

# Aspire!

How to Create Your Own Reality and Alter Your DNA

## - Sample Chapter -

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### What Legacy Do You Aspire to Leave Behind?

*If you're going to live, leave a legacy. Make a mark on the world that can't be erased.*

Maya Angelou

All twenty-five chapters of *Aspire!* are meant to evoke deep thought and actionable learning, yet only one chapter is posed in the form of a question. I believe when you have successfully created your own reality, and in turn altered your DNA, you will have truly left a legacy.

Find a mirror or flip your phone's camera around and read the title to this chapter aloud:

*"What legacy do you aspire to leave behind?"*

It's not a question that many of us think about until we are getting close to the end of our lives or something happens to make us ponder our mortality. But it's likely *the* most important question when it comes to altering your DNA and creating your own reality. And it's a question I believe we also should ask—and try to answer well—throughout our lives. You've heard of a reality check? Well, since we are creating our own reality, I suggest a periodic "legacy check."

Your legacy is a work-in-progress built upon choices that you make each day, and the sooner you identify what it is, the better.

On the Yugo We-go Tour I often asked the legacy question, and I was deeply moved by the answers I received. One man, Vinny (you'll meet him again in chapter 24), who had worked at a Veterans Administration hospital for 23 years, said that his legacy was "to take care of people that took care of our country." Beautiful, simple, purposeful, and profound. Another gentleman, Ben, the 87 years-old unofficial "Mayor of Badwater" who lives in the tiny desert town of Lone Pine, CA, told me that his legacy was choosing to be a doctor in a rural community. Given his credentials, he could have practiced medicine anywhere in the world, he said, but he made a conscious choice to care for the people in this small town for more than 55 years.

You would think that younger people would have a tougher time thinking about legacy, and in many cases you'd be correct, but a few millennials I talked with on the Tour shared incredibly wise responses. While staying at the beautiful Los Poblanos Historic Inn and Organic Farm in Albuquerque, I asked my 22-year-old waiter what he wanted his legacy to be. He stepped back from the table, put down his tray, and brought his index finger and thumb up to his chin as he went away to get some water to refill my glass. When he came back, he said, "I simply want to leave a wake of empathy." How profound is that? I told him to make a bumper sticker out of those last five words and I'd buy the first one hundred. Another young lady, mid-twenties, working at the St. Regis in Aspen, Colorado, told me she wanted her legacy to be helping people make beautiful memories. Her goal, she said, was to have a wedding planning business, because there's nothing more beautiful or memorable than a wedding.

These millennials were declaring what they want their legacy to be in the future. Vinny and the mayor of Badwater were looking back and reflecting on a legacy lived. But no matter

what stage of life you are currently in, I believe that spending some time focusing on your legacy will help to make your life richer and more fulfilling.

## **You are Worthy of Leaving a Great Legacy**

To me, legacy is simply a demonstration of how you are living your life, and how that life impacts others. For a lot of people, however, “legacy” is an intimidating word, and they don’t think of themselves as being big enough, or worthy enough, to leave a legacy. As a bestselling author I frequently get asked to write a foreword or an endorsement for a book. When I get such a request, I or someone in my office will do a little research on the person and their book. If it’s something I want to do (which I almost always agree to), I’ll email or text the author and say, “Send me a draft of a few examples of exactly what you want me to say in the most flattering way you’d want me to say it. Extol your virtues, put humility and humbleness aside, then send it to me for review.” Well, out of the 100 times I’ve done this, 95 of the drafts authors send me are woefully inadequate, bordering on *pathetic*. Sadly, most responses are a reflection of deep-seated insecurities, with the extremely worthy author unwilling to sing their own praises and declare their aspirations!

**Remember, you are *more* than worthy of leaving a legacy that you can be proud and happy to leave behind.** You just need to be brave enough and bold enough not to leave your legacy to chance—or worse yet, not to leave one at all.

