Healthy at 100*, *Diet For A New America* and *Food Revolution*.

I was no further in to the book than page two of the introduction when my own life took a sharp turn. Robbins was referring to a study completed

by the Yale School of Public Health. The results of it changed my life completely.

In the study, more than 600 men and women were asked multiple times over the course of 20 years whether they agreed with statements including: ‘As you age you become less useful’, ‘As you age you become more of a liability’, and ‘As you age your best years are behind you’.¹

What the study found was that the people who agreed with these statements had a disempowered view of ageing, dying on average 7.5 years earlier than those who disagreed. What fascinated me and sent shivers down my spine was that they didn’t measure their exercise, genes, economic status, family life, careers or environmental factors.²

All they measured was a *belief*.

Most glaring of all for me, was that they didn’t measure their diets. This hit me between the eyes. All it took was two pages from a book written by a legend of the vegan world to show me the fountain of youth did not live in our diet. The best thing about being a journalist is that I didn’t take this personally. Instead of judging myself, I became intensely curious. The next day, I went to work at our wellness centre and paid particular attention to everyone coming in. I was on a mission to see if this belief of a disempowered future was as widespread as Robbins proclaimed.

One after another, all I heard from Sarah’s patients was “I’m too old to do this” and “I’m too old to do that”. I was shocked by how disempowered people had become all because of a number – and some of these people were only in their twenties and thirties.

I was so rocked by my findings that I decided to put my journalist hat back on and go on the hunt for people who were ageing well. I didn’t want my research to start and end at our wellness centre or with the remote cultures Robbins had featured in his book. I wanted to find more relatable people living relatable lives.

“How you age is negotiable.”

– Dr Walter Bortz

A blueprint for life reveals itself

Research is a wonderful thing when you're learning information that inspires you. Minute by minute, day by day, I felt my beliefs changing about what it took to live an exceptional life. I was coming across human beings that were living simply remarkable lives, and whilst they were impacting me greatly, I just knew I had to share their stories with the world.

By 2012, podcasts had become a great way to share a message, and so without more than a moment's thought, I called my good friend Dr Damian Kristof, a health professional and media identity in Melbourne who was 39-about-to-turn-40 and not looking forward to it. I pitched the idea of co-hosting a podcast on longevity. He said yes, and we were off. The *100 Not Out* podcast was born.

As a vegan (and despite my epiphany), I still believed that we would find a vegan diet to be a strong precursor to both quantity and quality of life. Damian, a strict omnivore (meat, grains, vegetables, dairy, nuts and seeds), held the view that we would find that this style of eating was the most important factor in living a long life.

We conducted our first 12 interviews in less than two days, and it was clear that our respective biases were anecdotally being smashed to pieces. Ruth Frith, who won World Masters Athletics gold medals at 101, didn't eat vegetables. Fitness fanatic and Australian football legend, Tommy Hafey, ate ice cream every day. Octogenarian Mimi Kirk meanwhile had moved from a vegetarian diet to vegan diet in order to improve her arthritis, and thrived.

With every passing guest a blueprint for living a great, long life was revealing itself. Diet was *not* the number one ingredient. In fact, founders and formulators of the internationally acclaimed Atkins, South Beach and Pritikin diet all died at 72 or younger. And if our guests were anything to go by, movement in any form was far more important than society, medicine and governments had been telling us.

But it wasn't as simple as working out the importance of diet versus exercise. What about career choice, relationships, wealth and spirituality? Where did they fit into the hierarchy of living a great life? What impact

did stress and trauma have on longevity? I asked myself these questions for years, interviewing dozens of living legends in search of the answers. Countless nights were spent pondering the research, and eventually it struck me that no matter your genes, upbringing, race, religion, culture, financial status or diet, there was a pattern – a blueprint – for being truly exceptional in each area of life and not just one. It was at that moment the Exceptional Life Blueprint was born.

Before we dive deep into this blueprint, allow me to introduce you to the people who inspired it – people I like to call *The Exceptionals*.

INTRODUCTION

Meet *The Exceptionals*

The happiest man you'll ever meet is centenarian Holocaust survivor, Eddie Jaku OAM (b. 1920). Every family member, except his sister, was murdered by the Nazis. His parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins all perished. Despite these atrocities, Jaku today is a loving husband, father, grandfather and great-grandfather. He is *Exceptional* in every sense of the word.

Florence Nightingale (1820–1910) was born at a time when life expectancy was 41 years of age and women were expected to be a wife and mother. Nightingale felt called to devote her life to the service of others, and despite the intense opposition from her family, Nightingale went on to become the founder of modern nursing and is renowned for professionalising nursing roles for women. 'The lady with the lamp', as Nightingale was known, lived to the age of 90.

Dexter Kruger (b. 1910) started writing at 86 years young, and retired from farming at 95. He enjoys coffee and cake with friends twice per day and drinks a coffee at midnight to help him sleep. He breaks most, if not all of the well-held nutrition guidelines. Despite being blind, Kruger is a

prolific author and at the time of writing he is not only Australia's oldest man, but the world's oldest active author.

Sister Madonna Buder (b. 1930) started running at 48. At 82, Buder became the oldest woman to ever finish an Ironman Triathlon (i.e. a 3.8 km swim, 180km bike ride and 42.2km run) when she crossed the finish line under the 17-hour cutoff at the 2012 Ironman Canada. Buder, known as the 'Iron Nun', has completed over 300 triathlons including 45 Ironman distances.

The small Greek island of Ikaria is known as 'the island where people forget to die'. Ikarians drink generous amounts of coffee and wine, love their bread and many of them smoke. Ikarians experience 80% less dementia, 50% less heart disease and 20% less cancer than the western world.³ Ikaria is one of only five official 'Blue Zones' on the planet – locations where people live longer, healthier lives than the rest of the world.

These people are just a few of *The Exceptionals*, the small percentage of humanity who make the rest of their life the best of their life, no matter what has happened in the past. This book is your invitation to join them. To be an *Exceptional* you don't need extreme wealth, fame, beauty or the best genes. Instead, membership to this exclusive club requires that you question the many conventional and limiting beliefs thrust upon you by a unique yet overwhelming selection of family, friends, colleagues, media and society as a whole.

The problem for most of us however, is our belief that we are too busy to be exceptional.

Busy and overwhelmed on repeat

If you're like most people I've worked with over the years, you have at certain times in life become so busy being busy that the feeling of overwhelm feels almost normal. On top of that, it feels repetitive like the thump thump of the treadmill or pitter-patter of the hamster wheel.

Just like Bill Murray in the iconic film *Groundhog Day*, you may feel like the daily repeat cycle is here to stay. Whether it is the daily grind of school, raising children, carving out a career, a marriage, a social life, physical health, wealth and spiritual fulfilment – or even just the daily to-do

list – life can feel somewhat hectic and repetitive no matter your age or background.

Many people I work with feel as if they are a circus performer, spinning plates or juggling too many balls in the air, waiting in fear for the inevitable crash landing that could happen at any time. As a result, we are stressed – low on humour, fun, compassion, patience, spontaneity and perspective – and this stress builds gradually day-by-day until an uncontrollable feeling of mediocrity infects us to a point of feeling helpless to do anything about it.

Is this as good as it gets?

Underneath our overwhelm lies a deeper fear – *is this as good as it gets?* For many, each birthday with a zero seems to deaden the nerve on our optimism for living an exceptional life. Your 30th, 40th, 50th or 60th birthday may well come along with questions such as: *Is this all there is? Are my best years really behind me?*

Will we ever know true love? Will we ever be appreciated for who we are? Will we ever get our financial house in order and leave the legacy we want? Will we ever find work that we love? Will we ever love our body? Will we ever find true friendship and community? With so many questions unanswered, coupled with an already busy and overwhelming life, it's little wonder so many of us choose the path of least resistance and settle for average in many areas of our lives.

If you relate to any or all of this, I am so glad you're reading this book. We've all been on this path – it's as if we are each destined to set foot on it at some point – and many, sadly, never leave. Tolerating average has become so socially accepted that to plan for an exceptional life can open us to ridicule and rejection.

The risk is that if we stay on the safe path, the long-term consequences of mediocrity can be disastrous.

The consequences of average

Given we're so busy spinning plates, most of us never think about the long-term consequences of settling for average. The daily grind of working a job you don't love ends in major regret, or worse still a chronic disease.

The daily excuse of time and fatigue that stops you from exercising robs you of your vitality and energy in the short-term, but puts you at major risk of chronic disease and a loss of dignity in your final years.

Being too busy to socialise might seem normal at the moment, but when your nest is empty or you've retired, the ensuing social isolation and depression is a recipe for disaster.

Being 'ships in the night' with your partner might seem the only way to survive right now, but what if you feel like strangers to each other in five, 10 or 15 years? Resentment left unchecked breeds a bitterness that often ends in divorce and heartache.

Spending more than you earn might seem the only solution in your current environment, but do you really want to be like 69% of the population and retire on the pension?

