

Chapter Three

\$ If You're Not Out Selling, You're Being Outsold

One Life, One Boss

Under Construction

Tell it with Gusto

Signed, Sealed, Delivered

Eat Breakfast with Champions

Life's Hard; Hunker Down and Reach Higher Ground

Live, Thrive, and Come Alive in the Impact Zone

Is the "person" you live in under construction and improving or in danger of being condemned? A key to outperforming the competition is how quickly you learn and improve the most important tool you've got-you. The more you learn, the more you earn. It's that simple, provided you learn the right things. Are your mental skills sharper today than they were a year ago? How about your energy level, your stamina, your strength-are they improving? Is your sense of meaning and inner peace improving from year to year? The following story illustrates how the under construction principle really works:

A frustrated minister was working at home in his study on his sermon one Friday afternoon. "I can't come up with a single original idea," he muttered to himself. Suddenly, his 10-year-old son burst into the study, full of enthusiasm. "Are you ready to play ball, Dad?" he asks.

His father, concentrating on his sermon, ignored his son. "Dad," he persists, "You promised we could play catch tonight. Can we play now?"

The father set aside his papers and looked at his son. "How was school today?" he asked.

"We studied geography today, Dad."

"Really," the father replied. "What did you learn?"

"We learned about the world and where all the different places are, like China and France and Argentina. The world is a really big place, Dad!"

"It sure is," the father replied and glanced at the newspaper on his desk. Coincidentally, a full-page advertisement showing a large picture of the earth as seen from a satellite was showing. "See, look at this," the father said, pointing at the picture of the earth. "Would you like to do a puzzle?" he asked his son.

"Sure, Dad."

The father tore off the page of newspaper with the picture of the earth and began to rip the picture into small pieces, thinking it would take his son

a long time to put the self-made puzzle together because the picture of the earth would be difficult to piece back together. This would give him time to finish his sermon. He handed all the small pieces to his son, who went into the kitchen to work on the puzzle.

Five minutes later, the boy burst back into the room his father was working in. "I'm done, Dad," he said.

"You're already done?" the father asked, astonished at how quickly he had finished, and he stood up to go see the newspaper picture all pieced together on the kitchen table. "I'm amazed at how fast you did the puzzle, son. I figured that picture of the earth would be very hard to put together. How did you do it?"

"It was easy, Dad. On the other side there was a picture of a little boy that was a lot easier to put together. I figured if I got the little boy right, then the world would turn out right too."

"Let's go play ball, son," the father smiled. "You have given me the idea I've been looking for."

That's the way under construction works. By focusing on getting your own skills and abilities "right," you impact your world at the same time. When you grow and develop steadily in the skills that support your life blueprint, the circumstances of your life will respond with positive change. Under construction is a principle that focuses you on improving the one element of your life you can truly control-you!

Under construction is an approach to self-improvement that looks at the total you. This principle will not only help you to grow, but it will help you to achieve more and, most importantly, to enjoy the ride. Under construction is a principle that integrates the three primary areas we need to grow and improve in from birth to death-physical, mental, and spiritual. When we continuously develop in these areas, we improve both today and tomorrow for ourselves and the people around us. What makes living in the world today so exciting is the unparalleled opportunity for personal growth. Under construction is a principle you must sell yourself on so that you not only recognize the opportunity, but harvest it!

THE 5:00 QUESTION

The ride home from work, whether it be a stroll from the den to the kitchen or a torturous commute on crowded freeways or stuffed commuter trains, is a real moment of truth. That's where a most important sale

is made. This is a sale you need to make to yourself. You are either going to make a decision to goal achieve or stress relieve. Is the "free time" you have before and after work something you look forward to as "Wow, this is my time, my time to build a better me and a better life"? Or is it more, "I'm exhausted, how can I do as little as possible and just rest? I can't believe all the stuff that is piling up at home. I don't think I can get to it today."

After 5:00 thinking is either "round two, let's grow" or "life is harsh, I need some sleep!" The impact of a lifetime of accumulated decisions to approach round two as simply rest and relaxation time results in a continuous shrinking of energy, opportunities, and breakthrough experiences. On the other hand, using those hours to construct a better life unearths a hidden treasure, waiting to be opened.

We've talked a lot in this book about the beliefs and attitudes we sell ourselves and how these "sales" are what really determine our overall success in our careers and our lives. Whether or not you sell yourself on living the under construction principle is perhaps the most critical of all the sales you will make today. What are you going to do when you get home?

If you want to become absolutely unstoppable as a persuader, as a convincer, and as a persistent, never-say-die communicator, begin by making the sale every day at 5:00 to get under construction, to build yourself and your future, to achieve goals, and to really live your life at a higher level!

When Charles Wilson was president of General Electric, he was asked by the president of a small Midwestern company how his experience as president of a large company could apply to the president of a very small company. Wilson answered by describing a job he had when he was a child. He had worked for a dairy, and his job was to fill the milk bottles. The bottles were different sizes. Some were a pint, others half gallons, and still others were a gallon. They all had different-sized necks. On his way home from a 10-hour workday, he asked himself what he was learning. The answer was that no matter what size the bottle, the cream always came to the top. In a competitive, no-excuses business environment, the cream always rises to the top and rises fast. And when you apply the under construction principle to yourself, you become the cream and rise up no matter what circumstances you are in.

Part of the reason so many people today feel run down and stressed out is because they are neglecting their own self-development. When we don't

invest enough time in under construction, we end up having to work much harder to achieve fewer results. This is because our ability to create results is directly tied to how much we learn and develop. You should be able to create results much faster at age 40 than you can at 30. If, however, you can't, then you'll have to make up for your lack of ability with more time. You'll have to put in more time to get fewer results. It's a crummy tradeoff. Keeping up becomes exhausting. Under construction is the way to generate more free time over the long haul. The under construction principle will also build you into a person who is truly capable of enjoying that free time without the limitations that saddle so many of us later in life.

Lack of Credentials Is Not an Obstacle!

Credentials, or the lack of them, can be viewed as a curse or a blessing. You might feel that you would be better off today if you had a more advanced degree from a prestigious university, or more specialized certifications and credentials in your profession. Sometimes, people actually limit what they believe their future can bring them because of missing credentials. Certainly, credentials are important. However, a lack of the highest credentials is not necessarily an obstacle. When we say to ourselves, "I can't get ahead because I haven't got an MBA," or "The school I went to wasn't good enough to get me into the kind of company I would like to work for," then we become victims of our own thinking.

Instead, we need to look as objectively as possible at the credentials we do and don't have. Then we apply the under construction principle to get us to where we want to go. Don't beat yourself up for the credentials you don't have. Instead, use the next five years to make up for it! The credentials you do or don't have today are not going to limit you if you get serious about under construction. What limits us today can literally be our springboard tomorrow. Under construction thinking allows us to do something now about what was limiting us in the past.

Credentials Are Not Guarantees Anymore

Christian Haig, governor of Mississippi, went to a barbecue after campaigning one evening. After his first serving of chicken, the governor was still hungry, so he went back to the food line and asked for a second piece of chicken saying, "I'm famished Mav 1 have another niece of chicken?"