## **Tie Your Legacy to Your Aspirations**

Just like your aspirations, your legacy doesn’t need to be something big and bombastic. If you aspire to leave a legacy of a beautiful tomato garden for you, your family, and your neighbors to enjoy, and that garden really lays itself on your heart, great! (Full disclosure: I once

thought I was motivated to plant and care for a vegetable garden, but I found that I wasn't very good at gardening, and all the plants died, except for the few coconuts I stuck in the ground. Those trees are now 10 feet tall!) The only requirement is that you should choose a legacy that you truly want to be remembered for.

Not long ago I visited a woman, Debbie, in Tallahassee, FL, who answered the legacy question like this: "I want to set an example of what a good wife should be. A lot of the women that I meet either talk down to their husbands or talk bad about them, but I enjoy doing things for Hunter. I enjoy making my husband's lunch every day. And even though we work together and I work as hard or harder than him, I enjoy making dinner for him. These are the things that a good wife does."

Debbie is a high-powered, very successful real estate investor, and her answer was not at all what I expected. But it made me think of my wife, Nilsa. She is an incredibly talented interior designer who designed the interior elements of all of my oceanfront estates; she spearheaded fundraising drives for our Caring House Project Foundation and for a local hospital; she ran the support crew all twelve times that I ran Badwater; and if you asked Nilsa about her legacy, I'm sure being an amazing wife and mother would be part of it. (I'll talk a LOT about Nilsa and relationships in section 4.) Whatever your aspiration—whether it be to create an amazing garden, raise a beautiful family, send your child to college for the first time in your family's history, build a small business that's a cornerstone of your community, become a bestselling author or top athlete, or to be a philanthropist and support causes that are important to you—if you are truly pursuing it with all your heart, mind, and soul, then in time, it will become your legacy.

Years ago I believed that my legacy would certainly be the oceanfront mansions I created, with their artistry, grandeur, opulence, and showmanship. But then I recognized that even the most magnificent house, either through physical, functional, or economic obsolescence,

will turn to rubble. Especially in South Florida, where the value of the land eventually will exceed the value of the physical structure built on it, I know that the houses I built will be gone, and the memory of how I present them to the market will fade as well. But what *won't* be gone is the generational impact that the Caring House Project Foundation is having on the families in Haiti. I'm prouder of that legacy—a better life for the poorest of the poor in the poorest country in the Western hemisphere—than I am of any mansion I ever created, built and sold.

Motivation and inspiration will fail, but aspiration tied to legacy will span generations. Am I always motivated to go to Haiti or do the fundraising to build another village? At times, no. But I *never* lose the aspiration to leave a generational legacy for those families and children. The combination of aspiration and legacy creates a vivid mental image, a clear path for you to follow as you journey through life. If your aspirations create the road, legacy is the destination at life's conscious and various end points. And you'll receive emotional satisfaction from taking the small steps that will keep you moving toward the realization of your aspiration, which ultimately *is* your legacy.

## **Create a Legacy of Service**

Occasionally when I ask the legacy question people will say things like, "I want to be remembered as a self-made billionaire!" or "I want to die the most famous (actor/musician/performer/writer/real estate investor) in the world!" That's fine—but I always want to ask, "Why? What's so important about being a billionaire, or famous?" I believe that in order to be happy all human beings want a sense of purpose and some appreciation for who we are and what we do, yet unfortunately, many people link money and fame to purpose and appreciation. But if money is your only measure of success, or fame is your only indication of how much others appreciate you, then you're going to be pretty unhappy. Money and fame will

provide two things in abundance; relief and comfort—pretty much all the relief and comfort you want. And relief and comfort will make you very happy... for a little while. Then, like the high from heroin, it's gone, leaving you craving more and more (relief and comfort). It is a vicious, never-ending, maddening cycle.

I have no issues with people having legacies that include doing well financially, being successful in their businesses, or being recognized for their talents. (If you go back to those I aspired to emulate in Chapter 1, you'll see I admire those traits.) And if they want part of their legacy to be giving money to a hospital or university or other organization to get a wing or a building named after them, or using their fame to support causes that are important to them, great! As you'll see in chapter 23, I'm a big believer in philanthro-capitalism, using financial blessings to do good. But I also believe that it is just as important to leave a legacy of compassion and kindness for every human being, whether it's the homeless woman outside of the Seven-Eleven or the city employee that picks up the garbage at my house twice a week.