If you settle for long-term 'average' in just one area of life, the rest eventually comes tumbling down. Look at any person who ate, smoke or drank themselves sick over many years – and you'll see the eventual impact on the family, finances, health, friendships, spirit and career.

But where do you start on this adventure to exceptional? What if you have many areas of life you want to improve but are unsure where to begin? What if you want to audit your life and are unsure how to measure it? I'm glad you asked. After years of research, investigation and self-analysis, it became clear that *The Exceptionals* live by what I have come to call the Exceptional Life Blueprint.

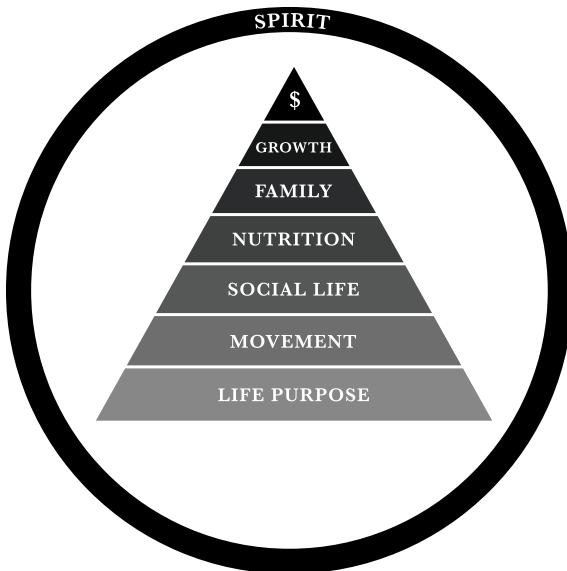


The Exceptional Life Blueprint

Throughout this book I'll talk about life as a recipe and you as the chef. Think of your Exceptional Life Blueprint as a dish with eight ingredients –

1. Life Purpose/career
2. Movement
3. Social Life
4. Nutrition
5. Family
6. Growth
7. Wealth
8. Spirit

The *order* of which you put each ingredient into your life and the *amount* of each has a major impact. Do you prioritise wealth over family and friends? What happens if you put in too much work and not enough family or nutrition? How does the recipe of life taste if you put family first and your spirit last? I have battled, experimented with and explored these conundrums for years. And finally, here is what I discovered.



Your longevity or quantity of life is largely determined by three ingredients: your life purpose (career), movement and social life. The quality of your life is most impacted by four ingredients: your nutrition, your family relationships, your growth and your wealth. I call these quality of life enhancers if they are present in your life, or destroyers if they are absent. They may not always add to longevity, but at any age these four ingredients will enrich your life.

There is another essential ingredient, however, and that is spirit. If you avoid putting your spirit – your heart and soul – into each ingredient, your life simply becomes a to-do list of doing the right things, judging your success on your achievements (human *doing*) rather than your fulfillment and who you are as a person (human being).

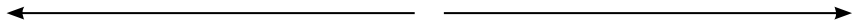
Exceptional Exercise 0.1: Examine your life

Socrates said “The unexamined life is not worth living.” This book is an invitation to examine your life in a way you never have before. Begin by taking a moment to look at the following assessment. Identify where you are in each area of life and give yourself a score out of 10 in each ingredient. You’ll end up with a maximum score of 80.

Look at the short descriptions and consequences of mediocre and exceptional to generate your score. This is only a snapshot, and by the time you’ve finished this book, the numbers are likely to change.

A word of caution here: some readers mark themselves more harshly than others. Personally, an 8/10 or above is exceptional for me. A score of seven and under feels average to me. Each reader will be different, and I ask you to assess your own life accordingly. Generally speaking, five or six out of 10 is considered to be mediocre. It doesn’t feel bad enough to change, yet is nowhere near the life that you want. It’s simply average.

Life Purpose – Do what you love and love what you do



I have a job
 I don't love my work
 I work to live
 My work lacks purpose
 I can't wait to finish

I'm on a mission
 I love my work (most of the time)
 I live to work
 My work fills me with purpose
 I could do this forever

Risk of Mediocre: Regret

Exceptional Payoff: Inspired

Movement – To live longer, move more



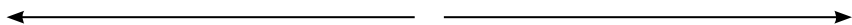
I don't have time to exercise
 Exercise is a lifestyle chore
 I can't be bothered
 I'm too tired to exercise

I make time to exercise
 Movement is a lifestyle choice
 I can't wait to move
 Exercise gives me energy

Risk of Mediocre: Cognitive decline

Exceptional Payoff: Vitality

Social Life – You become who you hang around



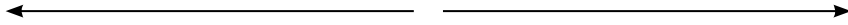
I don't have time to socialise
 I am disempowered by the people I
 hang around
 I don't love my local community

I make time to socialise
 I am empowered by the people I
 hang around
 I love my local community

Risk of Mediocre: Depression

Exceptional Payoff: Connected

Nutrition – To eat is a necessity; to eat intelligently is an art



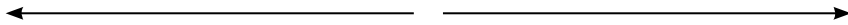
I eat too much processed food
I overeat
I eat fast
I often dine alone

I eat lots of seasonal, local, organic, wholefood
I stop eating before I'm full
I eat slow
I often dine with others

Risk of Mediocre: Disease

Exceptional Payoff: Energised

Family – Love people for who they are, not what they do or believe



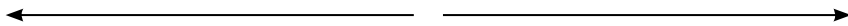
My family get in the way of my life
I have strained relationships
with multiple family members
I am focused on 'me'
We talk via email, text and DMs

My family are an integral part of my life
I have warm relationships with
most of my family members
I am focused on 'we'
We talk via calls and in the flesh

Risk of Mediocre: Bitter

Exceptional Payoff: Loved

Growth – To know and not to do is not to know



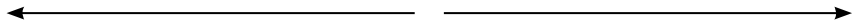
I stopped learning after school
I get most of my info from TV, radio,
newspapers and social media
I have no hobbies or special interests

I never stop learning (I am always learning)
I get most of my info from podcasts, books,
courses, movies and documentaries
I have hobbies or special interests

Risk of Mediocre: Bored

Exceptional Payoff: Enthusiastic

Wealth – Spend less than you earn and invest the difference



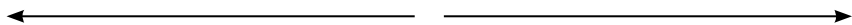
I spend more than I earn
 I have nothing to invest
 I have no savings
 I live pay cheque to pay cheque

I spend less than I earn
 I invest the difference
 I have savings
 I have a vision for my wealth

Risk of Mediocre: Broke

Exceptional Payoff: Independent

Spirit – Everything happens for a reason and a purpose



I believe in good and bad, right and wrong, love and hate
 I am easily outraged
 I can very easily become narrow-minded
 I struggle tapping into my intuition

I see the bad in the good, the right in the wrong, the hate in the love
 I can find calm in most situations
 I can see the bigger picture most of the time
 I have a strong sense of intuition

Risk of Mediocre: Broken

Exceptional Payoff: Fulfilled

<p>Total Score /80</p>

Do you choose an exceptional or average life?

Looking at the above table and your scores, how will life turn out if you settle for average in any area of your life? What impact will this decision have on your family, your friends, your work, your wider community, and most importantly, on you?

These future consequences are real and all too common. There is nothing make-believe or fanciful in this book. Whilst I am accused (quite rightly) of being a romantic idealist when it comes to living an exceptional

life, may I remind you there is nothing romantic about the consequences of mediocrity. If anything, settling for average gives rise to the physical, emotional and spiritual pains we endure; and many of those pains can be prevented and improved upon with a philosophical shift on how to live life.

I doubt you're reading this right now saying *I choose average*, however your current behaviour and standards in life might say otherwise. Of course, there are times in life where we become out of balance. The birth of a child, a new job, business endeavour or family bereavement will tip the scales for all of us. The key is not to live there forever and make the event a reason for accepting average.

If you want the rest of your life to be the best of your life, there is only one option available, and that is to take full responsibility and go for victory in every area of life, and not just one.

How to read this book: Choose Your Own Adventure

I loved reading *Choose Your Own Adventure* books when I was a child. I encourage you to read this book in a similar fashion. Imagine you are a first responder at a crash scene. Your job is to identify the areas of life that require the most urgent attention first. If your career and movement are exceptional but you're social life is lacking, start at the section on social life. If you're stuck on your career or life purpose, start there.

Keep in mind that the Exceptional Life Blueprint model is not a mountain where wealth is the summit or the peak. Instead, look at it as a triangular jigsaw puzzle, with life purpose being the biggest piece and wealth the smallest. Your spirit is the box that houses your exceptional life.

Part One of this book is dedicated to your longevity and quantity of life. We'll explore your life purpose, movement and social life.

Part Two is dedicated to creating an exceptional quality of life. We look at nutrition, family, growth and wealth.

Part Three is dedicated to unleashing your exceptional spirit by putting your heart and soul into each area of life.