The person serving the chicken replied, "Only one per customer."
"Do you know who I am?" demanded the governor.
"No," was the answer.
"I'm the governor!"

"Well," said the server, "I'm the lady in charge of the chicken." The walls of authority are dropping every day. The credentials of yesterday don't always carry the weight that we think they should. More and more companies are adopting open-door management approaches. Even medical doctors are finding themselves being challenged by more knowledgeable patients demanding more information and shared decision making.

Perhaps you already have some powerful credentials. Maybe your résumé is impressive. Credentials will get you into the game. They are, in a sense, the tickets to the ballpark. Too often, however, we think that they should also be guarantees of success, like entitlement certificates. That just isn't the case anymore. Credentials do not ensure lasting credibility that has to be earned. As the knowledge base expands faster and faster, the credentials you have today may become less and less relevant.

"Somehow, you have to make yourself unique out there in the marketplace," explains Don Graling, a top-producing salesperson and manager. "You do this by getting as many unique experiences in your life as possible. Education can do that for you. I went back to school after I got my graduate degree in economics to get another graduate degree in accounting. I thought that would help me in my business and build my credential base. I've found that you can never stop educating yourself. I always found it important to go to different seminars and classes to move ahead. You meet a lot of fun and interesting people at those events. Whenever I feel I'm in a rut, I look toward outside educational opportunities to try to work myself out of it. Go to courses outside your normal environment that aren't necessarily job related."

Credentials can become obsolete fast. They must constantly be renewed and updated. Either update and improve them or risk losing the value they once represented. If you don't update them, you may find that the credentials or tickets that you have earned will be to a game that has already been played. The game will be over and you will be on the court after the win or loss was already recorded. Continuously updating our skills improves our capabilities, which is more critical now than ever before because of the pace of change.

Change Is Too Rapid to Stand Still

Maybe there was a time when the pace was slower, when security was real, when getting ahead meant putting in your time, we don't know. We're still pretty young and we just didn't live through it. Nowadays, life moves quickly and the only way to combat it is to adapt. The insulation that was reportedly so beloved to generations gone by is now a liability. The more insulated you are, the more a target you become when the fat choppers start swinging their axes. Our knowledge-based economy is placing an increased value on learning. The price of standing still is very high. If you are not on a steady improvement plan you are losing ground. Fast-paced change demands fast-paced learning. Your ability to acquire valuable skills and knowledge faster than the people around you is your ticket to financial success.

The beauty of under construction, and why this principle is so timely, is that when we learn and develop we also diminish our resistance to change and increase our ability to adapt. That's what we need right now in this fast-changing world. And this ability to adapt to what is going on around you is also a fundamental skill when it comes to selling ideas. The more we know, the more connections we can make between ourselves, other members of the world, and the often unsettling paradoxes that characterize modern living. In a typical idea-selling scenario, we need to be able to understand the person we are speaking with and adapt to their perspective before we voice ours. The under construction principle will show you what you need to do to grow in the most useful ways. More importantly, you'll discover how to become energetic and inspired enough to do so. The following well-known story talks to the responsibility we all must assume when it comes to developing our abilities:

Many years ago, a wealthy man, about to leave for an extended trip, called for his three servants to give them his instructions before he departed. To the first servant, he gave five talents, which at that time was a form of currency, like dollars, and said, "Take care of these talents, good servant, while I am far from you." Then, he turned to the second servant and gave him two talents, saying the same words. Finally, he looked at the third servant and gave him three talents, with the same words of advice.

After three years, the wealthy man returned. He called the servants to his side. The first servant greeted his master and said, "Master, you delivered me five talents and I traded with them and made another five talents." The master smiled broadly and said, "Well done, good and faithful servant. I will make you ruler over many things."

The second servant approached and said, "You gave me two talents and now I give you two more." The master replied, "Well done, good and faithful servant. I will make you ruler over many things too." The third servant came up to the master, trembling. "Master, I know you to be a hard man, reaping where you have sown, and I was afraid. I hid your three talents you gave to me in the ground." And he gave the three talents to the master.

"You wicked and lazy servant," replied the master. "You ought to have at least deposited the talents in the bank and I could have gotten some interest." With that, the master threw the unprofitable servant from his castle into the darkness alone.

Life, like the master in the story, can be ruthless with us if we do not continually invest back into ourselves and develop our talents. Is it unreasonable to expect that we should all be improving, all the time? When you were in third grade, did your parents expect you to make it to fourth grade the following year? Or was it more like, "Well, I guess you were just too tired to grow this year. It's okay, let's spend some more time at this level and see what happens next year"?

Ridiculous, isn't it? But how many of us are living that way as an adult? A recent statistic showed that the average college graduate reads 0.9 books a year. That's less than one book a year for the most educated strata of America. Take a walk through a bookstore today and marvel at the number of titles dedicated to virtually any topic we can think of. Less than three percent of the population has a library card. And it's free! Then there are the thousands of books on audiocassette to listen to in the car.

For some reason, many of us equate non-work time with rest. Many different surveys have come out over the years claiming that the average adult watches between three and five hours of television, on average, per day. Add that up and you've got at least 45 days worth of time being funneled into television each year. That's almost one full day a week! It's ironic that so many people are spending a significant portion of their lives watching other people succeed on television, while they feel stuck and frustrated in their own lives. When we neglect the under construction principle, we slow down considerably.

What About the Busy People?

On the other hand, there is a big group of us that are so busy, we seemingly cannot squeeze any "personal" self-development time into our non-

working lives. What is it that we are so busy doing, anyway? Is it possible that all the motion and activities we are so busy with are in reality doing little to move us forward? There is nothing wrong with being busy, but when we're too busy to invest time back into ourselves, then we've really got a priority problem, not a "too busy" problem. The bottom line is that if your life is so crowded, rushed, and crazy that there is no time left to build a more exciting future, then you have done a crummy job of planning, and your priorities are probably in need of a serious review.

The time you spend preparing and doing the things that will pay off when the game starts will help you to yield better results when it counts.

It seems the large creatures and the small creatures got into a dispute about something that seemed important at the time. They argued back and forth and decided that the only way to settle the dispute was to do it the old-fashioned way. So they decided to have a football game. Both teams squared off for the opening kickoff, and the first half was a disaster for the small creatures. Nearly every player on the large creatures' team—the elephant, giraffe, bull, rhino, and even the donkey—scored a touchdown, and the score was 55-0 at the half. The small creatures headed for the locker room dejected and demoralized, a defeated team. The coach of the small creatures, realizing the terrible predicament he was in, did everything he could to regroup, reorganize, and inspire his team. He even called in a motivational speaker!

Right after the kickoff of the second half, a new player for the small creatures, the centipede, came bursting out of the locker room and onto the field. He entered the huddle and said, "Give me the ball. I'll score a touchdown." So the quarterback, bruised and battered from the first half, handed the ball to the centipede on the first play, who sprinted around the end and ran 70 yards for the small creatures' first touchdown.