The best way to leave a lasting legacy is to live so that you have an effect on others or the world. If you want immortality (and we all do), make it a practice to share your blessings in service to others and you're likely to have it—in heaven, if that's your belief, and on earth because people will remember what you did for them.

## **Other People Will Determine Your Legacy**

I once read that all the big newspapers write obituaries for famous people in advance, to be prepared to go to print just as soon as they hear that So-and-So has died. That to me is a great reminder of the fact that your obituary will be written and your legacy decided by people who know you, were affected by you, and who see the results of your aspirations. For example, while I aspire to leave a legacy in the poorest country in the Western hemisphere, I'll never know really

truly if I've done that. But in pursuing that aspiration I *do* know that we have made an impact on the 12,800-plus children that we've saved.

Remember: it's never the destination, it's the journey. It's never the legacy, it's the actions you take along the way to fulfill your aspirations. Think of Martin Luther King, Jr., speaking in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1968, the night before he was assassinated. He said, "I've been to the mountaintop.... And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land." Martin Luther King knew a thing or two about aspiration—not for himself, but for all African-Americans. And while many feel that his aspirations for equality and justice have yet to be fulfilled, it's the legacy of his journey, and his unrelenting pursuit of those aspirations, that make him still an inspiration to millions.

## **Identify the Legacy You Want to Leave Behind**

It's time for you to declare what you want your legacy to be. After reading the prior section you already should have been thinking about two questions and begun to make short lists: #1: *What are your aspirations?* And #2: *Who do you want to emulate?* Now it's time for #3: *What legacy do you aspire to leave behind?* To me, this list is just as enjoyable to compose as the other two, as it encourages you to dig deeper and face your own mortality to a degree. But if you want to really live your aspirations and create your own reality, choosing a legacy (or legacies) can help you design a road map to get there.

There are many different ways to go about answering the legacy question. There's the rocking-chair test, where you imagine yourself sitting in a rocking chair at the end of your life, looking back over what you've done. Or you can imagine people gathered at your memorial service, sharing their memories of your life and accomplishments. (Nowadays you could imagine

friends, colleagues, and family posting their tributes on your social media page.) Or you could write your own obituary as it might appear in the local newspaper. On two occasions in my life I have attended funerals of people I didn't know and imagined it was me in the coffin. As I sat there in the pew in church, I visualized what I'd hope my eulogy would sound like.

After writing *Aspire!* I suggest a slightly different version of the exercise:

1. Look at the list of aspirations you created at the beginning of this section, as well as the list of people you wanted to emulate.
2. Imagine yourself at a certain point in the future—a year, five years, ten, twenty years or longer (you pick the length). The entire time between now and then you've been pursuing your aspirations with dedication and commitment.
3. Looking back over those years, vividly yet succinctly describe the legacy created by your aspirations. What have you accomplished? Who have you helped or affected in some way? How have you grown? What are you proud of?
4. Reviewing what you wrote, what do you think your most important legacy will be? How can you set things in motion *today* to make that legacy a reality?

One of the great advantages of choosing your legacy today is that it can provide a crystal ball reflecting the actions you need to take in the near term. I'll equate it to the oceanfront properties I built: I had to have a vision of what the mansion would look like when it was finished in order to create weekly plans to make that vision a reality. It's the same way with building self-sustaining villages in Haiti. I'm driven by the vision of leaving a legacy in Haiti represented by these villages that allow tens of thousands of children, and their children, to live better lives, now and in the future. But when I first aspired to build those villages, I knew nothing about running a nonprofit or raising money. So my first step was to find someone to talk



to about charities and how to run them. After that, I devised plans for fundraising, connecting with donors, finding the right partners in Haiti, working with the local authorities, and so on.

Whether today you're in your seventies, or only 20 years old and hoping to be around for another 70 or 80 years, deciding upon a legacy and tying it to your aspirations is one of the most important life exercises you'll ever do. So, go ahead give yourself that "legacy check." Then pursue it with commitment and watch your DNA start to change as you begin to believe in the power of creating your own reality.

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