The primary message of the book is that all eight ingredients of your exceptional life are connected to and rely on each other. Your work life impacts your family life, your nutritional choices and your peer

group. When you make wise financial decisions, you and your family thrive. When you eat well, you're more present with your work or family. When you move well, you have more energy and vitality to thrive in every other area of life. There is no independence or segmenting of these different components.

Identifying *The Exceptionals*

Anyone in this book who has their year of birth in brackets at their first mention is considered an *Exceptional*. Oprah Winfrey (b. 1954) is, for example, a member of *The Exceptionals*. There are more than 60 *Exceptionals* featured throughout the book. Many direct quotes from *The Exceptionals* have been taken from interviews I have done with them on my podcast, *100 Not Out*. You'll find a complete list of *The Exceptionals* and episode numbers at the back of this book. A selected Bibliography has also been included if you would like to learn more about *The Exceptionals*.

Exceptional Exercises

Each section includes a number of exercises to help you consciously create your exceptional life. These exercises have been compiled into a printable workbook available at marcuspearce.com.au/youreexceptionallife. That same website has an array of further learning materials, profiles of *The Exceptionals*, and much more.

Let's begin a lifelong adventure

Manifesting an exceptional life doesn't necessarily happen quickly or easily. You're about to go on a mind and soul-expanding journey through this book that will both challenge and inspire you. The challenge laid down in this book represents a marathon more than a sprint. The average life stretches more than 30,000 days, so tread gently and be kind to yourself. All I ask is that you persevere; living your exceptional life is a journey and not a destination.

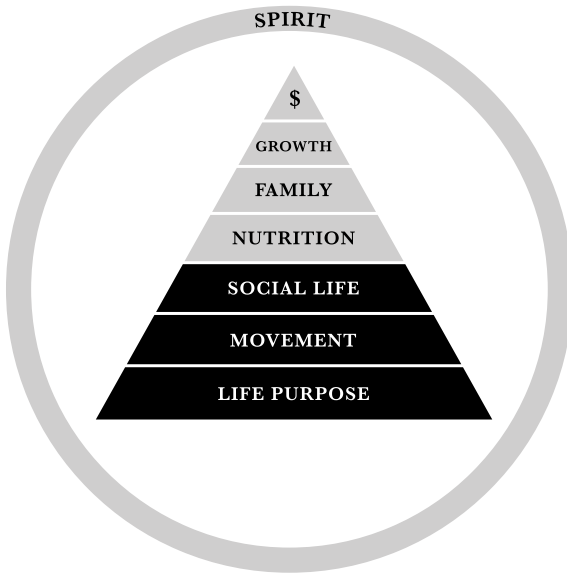
As you read this book, avoid comparing yourself to *The Exceptionals* – or anyone for that matter. Instead, let *The Exceptionals* invite and inspire you to rediscover or remind you that you are an exceptional human being. You are one of a kind. Your magnificence has not left you. It may be buried deep down, but it's there, waiting to be recovered. Let the principles, stories and strategies contained in this book propel you forward so that the *rest* of your life truly will be the *best* of your life.

Let's get to work.

*“Let go of who you're supposed to be;
embrace who you are.”*

– Brené Brown

PART ONE



YOUR EXCEPTIONAL LONGEVITY

YOUR EXCEPTIONAL LIFE



LIFE PURPOSE

“The meaning of life is to find your gift.
The purpose of life is to give it away.”

– **Pablo Picasso**

The purpose of your life – the reason you were born to live, your life’s task, your calling, your life’s work, your dream job, your dharma or your passion – rarely presents itself on a silver platter.

Perhaps your life’s purpose was born out of difficult circumstances. It could be the pains of labour, or major resistance to your career choice from family, a tragedy or crisis with seemingly insurmountable hurdles.

The seed of your life’s purpose may be less dramatic. You may have been born with or discovered a magnificent obsession early (or later) in life, or your journey might be to pick up where your parents left off – and achieve what they were not able to achieve.

Your life purpose might be easy to define or it may seem incredibly difficult to articulate. What is true for any *Exceptional* is a yearning or magnetic attraction to live the life you were born to live.

From Florence Nightingale to Leonardo Da Vinci, Richard Branson to Oprah Winfrey and all the *Exceptionals* you've never heard of; you'll find a magnificent life purpose has not been an overnight success, nor has it been an easy ride.

Moreover, your life purpose is not simply about what you do during your working hours. Instead, your *behaviour* and *character* will leave just as much, if not more of a legacy than your achievements. If you're mean, bigoted and judgemental, the people close to you will remember these traits a whole lot more than what you accomplished.

So an exceptional life purpose is not easy. It calls for an unconditional dedication to a standard many in society are not willing to aim for. In order to live your exceptional life purpose you'll need to deal with a never-ending line of fears and challenges. However, knowing that this is the path you have chosen will create a personal resilience you never knew existed.



Defying the People We Love the Most

Florence Nightingale's mother and sister were aghast that Florence didn't want to become a wife and mother (the expected role for a woman of her status). Florence instead wanted to devote her life to the service of others, and began by educating herself in the art and science of nursing.

Nepalese ophthalmologist Dr Sanduk Ruit (b. 1954) was told by his parents that his career was to follow in his father's footsteps as a salt trader. Today, having personally brought sight back to over 130,000 human beings, the world's foremost eye surgeon is known as the 'God of Sight'.

Albert Einstein (1879–1955) wanted to dedicate his life to the natural laws of the universe, while his father, Hermann, simply wanted his son to get a steady job.

Defying the important people who believe they are the scriptwriters of your life is not easy. Chances are, they are the same people who raised you, educated you, paid you or loved you. For many, defying these well-

meaning scriptwriters is a task so insurmountable that to tolerate mediocrity is a more viable alternative. For *The Exceptionals*, dealing with these opponents is just another step (albeit a significant one) on the path to doing their life's work.

Who are your life purpose opponents?

If any of the aforementioned *Exceptionals* heeded the advice of their well-meaning challengers, you would not be reading about them in this book. What is clear from my research of exceptional human beings is that overcoming someone, or a group of people, who do not believe or share in the same vision you have for your life, is a part of the journey to living your exceptional life purpose.

Who are your life purpose opponents? Who is consciously or subconsciously attempting to stop you realising your dreams?

Is it:

- Your parents who want you to be comfortable and live the life *they* planned for you?
- Your partner who thinks it's too risky to start something new?
- Your siblings who are wary of you being 'better' than them?
- Your boss who thinks you'll fail in a new venture or role?
- Your colleagues who question your ability?
- Your friends who have the same fears as your siblings and fear being left behind?
- The traditional mass media – television, radio and print – who want you to keep your eyes glued to *their* agenda rather than spending time on your agenda?
- Social media 'friends' and influencers who project perfection, success or fame without any substance?

Consciously living *your* exceptional life is akin to leaving the village and tribe who raised you. You'll be hard pressed to find much support, particularly at the beginning. If you still scratch your head when looking for a well-meaning opponent in your life, all you need to do is look in the mirror. *Your* limiting beliefs, *your* negative self-talk, *your* imposter

syndrome tendencies, *your* rationalisations to justify your behaviour will often challenge you more than anyone else.

The biggest regret of life

Grace was dying and she knew it. Her family knew it too but dared not to bring it up in conversation. Desperate to express herself and share her final thoughts on life – the highlights, the lowlights, the lessons and the regrets – Grace turned to the palliative carer who would be there for each and every one of the final days of her life. The carer’s name was Bronnie Ware (b. 1967), and the major regret Grace shared with Bronnie was: “I wish I’d had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me.”¹

It wasn’t ‘I wish I’d earned more money’ or ‘I wish I’d travelled more of the world’ or ‘I wish I’d spent more time in the office’. Grace’s number one regret was the missed opportunity she had to live a truly exceptional life on her own terms; instead she opted for the safe, socially accepted path of doing what would please or satisfy others before herself.

Ware worked as a palliative carer for eight years, spending time with more than 200 dying people in their homes before their life came to an end. She encountered this same regret over and over again. These regrets came to form a very successful book for publisher Hay House. *The Top 5 Regrets Of The Dying* remains one of the publisher’s fastest-translated books ever. Why? Because the message of regret struck a chord in humanity, and Ware’s book made it urgent for readers to deal with regrets whilst time allowed, instead of facing them on their deathbed.

You are the most important person in your world

I remember it like it was yesterday. It was 2005 and I was a young TV producer looking to quit my job and travel the world. From the outside looking in, I had a job many people dreamed of. It was a job you would *never* quit (because who knows when you would be offered anything like it again) and I was well up the ladder to becoming a highly regarded producer. My wonderful boss and executive producer, Tim, said something to me late one night when I was confiding my thoughts to him and his

words have never left my heart. He told me, “You are the most important person in your world.”

It’s a difficult statement to grasp. Many of us have simply forgotten to consider ourselves as number one. Out of touch with our own needs, desires and dreams, the modern day martyr instead puts children, partners, parents, employers or friends in front of the queue. We get so busy helping everyone else live their exceptional lives that we become too exhausted to live our own.