On the next play, the centipede made a tackle, forced a fumble, and recovered it, scoring another touchdown. For the rest of the third quarter, the centipede was a one-man wrecking crew, intercepting passes, running for touchdowns, and making fantastic plays continuously. At the end of the third quarter, the score was 55-55, tied up!

As the team gathered together on the sidelines before the fourth quarter, the coach looked at the team. "Who is scoring all those touchdowns?"

The centipede stood up. "It was me, Coach."

"You're playing fantastic," the coach said. "But I've got to ask you, where were you in the first half when we were getting trampled?"

"Well, Coach," the centipede replied, "I was in the locker room getting my ankles taped."

Often, busy people are too frantic, too involved in the game, to take the time to get their ankles taped and truly prepare for the most crucial

challenges of their lives. They race from activity to activity, but they never really accomplish much.

Simple activities can provide great opportunities to grow and develop and discover new things. Activities such as listening to tapes in the car, reading biographies, having lunch with new people at work, helping our kids with their homework, or walking the dog at night can be turned into dramatic self-improvement habits if we want them to. Self-improvement is not only about what we do, it's about how we do it. By doing nearly the same things we are doing now in a new way we can engage a whole new level of self-discovery, learning, and problem-solving. This is where the value of the blueprints we introduced in Chapter 2 come in. They allow us to weed out time-consuming activities that yield little results.

It's What Under Construction Makes of You That's Most Important

A remarkable film entitled Rudy tells the true story of a young man, Rudy, who has a lifelong desire to play football for the University of Notre Dame. He doesn't possess much natural football ability; he's small and he hasn't done well enough in school to be admitted academically. He's got some significant roadblocks, I think we would all agree.

Rudy's desire was so great that he moved to South Bend, Indiana, where Notre Dame is located, got a part-time job assisting the university football stadium grounds crew, enrolled in a nearby junior college to improve his grades, and worked out to stay in shape, holding tight to his dream of playing football for Notre Dame. He committed every waking hour to the task of qualifying to get into the university. He eventually did get in and even made the football team practice squad, but what was most remarkable was the person he became through this struggle to reach his dream.

With only one game left in his senior year, Rudy had yet to actually suit up for a real game. He was only used on the practice squad. The other players, who had seen Rudy give his all day after day on the thankless practice field, petition the coach to let Rudy suit up for the last game of his senior year. The coach agreed, more as a reward for his persistence than a strategic move to improve the performance of the team. Rudy was only on the field for two insignificant plays at the end of that game, but when that game was over, a remarkable thing happened. His teammates lifted him on their shoulders and carried him triumphantly off the field, heralding him as a champion. Rudy was carried off the field as a salute to

the man he was, not to his athletic ability. The struggle to reach his dream had made him into a man who was admired by those around him. Without the unique challenges he was forced to confront alone, Rudy would have been just another college football player. The fact that he had significant barriers that he had to overcome set the stage for him to accomplish the greatest possible feat. And that challenge was to take himself to the highest possible level of development he could.

The hidden beauty of this story is that after that final game was over, Rudy got to take that remarkable human being he had created with him! Like Rudy, when we put ourselves under construction to increase our talents, skills, and capabilities, we simply can't lose what we gain on the inside. It's our own prize to keep forever. Who you become as a result of the intensity of your own personal struggle is an end in and of itself!

The true reward of under construction is what we gain on the inside. The conditions of the world will always ebb and flow; sometimes we are in the right place to harvest, other times we are not. But what we gain on the inside because of our carefully thought-out efforts is the most satisfying of all of life's rewards, and the more we have inside that we can share with others, the more influential we become. You are the prize you get when you sell yourself on living the under construction principle.

Robert Riples, after doing some careful analysis, came to a startling conclusion about the value of ordinary iron. In a famous article he published, Riples wrote, "A plain bar of iron is worth \$5.00. This same bar of iron, if made into horseshoes, is worth \$10.50. If made into needles, it is worth \$355.00. If made into pen knife blades, it is worth \$3,285.00 and if made into balance springs for watches, that identical bar of iron becomes worth \$300,000.00."

We are the same. As we develop into the person we can be, our ability to create remarkable results grows, and the way the world values our contribution grows in the same proportion.

Who Can You Become?

Where you are today is hardly the limit of where you can get to with the added boost of the under construction approach. When we approach our barriers the way Rudy did, they become the launching pad to a better life. Sometimes we think that we are limited because we've only got this level of education or that level of certification. What a bunch of baloney. Where

you are today is the best possible place from which to launch the rest of your life. Where you are now is not limiting, it's perfect! You will find, if you engage in the task of developing yourself to the highest possible level, that where you are today will become an incredibly valuable asset someday. Remember, the limits you feel today will become the road marks toward your greatest triumph if you are willing to overcome them.

Nature has a beautiful way of illustrating the growth process. Take the Chinese bamboo tree for instance. The seed is planted, watered, and fertilized and, for the first four years, there is no visible growth. However, during the fifth year, the bamboo tree will grow 90 feet in six weeks. The question is, did the tree really take five years to begin growing? Not at all. Although growth was not visible, the tree was actually experiencing tremendous development during those first four years, which made it possible for it to stand sturdy and secure in the fifth year.

Under construction is much the same way. At first, the investment you make into your "roots" seems to yield little visible benefit. However, once a critical point is crossed, great possibilities can literally shoot up in front of you.

A close friend, Vince, worked for about five years at a popular children's television network. During that time, he was continuously creating proposals for new shows that he would then pitch to various producers, investors, and possible collaborators. Heartbreak after heartbreak followed with lots of near successes, but no big sale. Nonetheless, he kept coming up with new ideas at night after work, refining them, and enlarging his contact base until finally, with all that experience behind him, a producer latched onto him. Now, he's got a major hit with one show he's writing and several more coming down the pipeline. An overnight success? Hardly. By working to perfect his writing and proposal pitching skills night after night, year after year, Vince learned the skills that would eventually put him over the top and bring opportunities his way. Without the preliminary self-development, though, it is doubtful that those opportunities will appear for Vince, or any of us.

UNDER CONSTRUCTION REQUIRES VITALITY

Under construction requires discipline, and discipline requires energy. It's difficult, if not impossible, to grow and develop when you don't feel

good. Many people, maybe you, too, have great intentions and make commitments from the heart but lack the energy to get off the dime and follow through. It's amazing how many people are walking around in a state of half exhaustion! How can we possibly be thinking about making today the greatest day we have ever lived when we are essentially tired from the moment we wake up until the moment we go to bed?

One of our clients told us an interesting story about one of their salespeople. He works on inside sales on the telephone, his customers love him, and he does a very effective job. The company has an outside sales position open that represents more money and opportunity, but they have not given him the job because he is so overweight. They are unsure of the impression he would make on customers. Is it right? Should the company feel this way? Maybe not, but that's the way it tends to work in the real world. When we do not look like we exude vitality, it can actually hinder us from opportunities we might have attracted based on our accomplishments.