Consider this metaphor: visualise a jug full of water – its ingredients are your time, energy, love and inspiration. Each day you wake up and it’s full. Who has the first sip? For many parents, their children take the first sips. And after school drop off their employer or the house gets the next gulp. And as the day wears on, everyone else is drinking out of the jug of *your* energy, time, love and inspiration. Who is giving the water away? You are. And what happens? After a while the jug is empty and dry. As a result, *you* feel empty and dry too. Bitter, resentful and feeling helpless to turn it all around, over time you find that not only does the jug refuse to refill itself each night, you’ve lost the art of filling it up yourself.

If the jug metaphor resonates with you, this book will not only help you refill the jug, but also ensure that it is filled up each day and that on rising *you* take the first big sip. When you do this, you give your love, energy, time and inspiration with a full heart, and not an empty one.

If you’re already giving from a full jug, this book serves as a reminder to stay on the path, because even the most exceptional people can fall into a pit of mediocrity and chronic self-sacrifice.

The most selfless and loving thing you can do for the people around you and humanity at large is to express yourself and your life to the fullest. This is a beautiful blend of selfish and selfless. But don’t just take my word for it. Throughout this book you’ll find countless examples of *Exceptionals* who wrote their own script and followed their bliss despite the pushback, pain and harshest of circumstances.



Why We're Confused About Our Purpose in Life

Many of us live our lives in fear of what others will think of us if we go against the grain. When it comes to our career – be it as a parent, self-employed or employee – one of the most passive and soul-destroying ways we limit ourselves is through the toxicity of comparison.

Comparison has always been a part of the human condition. When we lived in villages we compared ourselves to our family and friends. When transport became more accessible, we compared ourselves with people from other villages. As our population swelled, we began to compare ourselves more against our neighbours and colleagues and people from other countries. And as technology has advanced, we can now instantaneously compare ourselves to millions of strangers thanks to the rise of social media.

Comparing ourselves to others can create fear, helplessness and a mindset that believes we'll never be good enough, strong enough, rich enough, supported enough or pretty enough, to do what *The Exceptionals* are doing.

My life purpose allows me to work with some brilliant leaders in the health, wealth and personal growth fields. These leaders are revered for their success and I know thousands of people who compare their own lives to *The Exceptionals* they admire. In the process of comparing, we often forget the individual's hard work – achieved over years, and often decades – especially on social media. How do you capture or portray decades of grit, rejection, heartbreak and the daily grind in a single image or status update?

How do you capture the sacrifice of Australian nutritionist Cyndi O'Meara (b. 1960), who would get up at 4am each morning whilst her children slept, in order to write her best-seller *Changing Habits Changing Lives*? How do you capture the determination of Temple Grandin (b. 1947), who was born autistic and raised in an era where institutionalisation was the preferred medical treatment? Grandin defied societal and

medical norms to become a trailblazer in her chosen profession, going on to revolutionise the treatment of animals in slaughterhouses around the world, despite the rejection of her peers.

How do you capture the resolve of international wellness expert Damian Kristof (b. 1973), who grew up in relative poverty in Melbourne's outer suburbs. Kristof did the exceptional and studied not one but two health professions, first becoming a naturopath and then a chiropractor. His breadth of knowledge would go on to see him appointed co-host of one of the first ever empowering weight-loss programs on TV, *Downsize Me!*

Oprah Winfrey, Richard Branson (b. 1950), and anyone else you love and admire were not 'overnight success' stories. Most media tricks us into feeling that the mountain called *Exceptional* is nothing more than overcoming a few cobblestones. When the hard work really starts, it's easy to see why the climb to *Exceptional* has fewer people at the summit than at basecamp. Reality rarely meets expectation when the climb to *Exceptional* is underway.

What you see when you're consuming mainstream media is never the entire truth. Social media is merely one side of the coin – and the side that people want us to know. Think about it for a second – do you pull your camera out and take selfies when you're in a terrible mood, yelling at your children or when your greatest plans are coming undone? I know I don't! Social media is an infinitely small component of reality. And sadly, this tiny component is what billions of people are comparing themselves to.

We are suffering from Facebook envy

The numbers are confronting yet unsurprising. In 2020, 3.8 billion people were using social media, representing 49% of the global population at the time.² Over two thirds of American adults use Facebook, which has 2.32 billion active monthly users (i.e they have logged into Facebook in the past 30 days).³ By generation, 90.4% of Millennials, 77.5% of Generation X and 48.2% of Baby Boomers are active social media users.⁴ We spend an average of 2 hours and 22 minutes per day on social media, checking our phones on average 28 times per day.⁵

All of this use causes for many what has been termed ‘Facebook envy’ – the tendency to be jealous of your friends’ activities on social media. Research at the University of Copenhagen on 1095 individuals (86% were female with an average age of 34) revealed that users who took a week-long break from Facebook were found to be more satisfied with life.⁶

What’s fascinating (and not all that surprising) is that 13% of the abstainers admitted to giving in and using Facebook due to an emergency or ‘habitual accident’.⁷ I could replace the word Facebook with Instagram, TikTok, alcohol, cigarettes or any other drug. For many, the addiction to social media is not dissimilar to a drug addiction.

A picture may tell a thousand words but it’s never the whole story

On a family trip to Europe in 2018 we passed the biggest field of sunflowers I have ever seen. My wife, Sarah, was spellbound and was determined to get a photo in the field. Not *of* the field or *in front of* the field but *in* the field. No matter that we had three tired children and had spent the day touring regional France; this was one of those moments where, hell or highwater, we *would* get the photo that would last a lifetime and evoke idyllic memories of our family holiday.

The reality was that bees were hovering around the sunflowers. Our son Darby was very concerned that he would be stung by a bee; our youngest and breastfeeding son, Tommy, decided this was the perfect time for some *booby juice*; our oldest child, Maya, was frustrated that she wasn’t getting the attention she deserved, whilst Sarah and I were navigating our way through hundreds of five-foot yellow and green sunflowers that were the subject of our angelic family photo.

In spite of all of this, we managed to take a burst of photos and put one of them up on social media to thunderous applause. According to the social media landscape, whether the kids were smiling or not was not important, and whether we were in fact happy or not at this time in our travels was definitely not important. The very fact that it was my most popular photo on Instagram that month is what mattered. Right?

I hope you sense my sarcasm. I'll never know what people thought as a result of seeing the photo. Did they wish they could do what we were doing? Were they jealous that we were in Europe and they were not? Were my so-called followers frustrated that their partner would never financially prioritise a six-week holiday with family? Or were they aware that behind the pop of yellow sunflowers was the mental, emotional and physical challenge of parenting young children on the other side of the planet in a different time zone, different culture, different language and a general greater sense of uncertainty for all involved? Whatever the case, analysing even just one social media post can demonstrate how little we really know of what is going on in someone's life.

Exceptional Exercise 1.1:
Remove the poison that causes life purpose confusion

If you've ever been caught up in comparing yourself to someone on social media, here are three techniques I personally use to remove comparison from my own life.

1. **Go on a social and mass media diet.** Ripping the bandaid off and going on a seven (or even 30) day diet that removes all media will yield clarity you never knew existed. Unplug your TV, delete your social apps and replace mass media with personalised media. Choose from inspiring movies, podcasts *you* want to listen to, and books that make you think and bring out the best in you.
2. **Be genuinely happy for the person in whatever it is they've achieved.** One comment is better than 10 likes. If someone you know has achieved something worthy of your congratulations, comment *sincerely* rather than liking the post and moving on. Tell them how happy you are for them. Better yet, if you know them personally give them a call, send them a message or change the experience from digital to real life.

3. Get your fix through online groups. The most social way to engage in social media is by connecting with like-minded people and actually commenting. Facebook groups, the modern day ‘online forum’ or club are the most empowering way to use social media because written conversation actually takes place with like-minded people.

The ultimate gift of ditching comparison

When you ditch comparison from your life you spend less time in fear or thinking about what others think of you. As a result, you have far more time to think about *you* and creating the life you were born to live.

Whilst I have a wife and four kids who love me, I know for sure that – outside of myself – not one person on this planet wakes up each morning and dedicates their day to me. Is anyone waking up dedicated to living *your* exceptional life? Are you? If your day begins and ends by dedicating yourself to others and never yourself, I can guarantee you that giving from an empty jug will not fulfil you.

It’s *your* responsibility to dedicate your life to the exceptional *you* – to fill *your* jug so that it’s overflowing. When you have a surplus of self-love, you can then give the overflow to everyone else because you already have so much for yourself.

When you remove comparison you lower your fear and increase your confidence. With that in mind, you’re ready to take the five big steps to an exceptional life purpose.



Five Steps to Live Your Life's Work

Before you get overwhelmed (as so many people do when attempting to discover their life's work), I want you to consider your life's work as only the next one to seven years of your life – not your entire life. There is a magic about seven-year cycles which I'll explain later in this chapter, and you may be in the middle of one now. As a result, you may feel comfortable only looking towards the next three years or so.