The component we need that is perhaps the most valuable possession of all is *vitality*. When we feel a strong sense of vitality, we are more able to enjoy and invest ourselves into our day. Learning, which asks us to put more effort into our free time, requires vitality. Would Vince have been able to develop all those program ideas at night without vitality? It's virtually impossible for us to look forward to the opportunity building time we have after 5:00 if we feel listless, tired, and drained. To make the most of the after - 5:00 challenge, we need energy and vitality. If you don't have it, that is where you need to start. You need to build it up. This is not going to turn into the latest diet and exercise book, we promise, but we do hope to help you see how simple it really is to increase your vitality.

Most people do not lack great dreams, they lack the energy and resolve to pursue them. Just maintaining their lives, just keeping up, becomes so taxing and so exhausting that there is nothing left. Athletes use the term second wind to describe a state they enter into after that initial feeling of tiredness. The second wind kicks in, like a reserve boost of energy, as we push past our initial exhaustion. Many people in their adult lives never experience the second wind when trying to develop to their highest level, because they don't have vitality to get past the first wind! A low-vitality life is no way to live if you want to enjoy the greater destiny waiting for you.

Vitality Is the Fruit of Under Construction

Vitality feels great! It allows so much more to happen. Vitality is the "wire" through which we experience the world. With a crummy, rusty, low-quality connection, all of our senses are dull, our thinking is foggy, our actions lack potency, and our appearance is muted. With vitality, our clarity increases, our appearance shines, and the ease with which we perform tasks that might have, in the past, shut us down, is remarkable. Vitality is, to be sure, the number one benefit of under construction.

You probably recall Aesop's fable about the goose and the golden egg:

A farmer visited the nest of his goose one day and found a glittering yellow egg. He was tempted to throw it away, but a second thought caused him to take it home and look it over more carefully. Much to his surprise, this strange egg turned out to be pure gold! Morning after morning, he gathered one golden egg after another from the goose, becoming very rich. The richer he became, the greedier he got until, one day, he became impatient with the gradually accumulating wealth. Hoping to get all the gold from the goose in one shot, he butchered it, only to find the goose empty.

Often, we become greedy in the same way with our free time. We stop investing daily into serious learning and self-development and kill off the golden goose in our own lives, which is, of course, our increasing ability to create value. The goose that will indeed lay your golden eggs is nurtured through living the under construction principle. Vitality is the window to the impossible, to miracles, because with vitality, we have more energy to invest into ourselves.

When you've got vitality, a whole new world of possibilities opens up to you; not only will you become aware of more opportunities, you'll have the gumption to act on them! As you develop your vitality to a higher level, you attract supporters, competitors, colleagues, and coaches of a higher caliber too. And when high-vitality, under construction people get together, stuff starts to happen!

What Is Vitality?

Liken vitality to the amount of watts you have in your light bulb. The more watts you can put in your bulb, the more you can illuminate the paths of your life. Vitality is like that. When you have it, problems become easier to see and to solve. With vitality, exercise is easier to do,

and making healthful choices changes from being a sacrifice to a joy. Activities that in the past were frustrating and exhausting become exciting and challenging. We enjoy the journey, the destination, the whole thing. We were in a strategic thinking session several years ago with some high-powered colleagues. The meeting was into the second day and really stalled in the afternoon. Everyone looked tired, and the problem solving was turning into problem creating. Gerry, a lower-ranking invitee, somehow had energy reserves no one else in the room had. He stood up and asked the group if he could lead the meeting for awhile. Relieved, the team agreed with his suggestion. Gerry quickly summarized what was going on and introduced several new ideas that were immediately adopted. His infusion of energy and enthusiasm, at a time when everyone needed it, became a turning point in his career. After the meeting was over, Gerry was invited back and eventually promoted and it no doubt had a lot to do with the boundless energy he displayed that day. Sometimes, life asks us to go through experiences where we need a 5,000 - watt halogen bulb-sized burst of energy. Vitality can give you that burst.

People are attracted to vitality and are influenced by it. When you have it in abundance, you will find opportunities to improve yourself, your career, and your relationships. Vitality is a magnet. When we lack vitality, however, we have to struggle to be heard, fight to get in the door, and climb the mountain to get a chance to compete with the big boys. What an ironic fact it is that people with low vitality actually attract more low-vitality people to them, which, of course, sap what little vitality they have.

Have You Got an Empty Battery?

Maybe you think influence is about the way you choose, put together, and express language. You might believe that being convincing and having impact is strictly a verbal phenomenon. Well, it's not. Your energy level has as much to do (maybe more) with the way you influence the people around you as do your communication skills. To be a powerful influencer, you need a full energy supply, a full battery. When you have enough so that the people around you start to, in a sense, feed off your energy, you are influencing. If, on the other hand, you are the vacuum in the room that sucks up the energy of others, chances are you are the one being influenced or, even worse, repelling others. Under construction builds a more

powerful reserve tank of energy and vitality for you to use. It also helps you to avoid problems.

"I think that staying in shape both mentally and physically has given me a lot of the stamina and endurance I've needed to make it to the top," explains Mike Finizio, a top-producing stock broker for years. "It's also given me an out for the frustration and pressures during the day. I've been working out since I got out of high school and it has helped me tremendously. I think that the discipline transfers to the way I work, which is why I've been able to consistently be a top producer."

When energy is flowing freely through you, you will reduce the likelihood of repair later down the road. The reason for this is that operating at a cleaner, higher energy level actually lightens the load on your system. That's the interesting paradox. You lighten your load when you increase your vitality. Living without much vitality is a lot of work. Increase your vitality and you will access more energy; use less of it and enjoy the ride a whole lot more.

VITALITY AND THE BIG THREE

A lasting sense of vitality is the result of consistent development in three key areas. You can't neglect one for long without limiting your overall vitality. They work together. When you develop in all three areas, you create a synergy effect so that one plus one plus one doesn't equal three but can equal 10.

These three areas are also the key areas you need to organize your under construction development around. Under construction, when approached in the way we're about to describe to you, is the most effective way to build vitality, and it is designed to increase your vitality now!

Let's make it as simple as possible to get started. You can look at under construction in terms of these three primary areas of development:

1. Mental
2. Physical
3. Spiritual

If you grow in all three of these areas each day, there is no telling what you can accomplish with 60 to 90 years of really living. Think of these three areas as the three great treasures of life:

1. To have a mind that is creative, well educated, resourceful, and able to solve problems. To be able to understand what is really happening and make good decisions.
2. To live in a body that has lots of energy, feels good, and has strength and stamina. To have strong resistance to disease along with balance and coordination.
3. To feel a sense of meaning, truth, and peace from within. To feel connected spiritually, with nature, and the people in our lives. To live values that uplift us and the people around us. To enjoy giving to others.

Mental development is the acquiring of knowledge and skills that allow us to accomplish our highest goals. It's an understanding of our problems and how to solve them. It's the ability to determine a plan and find the resources to accomplish it. It's the ability to penetrate beneath the obvious to deeper meaning and insight.