If you're expecting your first child whilst reading this, your life's purpose is about to undergo an incredible transformation. It's difficult to clarify life purpose in the middle of such change. If you're just about to retire, you might want to consider the next seven years, or perhaps just the next 12 months. Whatever your individual circumstance, choose a time frame you feel comfortable with.

There is a worksheet available at marcuspearce.com.au/youreexceptionallife to guide you through this five-step process.

Step 1: Identify the seeds of your life's work

The first step to live your life's work is to identify what experiences have taken place in your life. This step requires you to examine your life, and spend the necessary time doing so. When you look deeply at your past and present life, you'll find clues and blessings in disguise hiding behind life experiences you never thought meant all that much. Synchronicities, convenient coincidences and I-couldn't-have-done-it-if-I-tried moments often have a hidden power that we are unable to appreciate for the gifts they are because we don't examine our lives enough.

As you read the examples in the coming pages, you will begin to see the clues life has been whispering to you as to what your life is dedicated to. If you already know what your life's task is, the following will simply confirm it to you. This section requires an open mind and heart to see how some of your biggest challenges have been the seeds of your exceptional life.

The eight seeds of an exceptional life purpose

The path to discovering and living out your life's work is akin to sprinkling seeds in soil. Some life experiences will sprout and leave lasting impressions on you. Others will fail to thrive and disappear into the unconscious, never to be brought up again. Often in life, the experiences we least expect to impact us are the ones that wield incredible influence.

Each seed represents the varied experiences you've had in life that in reality are secrets or clues to what your daily life is dedicated to. You may have experienced tragedy and crisis, resistance from people around you, family pressure to succeed, or an obsession or burning desire you simply can't shake. These are just some of the seeds which, if allowed to sprout, combine to become your purpose in life. As you read them, tick off or make a note of the ones which exist in your life.

Seed 1: Resistance

In just four generations we have seen rapid change in the influence of parents on children and their career choices. Only 100 years ago, it was almost exclusively the domain of the father to choose the career choice of his children, with the boys likely to follow in their dad's footsteps and the girls trained to become refined women, housewives and eventually mothers. How times have changed! Today we are encouraged to follow our dreams rather than simply follow in the footprints of our parents.

This is, however, not the case for all of us. Our desire to win the love and respect of our parents by being 'successful' in life is often not as simple as it seems. The *success* of getting married, having children, starting a business or winning a job of status are uniquely intertwined in a race for our parents love and approval.

An exceptional vision or goal though is often met with resistance from the people closest to you, particularly parents (and often domineering father figures) and colleagues. Historic examples include Einstein and Mozart, but there are numerous modern day *Exceptionals* who have had to overcome significant resistance from parents. Ruth Bader Ginsburg (1933–2020), social justice lawyer and champion of gender equality studied

law at Harvard before finishing at Columbia Law School, graduating equal first in her class. Her entire profession shunned her because she was a woman. Finding it nigh on impossible to get a job in the law, Ginsburg spent more than a decade as an academic before co-founding the Women's Rights Project in 1972. In 1993, Ginsburg was appointed as an associate justice of the Supreme Court, where she served until her death in 2020.

*“My mother told me to be a lady. And for her,
that meant be your own person, be independent.”*

– Ruth Bader Ginsburg

We love our son, but he's crazy!

Paulo Coelho (b. 1947) is the author of *The Alchemist*, what Oprah Winfrey calls “the book of the century”. Coelho fought against major family resistance to become a writer.

“First, they tried to bribe me (to give up on writing),” recalled Coelho in a *SuperSoul Conversations* interview with Winfrey.⁸ “Then (they tried) a psychiatrist. Then one day they lost hope and they said ‘this guy is crazy. Our son – we love him – but he's crazy.’”

Coelho's parents thought their son was crazy because he wasn't conforming to the societal expectations of becoming an engineer, lawyer or other high-ranking employee. Coelho wanted to be an artist. “(My parents' view of artists were) – ‘oh, they starve to death, they drink, they do everything that our middle class, affluent family can't stand,’” Coelho said.

Coelho's parents decided to enrol him in a psychiatric institution, not once but three times. Each time, Coelho escaped. “They didn't put me there out of hatred,” Coelho reflected to Winfrey. “They were trying to help me. They really thought that I was crazy.” Thankfully, Coelho defied his family to arguably become the author of the 21st century with an estimated 350 *million* books sold around the globe.

Seed 2: Born or married into it

It seems some people get a head start in life because they are born into a profession. My dentist, for example, is a fifth generation dentist. You may be a third generation teacher or motor mechanic, farmer or lawyer. Whatever the case may be, being born into or married into a profession can have a significant bearing on your career choice.

If you choose to follow a different career path to your family, the seed of resistance often comes into play.

Seed 3: Exposure to the opposite

The life you were born to live may be close to the exact opposite of what you were exposed to growing up – and the reason for that exposure is to clarify and solidify in your heart and soul what you do *not* want for your life, and perhaps for others as well.

If you grew up in poverty, it's quite common to have a desire for wealth. If you were raised in a violent household, you are likely to want to provide calm and peace in the home. The unstable parts of your upbringing are often the highest priorities for 'correction' in your own adult life.

Children often discover this when they become parents for the first time. All the parenting methods you were exposed to (which you didn't like or don't agree with) become the opposite of how you raise your children. If you were raised in a 'children should be seen and not heard' family culture and you resent it, you're likely to give your children more latitude and freedom. Furthermore, you're likely to give your children what you didn't receive when you were younger.

My grandfather was an alcoholic who was absent as a parent, and my dad despised him for it. Whatever my grandfather would have done, my dad did the opposite. Dad rarely drinks (I've never seen him drunk) and loves to spend time with his children and grandchildren. The pain of Dad's upbringing was a seed of his life purpose, and thankfully my sisters and I were the recipients of the lessons my grandfather bestowed on his son.

No matter how *opposing* your upbringing was to your beliefs of the ideal childhood, remember that we only get the challenges we can handle, and sometimes those challenges are there to show us how *not* to behave when we are in similar circumstances.

Seed 4: Your parents didn't quite make it or gave up on their dreams

Before he was conscripted to serve in the Vietnam War, Normie Rowe (b. 1947) was dubbed Australia's 'King of Pop'. In a twist of fate not dissimilar to his mother's, Rowe's career was impacted by global war. "As a little kid my mum was always singing," Rowe shared with me on *100 Not Out*. "She came from a family of 11 or 12 kids. She always went to the May Downs dancing school, which still exists today. I think had it not been for the end of the First World War and into the Depression and the Second World War, Mum or some of her sisters may have ended up being dancers or singers of some sort. We rarely had a Saturday night where there wasn't some sort of music, joy, happiness, singing and general fun and laughter and a gregarious outgoing lifestyle."

Growing up watching his parents sing and entertain at family gatherings, Rowe developed a magnificent obsession with music and performance. He became the first Australian artist to ever have two top three singles simultaneously for three consecutive weeks and went on to support Roy Orbison in the US and represented Australia alongside The Seekers at Expo '67 in Montreal.

Seed 5: Family desire for fame, wealth or success

A derivative of the parent who didn't make it is the family quest for fame, wealth or (cultural measures of) success. Child prodigies often fall into this category. Many professional artists and sportspeople sprout from this seed, and it can be sowed by parents who want their children to have more opportunities than they did. Parents with low-paying jobs often want their children to seek higher-paying professions. Immigrant families are renowned for working incredibly hard in order to finance their children's education or pathway into a life of greater opportunity.

Like many before him and many after him, tennis icon Andre Agassi (b. 1970) grew up in a family where his father Mike dictated and defined what career each child would have. In his autobiography *Open*, Agassi recounts his self-talk as a seven-year-old. “I hate tennis, hate it with all my heart, and still I keep playing, keep hitting all morning, and all afternoon, because I have no choice.”⁹

Parents desperate for fame, wealth or success seem to have an innate knowledge of the 10,000 hour rule (explained later in this section), and they drill it in to their children without any conscious care for the child’s overall wellbeing. The seven-year-old Agassi would hit 2500 balls per day, 17500 per week. Over the course of a year that’s almost one million balls. Of his father, the young Andre observed that Agassi Snr “believes in math. Numbers, he says, don’t lie. A child who hits one million balls each year will be unbeatable.”¹⁰

Mike Agassi was right. His son became close to unbeatable *on* the tennis court, winning eight career Grand Slam tournaments. His deeds *on* the court would inspire millions of people around the planet. Life *off* court for Agassi was certainly no Grand Slam victory. He dealt with physical and mental health challenges, relationship breakups and financial crises. Among his litany of speed bumps, Agassi turned to crystal methamphetamine during a career low point in 1997. That same year, his marriage to actress Brooke Shields was in a sharp decline and he had lost all love for his life purpose, the sport of tennis.

The gifts to the world from *The Exceptionals* raised by parents desperate for fame, wealth or success cannot be argued. Each *Exceptional* leaves an incredible legacy to their profession and fans, but the price they have paid in order to share their gifts to the world can be difficult to justify, given the significant mental, emotional, familial, spiritual and often physical burden they have had to endure.