Physical development is easy to understand. Ultimately, in this area we want to build a body that feels good and has endurance, energy, and strength. We want a body that doesn't fall into disease easily and that holds up well over the long haul.

Spiritual development is the identification of our highest values and the ability to live in accordance with them. It is the cultivation of inner peace through our relationship with God. It is the understanding that all of our actions count and that what we give to others is our greatest accomplishment. Our spiritual development opens us to the wonder and magic of being alive.

Mental Under Construction

Let's look at the first of the three under construction development areas, mental development. The knowledge you have and your ability to use it to make a valuable contribution is what determines your value. In this environment, we need to be on a fast-paced learning curve now and, quite possibly, for the rest of our lives. Accept this reality and begin to enjoy the art of learning useful things that help you make a more valuable contribution.

We're living in a world where knowledge is valued above all else. There are people who can earn over a thousand dollars an hour (and others Much, much more!) simply because of the value they bring to a project or problem. Why? Because they have specialized knowledge and the

ability to use it in a way that creates dramatic value for the people they work for. It's not about control or tyrannically forcing things to happen; it's about creating value, and that takes knowledge. Simply put, this is a great time to be alive if you are willing to develop your mind.

Another key piece of the mental development puzzle is the cultivation of effective self-talk. There is an endless conversation that goes on inside each of us, the "inner dialogue" as Carlos Castaneda, author of several books about his association with a Yaqui Indian sorcerer named Don Juan Matus, puts it. The quality of that conversation has an enormous impact on how we feel and act. "Your attitude is like a rose garden," explains Mike Quindazzi, a top-producing sales manager. "It may be beautiful today, but if you don't take care of it and water it and pull the weeds out, the roses are going to die off and the weeds are going to grow. Keeping a positive attitude is like that. You have to constantly weed out the bad stuff and nurture the good stuff."

Learning breaks paradigms that limit

We all develop beliefs and ways of seeing the world that many people call paradigms. The term has been popularized by some highly visible management gurus like Stephen Covey and Joel Barker. The paradigms we form can actually limit our possibilities. For instance, if 15 years ago I wanted to build a better telephone, but my belief system held tight to the notion that the handheld part of the phone must be connected to a cord that runs to the base, then I would have worked for years at perfecting a phone that no one would want. Why? Because I would have completely missed out on the wireless innovation. All the improvements I would have made to that corded phone would have been useless because people prefer buying cordless phones. That is an example of what a limiting paradigm can do. We have paradigms in all areas of our lives, including our relationships. At times our paradigms help us, and at times they don't.

"Self-improvement, I believe, requires change," explains Chip Sollins, the president of American Pool Service, the largest pool management company in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. "How you choose to self-improve doesn't matter, as long as you continue to change and adapt. I used to be a hot-head. I had a temper. For me to self-improve in that aspect I realized I needed to change or I would not be able to get better results and grow my business. By changing, not reacting always with my

temper, and being a little more understanding, it has gotten me a lot further. I've been able to motivate people much better as a result."

A fast-paced learning approach helps us to break limiting paradigms much more quickly. Let's say you decide to become fluent in Spanish and work hard at it for several years. As a result, you plan a trip to Mexico City. Your experience of the city and the people you meet will be completely altered by this new knowledge of their language. Your new skill in the language will dramatically enhance your ability to understand the Mexican culture and, more importantly, it will increase your ability to function effectively in a city that is new to you.

When we adopt a fast-paced learning lifestyle, we quickly become aware of and move past our limiting paradigms. We don't get stuck for as long a time and can actually become perceived and valued by others as creative and innovative simply because we have less-restricting blinders on than the people around us.

Learning helps us to understand and accept the people and conditions around us. It makes us less paranoid of people who are not like us and helps us capitalize on this diverse world we live in. We become interested in others, not afraid of them. This can help us to be much more persuasive and develop better rapport with a wider variety of people. We develop a broader perspective, become more interested and interesting, and become less ignorant. These are all fabulous characteristics if you want to go after the big prizes in life, prizes like influence, affluence, and high-quality, supportive relationships. It's worth it. Get unstuck. Learn faster. Make the 5:00 decision. Read for 30 minutes today.

What are you reading?

What is the quality level of the stuff you read on a regular basis? Can you notch it up a bit? The average person, if they read just 30 minutes a day, would read over 18 300-page books a year. Do you think that would make a difference in your intellectual power over time? What if all 18 of those 18 books were of the highest quality, such as challenging novels, classic works of literature, or respected publications on business, health, fitness, and relationships. What if you took notes, reviewed those notes, and implemented them? That's fast-paced learning. That's under construction. Before you go to bed, read something that will contribute in a meaningful way to the knowledge you need to have to do a better job at what you will be doing tomorrow. Read something that will bring you more insight, like

a classic novel. Listen to a tape on the way to work tomorrow that will help you discover more of your potential!

For the person who wants to be an expert at selling ideas, consider the following topics as areas to continuously read in:

- Biographies of successful people
- Articles and books tracking and reporting business trends
- Psychology books on relationships that help you understand how people really work
- Popular business books that make the best-seller lists
- Leading management thinking, approaches, and trends
- Quote books that pull together a wide variety of stories and anecdotes
- Well-written novels, which improve your ability to use language

The more you read the better, but it doesn't take much more than 30 minutes a day to become a well-read person. Even a moderately paced reader will complete at least 15 books a year just by reading 30 minutes a day! Think of what a difference it would make over a five-year period if every day you pumped 30 minutes of quality knowledge into your brain!

Mike Finizio explains: "You have to turn yourself on and motivate yourself, but you can cheat too. You can cheat by listening to other people who are very successful in the field. I never consider myself to be the best because there is always room for improvement. So I will continually go to things like toastmasters or listen to motivational tapes. I go through the Nightingale Conent brochure each month and pick out a tape that I think may help me. I find sometimes that after listening to 12 hours of tapes that I only may get two or three good ideas from all the tapes. But those two or three ideas can bring in some tremendous returns. A lot of people just won't go through it, to shovel through all that snow to find just two or three ideas, but I will. When I'm in the car, I listen to it constantly. I think that has helped me considerably, and my family is 100% behind these types of motivational classes and education."

Input on Purpose

Think of the experiences you have during the day as being the input that is going into the creation of who you are. Make sure that at least some of this input happens on purpose. Was the physical input (food) you fed yourself of the highest quality you were capable of finding, or was what

went into your body today more a formula for creating blobulitis? Did quality information touch your memory banks, or were you feeding it titillating distractions instead? What are you taking in? What is the quality of your input? Are you still growing? Would you prescribe the quality of the information you are digesting for a person who is intent on developing to the absolute highest level? Is there any other level to shoot for? Why settle for less?

When Alexander the Great was a boy, his father searched for the best tutors in Greece. He hired special teachers to work with young Alexander on music, science, mathematics, and even hired Aristotle as his tutor in philosophy and politics. By age 30, Alexander the Great had conquered the known world for the Greek empire. Do you think there is a relationship between Alexander's learning pace and his ability to achieve? Like Alexander, to accomplish great things tomorrow, we need to take the right steps today.

Physical Under Construction I

The current state of our physical body is relatively easy to measure and, to a large extent, it determines the amount of energy we have. Are you in a strong body that has flexibility, stamina, and balance? Can you knock off 25 push-ups right now? How about ten pull-ups? Can you run a couple of miles? Can you go for a five-mile hike and enjoy it? How about a ten-mile bike ride? No one's aslung you to run a marathon or compete in a triathlon, but is your body reasonably well fit in terms of strength, stamina, flexibility, and balance?

Or is your body generally stiff, weak, aching, and lacking stamina? If so, your body is limiting you and limiting the opportunities that flow your way. It could also be limiting the impact your message has on others and even be repelling people and opportunities. A poorly fit, unhealthy body will lower your quality of life and, in general, it just feels uncomfortable to live in. When you feel that way, imagine what happens to the way you communicate. It's hard to smile with enthusiastic abandon when stuff hurts.

Three years ago, I was speaking at a convention, and I was following a man, Michael, who was presenting before me. He was at least 75 pounds overweight and had an expression on his face that appeared to be masking pain of some sort. "How are you?" I asked, shalung his hand. "To be honest," he replied, "my back is really hurting. It's been bothering me for a

couple of months now." He seemed to be out of breath and was definitely not "in .the flow." When I watched him on stage, I noticed that his energy level was very low and it had a very quieting effect on the audience. When he came backstage after his presentation, I shook his hand again and he said, "Wow, that really takes a lot out of you." I had an opportunity to meet with him several times over the next two years and he was always the same-tired and sore. I remember one meeting where we were putting together a new advertising promotion, and he was part of the team. He seemed unable to concentrate for long periods of time, always fidgeting and trying to get comfortable in his seat. As a result, he was not a very inspiring person to be around. There are a lot of people like Michael who are continually suffering because their body hurts. It's hard to solve vexing problems when the body is always crying for more and more rest.

Your body really wants action, movement, and the opportunity to express itself physically. As you raise the quality of your physical body, you improve your mental power, too. "I find that I tend to bottle things up inside, which generates a higher stress level," Paul Thomas, a successful sales manager, adds. "When I stay involved in some type of physical activity, I can get it out. It makes a big difference in the way I work. I'd say it's a key element of my success."

That's not to say there aren't some very influential people who are out of shape, because there are. The question is, however, is the quality of their life on the way up or down? We're really after a combination of quality of life, meaning, and influence. That takes a steadily improving physical vehicle that powers you into opportunities instead of providing you with excuses.

Physical development keys

Here they are, folks, the big mystery, the three components that determine the lion's share of the feeling of vitality you experience from a physical standpoint:

- What you eat and drink
- How you exercise
- How you rest and relax

We're not going to launch into a fitness program here, but let's cap all of this by saying that moderation is critical, common sense is valuable,

and non-fanatic discipline is essential. Get some commonsense advice from a person who has vitality. Go to a trained fitness expert at a local gym. Get a couple of books that exude common sense, and most importantly, look to yourself for some inner wisdom. You'll find it's not that hard to figure out. Usually, in a single paragraph, this is what most people discover:

I need to eat a stimulant-free diet (sugars, caffeine, drugs, etc.) that is rich in fruits, vegetables, grains, and low-fat proteins. I need to drink a lot of fresh water, keep alcohol intake down, and get about 30 minutes of exercise a day. I need to stretch out every day, and if I alternate aerobic workouts with strength building every other day, I can't miss. I need to get at least six solid hours of sleep every night and maybe a restful 15-minute break a couple of times a day

Do this and your vitality level will probably go up. Cut the crap, cut the excuses. It's your life. Live in a body that feels good and helps you achieve your God-given potential.

Imagine that you had a million-dollar racehorse given to you. What would you do with him? What would you feed him? What would you give him to drink? How much exercise would you give him? When would you put him to bed at night? You probably would do everything you could to maximize the horse's performance, but what about yourself? If you would treat a horse with the most well-thought-out care, why not do it with yourself. Don't you hold the same incredible potential inside waiting to be released?

About five years ago I was going through a relentless series of business trips that put me in a different city every week for about a year. I completely fell off my normal exercise regimen and felt totally exhausted and fatigued. I blamed my low energy on the travel, and it certainly was a contributing factor. By luck, I ran into a guy on the road at the end of that year who traveled even more than I did. I asked him how he dealt with the accompanying exhaustion and he laughed at me. "I've never felt better physically in all my life," was his reply. I asked him how he did it and he explained that all it really took was 45 minutes a day to either jog or hit the hotel gym. I became aware of all the excuses I had come up with for putting off exercise and realized that they were just that, excuses. I took his advice and within a month I felt Great, even though my travel hadn't

lightened up at all. I learned a valuable lesson about exercise and vitality and how easy it is to let excuses slip in and derail the train.

"I think health and exercise are so important," explains Tommy Giairno, a consistently top-producing salesperson. "If I let myself go for a couple of months and don't go to the gym, I can feel it. I feel kind of run down. I've found that you really do have to eat right and keep in shape to stay on top of your own game."

Typically, what most people say when they consider beefing up their exercise regimen is, "I would love to do it, but I don't have the time." If that's you, then we strongly suggest putting your exercise activity at the beginning of the day before the day starts to take on a life of its own. If you'll create your own personal victory first thing in the morning, you'll get it out of the way, and it is the time of day that is easiest to control in terms of unexpected interruptions and schedule screw-ups.

I was on a plane recently and was browsing through an in-flight magazine. On the cover was Jerry Rice, the superstar receiver on the San Francisco 49ers football team. The article explained that at 33 years old, Rice was already way past the typical "prime" for an NFL player. What the writer discovered, however, was that Jerry Rice, who should have been at the end of his career, is faster, stronger, mentally tougher, and performing better than guys 10 years younger. Why? Commitment and discipline. The writer observed Rice's workout regimen to try and determine the secret of his longevity and a career free of serious injuries. What was the secret he found? Simply this: Jerry Rice works out harder than anyone else in the league. Every year he increases his strength, endurance, speed, and power. His daily regimen of sprints and power drills frightens off even the most conditioned athletes who often visit with the intention of "hanging" with Jerry Rice but soon find shortly into the workout that keeping up with Rice is easier said than done. Jerry Rice will probably go down as the greatest wide receiver in NFL history because of his discipline and commitment to physical under construction.

Do you and I need to get to that level of fitness? Probably not, but we can, like Jerry Rice, gain access to a much higher level of vitality and accompanying performance if we pay strict attention to our exercise needs. I

Make rest and relaxation a necessity, not your primary goal

"Thank God it's Friday," is an interesting saying that is pretty well representative of an attitude that values having fun more than making a contri-

bution. Why is it that two days off on the weekend can create so much excitement and positive anticipation? What makes the prospect of free time on the weekend so relieving?