*“Your children are not your children.
They come through you but not from you and
though they are with you yet they belong not to you.”*

– Khalil Gibran

Seed 6: Magnificent obsession

Alice Herz-Sommer (1903–2014) grew up in Prague surrounded by family and friends who loved the arts. Alice’s older sister Irma taught her how to play the piano, and Alice developed a magnificent obsession that would go on to save her life.

“My world is music. I am not interested in anything else. Music is so beautiful,” proclaimed Alice at age 109 in the Academy Award winning documentary *The Lady In Number Six*.¹¹ “Beethoven – he is a miracle. His music is not only melody. What is inside (pointing inwards), how it’s felt, it is full, it’s intensive, it is a mystery. When the music starts, it goes straight away into our souls. We should thank Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Schubert, Schumann, (for) they gave us beauty, indescribable beauty.”

Alice was married to Leopold in 1931, had a son Raphael in 1937, and was a renowned concert pianist across Europe before the Nazis took over Prague in 1938.

At age 39, Alice and Raphael were held prisoner in Theresienstadt, a feeder camp for Auschwitz, and the place where the Nazi’s kept the Jewish intellectuals and artists in order to use them for their own propaganda campaign. Starving prisoners were allowed to compose and give concerts. Alice would go on to play over 100 concerts, playing all 27 of Chopin’s Études from memory among a wide-ranging repertoire.

“I felt that music was the only thing which helped me to have hope,” recalled Alice. “It is a sort of religion, actually. Music is God.”¹²

And perhaps a magnificent obsession is laced with divine intervention. The Holocaust is filled with stories of survival thanks to a valuable career. Herz-Sommer’s decision to dedicate her life to music certainly saved her from the gallows, and she is not alone. The oldest survivor of the Holocaust is Yisrael Kristal (1903–2017), whose career as a master confectioner saved his life – for even the Nazis had a sweet tooth.

Seed 7: Higher calling

The definition of call is to ‘summon loudly’. A calling is often a summoning from some other source that simply cannot be ignored. Mother Teresa’s (1910–1997) calling came through the poverty she witnessed in Calcutta whilst she was a schoolteacher. Domestic violence campaigner Rosemary Batty’s calling came after her 11-year-old son, Luke, was murdered by his father.

A higher calling doesn’t need to feel religious; it can simply be an unstoppable magnetism to complete a mission or purpose that you may not have chosen consciously. You see a higher calling play out regularly with parents who have children that go through major health challenges, trauma or even death. Others experience a perceived gross injustice and this event becomes the trigger for living a more meaningful life.

Seed 8: Tragedy or crisis

There are no less than eight forms of crisis that may be the powerful seed of your purpose in life. Internal crises – ones that impact you and the close network of people around you – include a family death, divorce, permanent physical injury or chronic health conditions. Business or financial upheavals may be the seed of your life purpose, whilst a social or community crisis (such as public health or crime) is often the bridge to an external crisis.

You may live in a culture or have a faith that has experienced significant challenge, or government policy of some kind may have created upheaval in your life. Many external crises are often cultural, political and religious concurrently, and they then cause internal crises such as financial ruin, poor health or community collapse.

Internal Crises	External Crises
Family	Cultural
Health	Political
Financial or Business	Religious
Social or Community	Environment

A brush with death is a fertile seed for purpose in life

The life's work of Dr Sanduk Ruit was presented to him in the form of a family crisis after his younger sister, Yangla, died at 15. Yangla was the third sibling of Ruit's to die. Her death from tuberculosis was medically preventable, and it was only through a lack of finances that she couldn't be kept alive. It was then, as he shared with me on *100 Not Out*, that Ruit decided to become a doctor.¹³

“I said, ‘why does a person like my sister die because of a lack of appropriate medical care. There must be hundreds of thousands of people just like Yangla who are in a similar situation.’ This really opened up my belief that this (medicine) is probably the profession that I should get myself into. That was the inspiration and determination I took from Yangla's death. I resolved that I would try everything to get into medicine, and I was successful.”

Not only was Ruit successful in becoming a doctor, he would go on to become the first Nepalese ophthalmologist and one of the world's most renowned eye surgeons. On a mission to end preventable blindness in his lifetime, Ruit has personally restored sight to over 130,000 people in developing nations and eye surgeons from all around the world fly to Nepal to learn his methods.

Ruit views the crises he has faced as blessings. “I consider these (crises) as landmarks in my life. Once in a while I go for a short trek up in the mountains. When you reach the top of the hill you have all the time to yourself. You have emptied yourself and you are so fresh to think about some things. I reflect back and I very often think about these landmarks and I say that if these things had not happened – if I had not had such a tough childhood, and if my father didn't have a vision to send me to school, and if I was a ‘normal’ kid in school and never learnt how to struggle in life. If I didn't lose my sister who was so close to me, would I be doing what I'm doing now?”

Malala Yousafzai (b. 1997) is a trailblazer for female education. The strength of Malala's life purpose only intensified when she was shot in the head by a member of the Taliban whilst on the school bus in her small

Pakistani village – and survived. The physical crisis she experienced as a result of the social, political and religious crisis she endured placed her in the hearts of millions around the world and only added to her power and influence around the globe. In 2014, Yousafzai was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize at age 17, becoming the youngest Nobel Laureate in the award's history.

Turia Pitt's (b. 1987) life purpose was born after a physical and spiritual crisis. Pitt suffered first-degree burns to 65% of her body during the ill-fated fires in the Kimberley region of Australia in 2011. Today, Pitt's life purpose is dedicated to inspiring people through her own resilience and forward-thinking approach to life.

Eddie Jaku's life purpose was sowed in the seed of the Holocaust, a political, cultural, social, family, physical, financial and religious crisis. Today Eddie teaches and inspires humanity to cleanse themselves of hate.

Life can be so brutal

The truth is you may be forced to bury your soul mate or child. You'll farewell friends and your business life will end. Your treasured possessions will break or may burn to a crisp in a few hours. Death, as much as we attempt to deny it, is an essential part of life. Every element of our life will be with us for only a part of our entire life, with one exception: our own life purpose.

Your life purpose is part of your spirit. It is immortal, as it impacts, influences or ripples into other people's lives in a way that you may never know. Whilst it may feel like purpose can end in dramatic circumstances (you get the sack, your business goes under, your marriage ends, a major tragedy strikes), when the dust settles, all that remains is the quest to define what's next.

During crisis, many of us refuse to redefine the next chapter of our exceptional life, largely because of fear and the social belief that it is too indulgent to move on. On the other hand *The Exceptionals* give grace for the people in their past and walk courageously into a new future, no matter how scary and uncertain it may be. As much as you are the scriptwriter of *Your Exceptional Life*, life demonstrates that there is a co-writer – God,

Mother Nature, Buddha, Gaia, Muhammad or whatever you like to call the energy that runs the universe.

Particularly when death strikes, this understanding (also known as faith) that you are not walking the path alone will bind you to an inner belief that this higher power makes no mistakes and as painful as it is, there is a greater cause or purpose to the tragedy.



Step 2: Combine the seeds

It's unlikely that your life purpose sprouted from just one of these eight seeds. Chances are, just like plants thrive in the presence of other companion plants, one of your life purpose seeds has had a companion or two. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791) had the seed of a magnificent obsession, accompanied by a family upbringing dominated by music and a father who vehemently resisted his son's desire to be a composer. All of this pressure is perhaps what created the diamond that was Mozart.

David Attenborough (b. 1926) knew from the age of eight that he wanted to spend his time studying the natural world. His magnificent obsession combined with the multiple environmental crises Attenborough has identified during his career has only made his work more important – and more respected.

The more I research *The Exceptionals* the more I find resistance from at least one key individual at the heart of a magnificent obsession manifesting itself; it is almost a rite of passage that the universe places in front of us. You have to *fight* for your life purpose against challenges in order to test and define how committed you really are to living your exceptional life.

Embrace the twists of fate and sliding doors

I grew up with a magnificent obsession for Australian rules football, the son of a father who came close to playing at the highest level but never quite made it. Those two seeds sprouted within me for two decades, and when I realised I would not be a great footballer, I decided I would be a

journalist and work in the sports media. As luck or fate would have it, the family crisis of my parents marriage led to my dad selling his newsagency business and getting a job with a major Australian newspaper.

This media connection allowed me to obtain one week of work experience with the *Herald Sun* sports department when I was 16, and the seed of my life purpose definitely sprouted and roots began to form. Fast forward three years and my mum's partner at the time, Justin, had a friend who worked in sales at a Melbourne sports radio station, Sport 927. I did another week of work experience there, and as a twist of fate would have it, a senior breakfast radio producer resigned not long after my stint. His assistant was promoted and I slotted in to becoming a radio producer at the age of 19.