Rest must become preparation for the next event, not the goal itself. It's maintenance, not the reason for being. We all need to rest and relax, and we should rest and relax well, in spectacular fashion, so that we are Truly prepared for whatever comes next. Often, however, our relaxation time is anything but restful. As a result, we are exhausted for what we consider the contribution part of our lives and are too often in a frame of mind that says "I'm going to tolerate this rather than leverage it!"

Over a period of time, all sea-going vessels accumulate barnacles. Barnacles are marine organisms that form a hard shell attached to a ship's surface, fouling up the ship's bottom. The accumulation of small individual barnacles on a ship's bottom can add tons to the ship's weight, creating a tremendous drag as the ship glides through the water. This reduces the ship's efficiency and can add huge costs to the ship's operation. At regular intervals, the ship must be dry-docked to have the barnacles scraped from its bottom. When you feel inefficient and tired because you aren't getting the right kind of rest, it's like carrying around a load of extra barnacles. Those barnacles, that tired feeling can prevent you from coming across to others with the level of punch you need.

Rest is not recreation. We need rest in order to fully enjoy recreation. Often, we mistakenly confuse the two and end up having a lesser experience doing both. How much sleep do you need to really feel refreshed in the morning? Find out and make sure you get it every night.

Get the appearance you really want

From a purely selfish standpoint, wouldn't you rather live in a body that looks and feels the way you really want? You deserve to, provided it is the body that is the best possible version of you. We should not strive to be the image of someone else, but simply the best possible version of ourselves. Earn the appearance you really want. What can compare to the feeling you get when you step to the front of the boardroom, ready to make a presentation, knowing that you look great, your clothes fit, you I feel energetic, and nothing is hurting? When you are in shape, you look great in clothes. and you can wear clothes that make you look and feel great. Create a comfortable body to live your life in!

Spiritual Under Construction

This is a touchy area for many people. Typically, when we conduct goal setting seminars, most people feel that they are not growing and have not grown for years in their spiritual life. Perhaps because spirituality is often shrouded in mystical gobbledygook, it is hard to get a firm grasp on. However, some very simple daily practices can create a dramatic effect on you spiritually. When you develop a stronger sense of your spiritual center and have a greater sense of inner peace, you'll be better able to deal with the daily stress of change, time constraints, having to do more with less, and so on.

Don, a businessperson I truly admire, runs a business in Chicago. He has grace under pressure, and in business situations he is able to stay composed, even when people around him are falling into emotional turmoil. Having observed him over several years and marveled at his profound balance and equanimity, I asked him how he does it. He told me that it comes from his inner sense of spirituality. You may know someone like Don, but you probably know a lot more people who aren't like him at all—people who sway with every emotional wind that blows. You can develop more composure by paying more attention to your spiritual development, and this in turn can really help you in business.

A good place to start is to read something uplifting from one of the great spiritual texts (the Bible, Bhagavad Gita, Koran, Tao Te Ching, etc.) at night before you go to bed. Read only a small section and take time to think about its meaning. You may even want to keep a journal of spiritual insights nearby that you can jot notes and special thoughts into. Writing down your thoughts and beliefs about God is a great way to increase your sense of spirituality.

Another worthwhile activity is to do something good for someone each day with no thought of remuneration or reward. Simply do it for the joy of giving to another human being. Whether it's writing a quick thank-you note to a coworker who helped you out today, or telling the manager of the restaurant about the good service your waiter gave you, or saying something positive (and true!) about someone behind their back, you'll find that these positive contributions will impact the way you feel. Volunteer time regularly to a local youth development program or donate some time to serve at a local homeless shelter. There are countless opportunities each day to give to others selflessly.

Perhaps the most powerful of all spiritual activities is the cultivation of inner calm, peace, and, ultimately, quiet. Prayer and meditation are the most popular ways to quiet your thoughts and sense your bigger purpose. Living in accordance with your highest values doesn't hurt either. If you did the one life, one boss blueprint, then you already know what those values are.

A walk in the woods or a visit to a tranquil place can reconnect you with nature and your spiritual center. At lunchtime drop by a church and spend 20 minutes by yourself. Don't neglect your spiritual development, because it is the rock of strength that we all come to lean on from time to time.

There is a story by an unknown author about a dream he once had. In the dream, he was walking down the beach beside the Lord. As they walked, above him the sky was reflecting each experience of his life. When he reached the end of the beach, he looked back and saw the two sets of footprints extending down the way, but suddenly, he noticed that every once in a while there was only one set of footprints. And each time he noticed the two sets of tracks turning into one, there was above reflected in the sky a series of events that were times of great trial and suffering in his life. Upon realizing this, he turned to the Lord and said, "You promised that if I walked with You, You would always be by my side. Why did You desert me in times of my greatest need?"

And the Lord listened with compassion and said, "My beloved child, I wouldn't desert you when you needed Me. When you see only one set of footprints, those were the times in your life that I carried you in My arms."

It is from the well of our spiritual nature that we all must draw during life's most difficult moments. It pays to increase the size of the well a little each day.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED RECENTLY?

Take out a pen and paper. Make a list of all the significant things you have learned this week. Difficult? Take a whole month if necessary. Still difficult? How about the whole year. If someone asked you to make a speech today on the most important lessons you have learned this year, what would they be?

Shouldn't there be meaningful learning taking place each week? Each day? Are we being unreasonable when we say you should be able to tick

off some meaningful progress each day before you go to bed? How about a journal that asks you for your learning breakthroughs each day? What is I reasonable to expect in terms of progress each week? Can you chart some progress? If yes, congratulations! If not, why not? Get started now.

5:00 Opportunities

One thing for sure, as you approach your post-5:00 challenge, the one thing you don't want to do is bore yourself to death. Shacking up with three hours of business books is not what we're talking about. Consider all of these alternatives:

Mental

- Enroll in a class at a local junior college.
- Read a biography of someone you admire.
- Read the latest "on trend" book on your profession.
- Enroll in a conference or convention that will help you grow.
- Learn a new computer program.
- Take a guitar or piano lesson.

Physical

- Take a walk each night with a loved one.
- Go dancing or take a dancing lesson.
- Climb a nearby hill and enjoy the view.
- Hit some golf balls.
- Go to the gym and work out.

Spiritual

- Read a spiritually oriented book for a few minutes a day.
- Take a yoga class.
- Close your eyes and relax for 30 minutes a day.
- Take a walk by the lake and enjoy the sunset.
- Stop by your place of worship.

All of these things can be considered under construction activities. Be creative. Do something that puts you into a learning/discovery mode and, more importantly, pour yourself into it. When you're in an under con-

struction activity, you have to eliminate distractions and focus all of your concentration on that activity. If you're thinking about something else, anxious to get that activity over with rather than giving it 100%, then you are cheating. Remember, the real learning comes from the effort.