In a reflection of *Sliding Doors* (that great movie starring Gwyneth Paltrow), I often wonder how my professional life would have turned out if my parents had not split up. When I think of the opportunities and lessons I have had as a result of my parents divorce, it's easy for me to say that their decision to split was the best decision they ever made. My marriage would not be what it is today without the exposure to the opposite I witnessed growing up and my professional life may have turned out completely differently had my parents stayed together. I share my own example and those of *The Exceptionals* as an invitation to you to assess where the seeds of your life purpose live.

Exceptional Exercise 1.2: **Identify the seeds of your life purpose**

1. Identify the seeds. Review the eight seeds of your exceptional life purpose and write down specific examples from your own life. Have you had a health crisis, a financial crisis or parents resisting your magnificent obsession? Did you or the people around you quash a childhood passion because you could never see a career in it? Does your gift to the world lie somewhere in the greatest challenges you have gone through?

2. Join the seeds. What do these life experiences mean for you? How do they impact your beliefs and subsequent decisions and actions?

Remember, these are *seeds* of your purpose in life, and they may not have been given an opportunity to sprout and grow just yet. This book may be just the beginning of the acorn turning into the oak tree.

Identifying the seeds of your purpose in life may give you clarity and perhaps even some excitement. Clarity however will not deliver you overnight success. Whilst clarity is undoubtedly powerful, it's not enough to guarantee success of any kind. The seed needs *time* to grow.

Step 3: Commit the time

When you have the clarity of what your life purpose is committed to, and the confidence to make it happen, the only barrier remaining is time. As paradoxical as it sounds, the greatest barrier – time – is the only pathway. Society is rife with ‘I don’t have time’ statements. ‘I don’t have time to exercise’, ‘I don’t have time to catch up with my friends’, ‘I don’t have time to meditate’, ‘I don’t have time to study’ and ‘I don’t have time to be healthy’ are commonplace and all socially acceptable statements.

If you’re to truly master your life purpose and live your exceptional life, you must be prepared to dedicate *significant* time to its attainment. Many people believe they don’t have time to identify their life’s purpose, whilst *The Exceptionals* believe as Picasso did, that: “The meaning of life is to find your gift. The purpose of life is to give it away.” Put another way, you were born with an incredible gift to give away. Your number one priority is to dedicate the time to discovering exactly what that gift is.

The seven-year apprenticeship leads to overnight success

Every *Exceptional* you admire has been an apprentice to a mentor or master. Robert Greene beautifully outlines the power of spending quality and quantity time learning from a mentor in his book *Mastery*. Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) spent over 10 years with the artist Verrocchio, seven of them as his apprentice. Health professionals complete a five-year university degree and ideally the early part of their professional life is viewed as the final chapter in the apprenticeship. Building and other trade apprenticeships around the world last between one and seven years, with apprentices required to complete between 2000 and 12000 work hours before earning certification. Any creation of great quality requires quantity time – a human being, an exceptional relationship, a thriving business, a successful career, skill or a work of art.

“Give me the child for the first seven years and I will give you the man,” said St Ignatius Loyola. So many of us in our adult lives are dealing with problems that stem back from our childhood and, by extension, the behaviours of our parents in our first seven years of life.

By design, a parent’s mentors are their own parents, aunts, uncles and grandparents. In modern times though, this is rarely the case; sadly not many of us view our elders as mentors. Regardless, if you are determined to master anything in your life, you must have a mentor for a significant period of time.

On the same day that Bronnie Ware gave birth to her daughter, Elena, a publishing contract came through for *The Top Five Regrets Of The Dying* that very quickly spread its wings into 29 different languages. Deemed an overnight success, what wasn’t often explained was that Ware had quit her job as a bank manager in order to, in her own words, “look for a job with meaning”. That job was as a palliative carer, which she worked at for *eight* years, looking after over 200 dying people (her mentors) in their homes. That career change wasn’t meaningful just for Bronnie and her dying patients; it has gone on to inspire millions of people around the planet.

Every master was once an apprentice, and every apprentice has a mentor

Who are your mentors right now? Who has walked the path you intend to walk down? Mentors of today don't necessarily have to be people you know personally. You can immerse yourself in someone's teachings from anywhere on the planet. I do think having a mentor who you can have one-on-one time with, to ask questions of, and get personalised feedback from, is far more powerful.

My personal experience has been that working for mentors for free (or even paying them for the privilege of working with them) is incredibly powerful and provides added accountability to succeed. Do work experience, offer your time for no charge; just do whatever it takes to be in the proximity of *The Exceptionals* and you'll see living proof that we become who we hang around.

The power of seven-year cycles

The seven-year apprenticeship is not a random number plucked by society. If you've experienced a 'seven-year itch' in your life you'll have an understanding of what the passage of time can bring. The number seven has dominated history across all cultures, from ancient wisdom and traditions to modern-day science. Starting off as the number of days it took to create the world (according to Christianity), the number seven appears over 700 times in the Bible. There are seven planets visible to the naked eye, seven chakras, seven heavens in Islam and ancient Judaism, seven deadly sins and seven heavenly virtues.

There are seven colours in a rainbow, seven unique notes in a common musical scale, and the moon's four distinct phases each take approximately seven days to complete. The female body develops in seven-year cycles according to Traditional Chinese Medicine (men are slower with an eight-year cycle), while the human body replaces every single cell over the course of seven years.

Agreeing with the concept of seven-year cycles is not important. What's essential is honouring the *time* it takes to transform and graduate from *apprentice to master* in your chosen career. Whether you choose to master

parenting, law, gardening or surfing, no seven-day short course or seven-week diploma is going to create a shortcut to mastery. The number is seven years and no less.

The Greatest Showman: A seven-year success story

Director Michael Gracey was in Japan shooting a television advertisement for Lipton Ice Tea. The star of the ad was Hugh Jackman (b. 1968), and the pair – who had never met – struck up an instant friendship and mutual respect that led to Jackman sharing with Gracey his dreams for a Hollywood musical movie blockbuster called *The Greatest Showman*, based on the life of circus entertainer P.T. Barnum.

“For the first three years I was acting like I knew the film was going to happen but I really wasn’t sure,” Jackman recalled at the Sydney premiere of the film. “At the time I’d never done a movie musical, I’d done a lot of movies and a lot of musicals and I’d just hosted the Oscars. I thought ‘I’d love to give it a go’ but I wasn’t sure I’d get a shot.”

Not only did Jackman ‘get a shot’, *The Greatest Showman* went on to become the third highest-grossing musical of all time, taking in a cool US\$435 million at the box office. And how long did *The Greatest Showman* take from conception to release? You guessed it – seven years.

Exceptional Exercise 1.3: Your next seven years

Research in the 1990s by K. Anders Ericsson and associates at Berlin’s Academy of Music demonstrated that the more we practise the closer we get to achieving mastery in a chosen field.¹⁴ From elite athletes to musicians, teachers to artists, plumbers and professionals you’ve never heard of, the magic number of hours popularised by Malcolm Gladwell in *Outliers* is 10,000. For some that might be 40 hours per week over five years, for others it might be 20 hours per week for 10 years. Whilst not an exact science by any means, if you’re looking for

a shortcut on the seven-year-apprenticeship, it seems knocking over 10,000 hours as quickly as possible is the answer.

What are you prepared to dedicate seven years or 10,000 hours to? Are you prepared to dedicate 10,000 hours to raising your children, learning aerodynamics, fashion, medicine, history, the piano, archaeology, social justice, international politics or the arts? My first 10,000 hours (1999–2006) were dedicated to journalism in the sports media. My next 10,000 hours were dedicated to the wellness industry (2007–2014) and I'm currently dedicated to helping humanity create exceptional lives. Given that your average life spans more than 700,000 hours, you can master multiple fields in just one lifetime.

Everyday Exceptionals: A word for the parents

My wife Sarah spent five years studying chiropractic and spent a further 12 years in practice before she decided to dedicate her time to being a stay-at-home mum.

“For me personally, when I tried to be a working parent, I felt like I was failing as a mother and failing my clients because my heart now lay elsewhere,” recalls Sarah. “I would leave my children with my mum or Marcus, my heart in my throat every time and crying all the way to work.”

One night in 2013 Sarah was in tears. Struggling emotionally with the conflict of having dedicated almost 30,000 hours of her life to her profession, my angel was now seriously contemplating the idea of transitioning out of chiropractic and putting all her energy into raising our children. In short, she wanted to reach 10,000 hours with the children sooner rather than later.

“So much of my identity came from being a chiropractor. I wasn't sure I could live life as a stay-at-home mother. I was also burning myself out by trying to do everything, to be today's modern supermum. Everyone else seemed to be able to do it (or so I thought). And yet, the universe sent me a pretty strong repetitive message. So many of my female patients,

from young to old said a similar thing when I showed them their health results. Dismayed, sad, and frustrated they would often say, ‘I wish I’d taken care of myself earlier. I wish I hadn’t put everyone else’s needs first’.