Time Efficient Under Construction

Are you ready for the ultimate concept in time management? Here it is. Find activities that knock on the doors of several goal areas at once. We'll call these compound activities. For instance, tomorrow call up the highest-ranking finance person in your company and offer to take him or her out to lunch. Tell them that you would like to learn more about their ideas on how to make your department more profitable. In this case, you're combining learning (an accounting person's perspective) with relationship building, with finding ideas you can use to achieve results. Let's say you need to work on your relationship with your 10-year-old child. Why not go on a bike ride together tonight, pack a snack, and have a mini-picnic, which, of course, is a great time to talk and pal around. Or how about you and your spouse developing the habit of going for a 15-minute walk every night just before bed. On this walk, let each person talk for half the time about what they perceive to be their most significant accomplishment of the day with absolutely no interruptions. No criticizing allowed! The walk ends with each person complimenting the accomplishment or sharing some encouragement with the other. Imagine what a couple of months of these walks would do for your relationship.

With compound activities you improve several areas of your life at once. You can get exercise, work on a relationship, and improve your verbal skills all at the same time.

The next time you go to lunch with a colleague, develop a list of ideas that would help cut costs in your department and submit them to your boss together and possibly even offer to spearhead their implementation. Give up running one night for a change of pace and for some fun and relationship building, take a dance lesson. Then follow it up with a night of high energy dancing. Why not sign up for piano lessons with your eight-year old? You've probably always wanted to be able to play, and what a great way to learn-with your child! The two of you will share that marvelous skill together for the rest of your life. Exercise, family time together,

healthy food, fresh air-the benefits flow to you quickly when you learn to use compound activities.

Time management isn't exclusively about how to organize your appointment book, it's about how to accomplish results, how to make things improve for yourself. We are, as a business culture, overly focused on to dos and underfocused on value. There are miracles waiting to happen in that 5:00-till-sleep window. Make them happen! Before you go to sleep each night ask yourself if you did the following:

- Increase your value?
- Increase your stamina?
- Increase your strength?
- Increase your flexibility?
- Increase your mental power?
- Increase your vocabulary?
- Improve your memory?
- Deepen your spiritual roots?
- Improve your ability to observe, notice, and listen?

Learn to experience true joy as you feel yourself expanding in these areas.

Did Your Learning Curve Drop Off (Sharply) Along the Way?

"I think we have to first recognize what we have inside that needs to improve," explains Nola Beldegreen, a highly successful advertising professional. "We have to notice what doesn't feel right to know what we need to improve. When we feel something isn't right inside, that is an indication that we need to work on it."

Kindergarten through high school was level one. College and graduate school, if you did it, was level two. More importantly, though, we all eventually get to level three, which is probably where you are now. And what's fascinating is that you can overcome a deficit in level two by getting to work in level three.

You are now on an advanced, self-directed, lifelong learning program. No one is going to enforce it but you. Learning has become an elective. Has your learning curve dropped off because you're not working at it any more?

No one is saying that you have to come home and study for seven hours a night. There are many ways to learn. What we are talking about is how you approach and invest in your free time that you have bought into. Is it goal achieving or stress relieving?

Overtime Happens at Home

Overtime is a pretty neat concept. You get paid time and a half or even double time when you stay late and clock in some extra hours. This is exactly what happens when you buy the under construction principle. You will be clocking overtime at home. You will be increasing your value, increasing the joy you get out of life, and increasing the likelihood of positive opportunities coming your way. Guess what that will do to your energy and enthusiasm?

It starts today, now, right now. Stop worrying about the tomorrows you will never live. Throw yourself into developing you. Do it now, because you'll get another chance tomorrow when tomorrow becomes today. Learning to function in the now is the way to wrestle out of yourself more of who you really are and the magic of who you truly can be. It all starts when you make a plan, when you go through the vision-to-reality process, when you identify the habits you need to remove and the habits you need to build and start putting them into your daily schedule as priority number one every day.

Take today as a personal challenge. Go to bed knowing you have constructed a better you as a result of today. Find out what your best effort is really all about. Don't take under construction halfway anymore. Go for it. Just do it!

It's Evolution, Not Revolution!

So how do we get to this exalted state of mind when it seems light years away? You start where you are. For example, right now, you're reading this book. How could you read this book with more of a commitment to get the most from it? Do you have a highlighter in one hand? Do you have a notepad out? The whole point is that it starts right now, not in five minutes, five hours, five days, five years, or five decades. Right now! Soon, you'll put the book down and be off to the next activity. The mistake we often make is to labor too much over the selection of what we're going to

do rather than approaching whatever we happen to be doing with a stronger under construction approach. Want to watch TV? Surf the channels and find something that is really interesting. Take notes! Watch actively. Certainly we do need to plan the right activities, but you can and must start with whatever you're doing now. That's the key. The opportunity is right here, right now. Focus on today. Make today the objective, not tomorrow. Don't think about when you'll start, just start with whatever your next activity is. Put more of yourself into it. Do it as though God were watching, waiting to applaud you for your spectacular performance.

Mark Ferraro, a top-performing sales professional, explains: "As a human being, if you don't learn, you don't get any better unless you grow and improve. It's part of the growing process. I got it fairly young that learning is something that is nonstop. I've heard it from people I admired my whole life. The old guy in the office that's the most successful always says, 'I never stopped learning.' Self-improvement to me has always meant improving and getting better."

One of the most inspiring truths about improvement and performance is that you don't have to improve 100% to get 100% better results. Small improvements in performance can yield enormous benefits. Consider major league baseball. The difference between a lifetime .280 hitter and a .300 hitter in terms of prestige, recognition, and fame is enormous. Nearly all lifetime .300 hitters, such as Babe Ruth, Willie Mays, Ted Williams, and Rod Carew, make it to the Hall of Fame. That is not necessarily so with .280 hitters. You would think the difference between the performance of these two groups would be enormous, but when you do the math, the difference in performance is actually very small. A .300 hitter only gets one more hit in every 50 at bats than the .280 hitter. That's just one more hit in about 10 games! This holds true in many other arenas: the proposal that won out by just a hair, the horse that wins by just a nose, or the golfer who wins the tournament by only one stroke. What we find is that the top performers in any field are not twice as good as everyone else, even though they may be enjoying twice the benefits.

Is the salesperson who gets the order twice as good as the competition? Not always. Maybe she is only a little better than her nearest competitor, but she gets 100% of the order and her competitor gets nothing! That's the way it is in business. When you're a little better than your competitor most of the time, you do a lot better than they do.

Dave Doehr, a highly successful leader in the telecommunications field, explains: "You're going to come across your little gold nuggets every once in awhile. Whether it's from someone you see in the office, or something you hear on a tape, or something you see on video. And you're probably going to sit back and say, wow, that's a great idea and that could really work. But where the rubber meets the road is in the implementation and practice of what you learn. That's what separates the achievers from the wannabes. You have to practice the little things you learn every day that add up to a big improvement over time."

Become the Boss Again and Take Control

Where do you need to grow and develop? Take out your life blueprint and activity planning sheets and write down some activities that can jump start your learning curve and put you under construction. Put those items into your calendar. It's the putting into the calendar step that most people never get to. Don't con yourself into believing that you're too busy to squeeze in a little under construction activity. You've got all the time in the day to grow!