“It was this common theme that gave me the courage to walk away from my profession and be the best example I could for my children. I didn’t want them seeing me sacrificing myself at the expense of everyone else. And I wanted to be there to watch them grow, especially when they were little. I wanted to be fully present with them, to give them all of my love and focus without distraction. I wanted to be able to do it at a more relaxed pace that was healthier for me, and to still have time to carve out self-care for me and quality time with Marcus. Raising four children is the toughest thing I have ever done, but deciding to do it without the added stress of a career has been one of the best decisions I have ever made for my life.”

If you’re a stay-at-home parent, know that your current career or purpose in life is largely dedicated to your children. And, if you view your purpose as Rose Kennedy (1890–1995), matriarch of the famous Kennedy clan did, you’ll see your life is dedicated to raising a family of world leaders. That doesn’t mean your children need to be the next leaders of the free world; instead it means you’re raising your children to be valuable members of society, contributing their individual gifts to humanity which ideally you have encouraged and empowered them to share.

On the flipside, your role as a parent may have you now feeling determined to start the business you’ve always put off, or you may simply want to balance your family time with a part-time job. Whether you’re the parent who craves staying at home, whether you’re starting a business or re-entering the workforce, you must follow these intuitive hunches – no matter how illogical they seem – in order to live your exceptional life.

And whilst 10,000 hours may seem like a long time, when you do what you love and love what you do, that number not only excites you, you wish you could spend even more time doing it. Which is why the notion of retirement is so preposterous to *The Exceptionals*.



Step 4: Never retire

Charles Eugster (1919–2017), a retired dentist who went on to become the fastest man over 95 years of age, described retirement to me as “a financial catastrophe and a health calamity”.

“Retirement is voluntary or involuntary unemployment,” Eugster shared on *100 Not Out*. “And unemployment is something that is extremely dangerous for your health. Most people after retirement are sick! The statistics from the US show that 92.2% of people over 65 have one or more chronic diseases. We are destroying old age!”

Eugster’s point is well made. My home country of Australia sits fourth on the longevity ladder (with a life expectancy of 83 years) yet plummets down to 15th for *quality* of life. Australians on average have 72 quality years and 11 terrible years – over 4000 days – of poor quality of life.¹⁵

Eugster wasn’t simply pontificating about ageing gracefully. I interviewed Eugster twice on *100 Not Out*, and both times he was determined to champion the importance of working. “I practised dentistry until I was 75. When I was 58 I started a dentist newsletter which I continued until I was 82,” he told me, “and at that particular time my wife had died and I wasn’t feeling particularly good. I thought that I would only live until I was 85 and so I got rid of the publication which was a huge mistake! After that I was unemployed for eight years, which didn’t do me any good at all. I managed to find employment again at the age of 90 until 92 for a fitness group. Today I am an author trying to write a book.” Eugster went on to release *Age Is Just A Number* in 2017 before dying a few months later from heart failure, aged 97.

“I want to change the world,” he told me. “I want to make old age into one of the most fabulous, extraordinary, wonderful, beautiful, glorious, stupendous periods of everybody’s life.”

In ‘retirement’, Eugster would go on to win over 100 rowing events, bodybuilding competitions, 36 Masters gold medals, set world records in athletics in distances from 60m to 400m, present an inspiring TEDx talk and become a published author. Not a bad way to spend your time in retirement.

The longevity hack is doing work you love to do

Nelson Mandela (1918–2013) became the President of South Africa at age 75, whilst the world’s richest man, Warren Buffett (b. 1930), still drives to work each day. At 93, Dick Van Dyke (b. 1925) performed an inspirational cameo in *Mary Poppins Returns*, 54 years after starring as Bert in the original *Mary Poppins*. The film also featured Angela Lansbury (b. 1925), whose career across theatre, television and film has spanned a remarkable eight decades.

Working beyond retirement age is not just for the rich and famous though. Nonagenarians like war widow Thelma Zimmerman (b. 1922) continue to live with plenty of purpose and vigour. “I work every Wednesday morning at our church op shop, giving food and clothing to the needy and the homeless,” Zimmerman shared with me on *100 Not Out*. Speaking from her home in a South Australian war widows complex, Zimmerman has a full calendar. “I’ve also been helping clean the church for 25 years. We have a committee meeting once a month on a Tuesday, and then I go to church where I’m on the roster for kitchen duty.”

Retirement from professional income-generating work is a logical and desirable step for many people, but retiring from life and no longer contributing to society has disastrous physical, mental and spiritual consequences. Never let age or the word ‘retirement’ trick you into believing your work is done. If *The Exceptionals* have shown us anything, it’s that our work is never done, our value is never diminished; our roles simply change with the passing chapters of life.

Step 5: Enjoy your work or start over

If you’ve felt that you’re too old to change career or create your exceptional life, look no further than ‘China’s hottest grandpa’, Wang Deshun (b. 1936). “People can change their life as many times as they wish,”¹⁶ says Deshun, who today models for Zegna, Reebok and the world’s leading fashion designers. After gracing the catwalk at age 79 in 2016, Deshun rose to international stardom, the pin up boy for being able to achieve life’s dreams at any age.

“Many say I became an overnight sensation, but I’ve been preparing for 60 years. At 24 I became a theatre actor, at 44 I started learning English. At 50 years old I went to a gym for the first time. At 70 I was working out regularly. At 79, I went on the runway for the first time,” he says. “Today, I am 80 years old and there is still something inside me. I still have dreams to achieve. Our potential can always be explored. When you think that it is too late, be careful. Do not allow this to be an excuse to give up. No one can stop you from succeeding, except yourself.”¹⁷

Just like Wang Deshun – who has also worked as a shoe shiner, a factory worker, and a ticket collector – you are likely to have multiple careers in your life. My history includes working in newsagencies, as a telemarketer, a LEGO® builder and a newspaper delivery boy.

Sometimes the career change can be within the same industry. Matthew McConaughey (b. 1969) studied law before becoming Hollywood’s number one romantic comedy actor. After growing stale of the same genre, he refused all rom-com scripts until he landed a role in a drama. Four years after quitting romantic comedies, McConaughey won an Oscar for his portrayal as AIDS patient, Ron Woodroof, in *Dallas Buyers Club*.

If you attempt to find a career that you will do for the rest of your life you’re likely to never choose one, as the pressure of that one big decision will render you emotionally paralysed and powerless.

Remember, age is not a barrier. Age is not an excuse. Age is not an alibi. Age is just a number. Your age is a sign of *life*, and life is your blank canvas to create your masterpiece and to write the script of your exceptional life.

*“Nature determines your age, but you
determine your state of mind.”*

– *Wang Deshun*

Exceptional Exercise 1.4: What is your life dedicated to?

Let this question nag at you constantly until you can answer it. Giving yourself the time to answer this question is one of your most important tasks in life.

What is *your* life *dedicated* to? Not knowing, or perhaps worse – knowing and *not* dedicating your life to it – will not only suck the life out of you, you’ll become bitter and twisted, scourged with resentment, anger, and even hatred. A sad and disconcerting sight is seeing someone with potential who *knows* they are gifted in something and refuses to acknowledge their exceptional nature. “Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate,” wrote Marianne Williamson in *A Return To Love*. “Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us.”¹⁸ What is your *light* that frightens the living daylights out of you? You know, or have a hunch, that you are or could be *crazy good* at something – parenting, turning and fitting, cutting grass, reading contracts, editing, mathematics, astrophysics, negotiating, cooking, running, swimming, gardening, speaking, dancing, singing, designing – yet you shut it off, turn it down and refuse to let it shine.

Denying yourself the greatness and the exceptional life that you deserve benefits no one. In fact, it robs society of a gift.

You can begin the sentence with “my life is dedicated to...” or “the purpose of my life is to...” and then follow it with a verb and an outcome. For me, the purpose of my life is to help humanity rise to exceptional in each area of life and not just one. In my personal life I achieve this through the example I set as a man, husband, father, friend, son, brother, cousin and uncle. In my professional life I do this as a speaker, podcaster, author and mentor.

So, what is *your* life *dedicated* to?

The foundation of your exceptional life is your life purpose

Remember, your life purpose comes *first*, before any other area of life. Your fulfilment during your working hours – whether paid or not – will provide greater longevity than your diet, your exercise habits, your friendship group, your family and your wealth.

Your life purpose is your valued contribution to the world. When the value is gone – when you stop providing value to the world – that’s when you begin to really die. Sadly, we can see that in people of *any* age working in jobs they hate – they are dying a slow death, one working day at a time. And not only that, this lack of fulfilment infiltrates most, if not every other area of life.

When you do what you love you wake up with more buzz. You move your body because you know that makes you better at your work; you socialise with great people because those relationships support your life’s work; just as your nutrition, your family, your growth and wealth all directly benefit your work. Your spirit is soaked in your work, and the major challenges of life are easier to work through when a strong foundation of fulfilment is derived from your work. If you refuse to live your exceptional life purpose, the odds are you’ll die with the painful regret that you didn’t summon the courage to live life on your own terms. What outcome do you choose?



“Don’t hold back. Ten little words.

If it is to be it is up to me.”

– Tommy Hafey