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The Laws of LIFETIME GROWTH

ALWAYS MAKE YOUR FUTURE
BIGGER THAN YOUR PAST

*"This little book
can change your life, as its
principles have changed mine."*

—DAVID BACH

Author of the #1 New York Times bestsellers
The Automatic Millionaire and *Start Late, Finish Rich*

an excerpt from

***The Laws of Lifetime Growth:
Always Make Your Future
Bigger Than Your Past***

by Dan Sullivan & Catherine Nomura
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Preface

Dan Sullivan has spent the better part of his life observing how people grow, identifying what gets in their way, and coming up with tools, structures, and processes that help them to overcome these obstacles to reach the next level of personal or professional growth. It started at the kitchen table of a neighbor, Mrs. Wetzel, when he was six years old, and has grown into the basis for The Strategic Coach®, a \$25 million coaching company that has helped more than 10,000 entrepreneurs from around the world.

Mrs. Wetzel used to say, “Danny’s been here, and I feel much better now,” after Dan’s questions helped her to think through what was weighing on her mind and gain new perspectives. More than 50 years later, it’s people like best-selling authors David Bach and Jack Canfield, along with thousands of other successful entrepreneurs in more than 60 different industries, who credit Dan with having helped them to see things in new ways that have contributed to their growth and success.

One of Dan’s unique talents is to be able to take broad swaths of universal wisdom and reduce them to simple, practical tools that allow people to apply these principles in their everyday lives. The laws of lifetime growth are the result of Dan’s taking his observations about the growth experiences of thousands of entrepreneurs and others, seeing what worked and didn’t work in all those situations, and distilling them into a set of ten simple laws that can be followed by anyone.

When I met Dan and his business and life partner, Babs Smith, seven years ago, it was our combined passion for growth and the desire to free people to make their best contributions in the world that brought us together. I had spent many years focused on how the poorest of the poor could take more control over the forces and direction of their own growth and had arrived at the belief that entrepreneurial thinking and activity offered the best opportunities. Dan's ideas stunned me with their simplicity and effectiveness.

As I've worked with Babs and Dan to capture and shape growth opportunities for The Strategic Coach, they have always allowed me to conduct my own "rogue experiments," testing certain tools and concepts Dan has created to see if they prove to be as powerful and applicable for audiences outside our program. In writing this book with him, I found it a pleasure to be able to extend his ideas beyond the realm of successful entrepreneurs and to show how they apply equally well to people from many different backgrounds and circumstances.

In fact, anyone can use the wisdom in this book at any stage in life. Look anywhere, in any culture, in any situation, at people of any age, and you'll see that where there is growth, these laws are in action.

We're very happy to be able to present them to you in this brief, accessible format. And we wish you continued courage and imagination as you pursue your own lifetime growth adventure.

Catherine Nomura
August 2005

Introduction

The Desire to Grow

Growth is a fundamental desire of all human beings. No matter what kinds of goals you have or what you strive for, whatever you want to see in your life that's not there now is about growth. Growth is at the root of everything that gives us a feeling of accomplishment, satisfaction, meaning, and progress.

Yet sometimes people do stop growing. We all have images we can call to mind. The movies and literature are full of them, as is real life. Take, for example, the character of Uncle Rico in the film *Napoleon Dynamite*, who constantly replays a moment of lost opportunity from his high school days; or Norma Desmond, the reclusive and mostly forgotten former movie star in *Sunset Boulevard*. More commonly, you may be familiar with the retiree who's driving his wife crazy because he suddenly doesn't know what to do with himself; the addict whose life has become solely focused on whatever it takes to find the next fix; the man who is still treating women the same way he did 40 years ago and doesn't understand why they don't respond the same way; the person whose life consists of clocking in and out day after day at a dead-end job, going home, sleeping, and then doing it all over again.

There are examples all around us of people who for some reason have stopped growing, either tem-

porarily or indefinitely. If you've picked up this book, chances are you don't want to be one of them. Maybe you're feeling a bit stuck. Maybe you're in the midst of a particularly challenging growth period and you're looking for insight, encouragement, or direction; or maybe you just want all the resources you can get on your side as you pursue your own growth path. Most of us struggle with issues related to growth at various points in our lives. The entrepreneurs with whom we work at The Strategic Coach are some of the most successful and internally motivated people on the planet, and yet they face just as many challenges in their growth as anyone else does.

The ten laws in this book are like mirrors you can use to reflect your behavior, to see if it's supporting or undermining your continued growth. Use them as you would a hallway mirror on your way out the door—do a quick check to make sure everything looks good, adjust if necessary, and then carry on. Or take a longer, more studied look to reveal areas that might take more work to transform. The laws are useful for this purpose because it's often hard to tell whether you're on the right path just by how you feel.

Rosabeth Moss Kanter has wisely observed that “everything looks like a failure in the middle.” Sometimes growing pains can feel like failure—and sometimes failure is a part of growth. Successful entrepreneurs know this well. Most of them fail before they succeed. Dan likes to refer to his first two bank-

ruptcies as “market research.” That doesn’t mean they felt any less like failures at the time, but only that the lessons he took out of them were essential to building the growing multimillion-dollar company he and his life partner, Babs Smith, run today.

Checking in with the laws can help you to stay the course when growth is difficult. In many of the examples in this book, challenging or seemingly less-than-ideal situations offered people rich opportunities to grow. The laws can help you to extract the maximum value from experiences you might otherwise try to avoid or forget.

It also pays to check your behavior against the laws when things are going well. Getting what you want or achieving your goals can make you feel good, but it won’t necessarily keep you on the path to further growth. In fact, it can often lead to growth traps. Things like money, applause, rewards, comfort, and even a brilliant past can be quite seductive. If these *means* to growth begin to overshadow purpose, performance, contribution, confidence, and the sense of a bigger future—things that *drive* growth—they can quickly undermine your ability to keep growing in the future.

These laws come from our observations about what makes growth happen. If the word *law* makes you uncomfortable, it might help to think about the message on a tongue-in-cheek T-shirt we saw recently in the neighborhood. It had a picture of a policeman

holding up his hand, accompanied by the caption, “Obey gravity! It’s the law.” Of course, natural laws operate whether you obey them or not. If you disregard gravity and jump off a rooftop, it won’t be the “gravity police” that get you. Likewise, no “growth police” are going to come after you if you don’t follow these laws. You’ll just find that you probably won’t grow as much.

You might want to think of each law as being prefaced by, “You will continue to grow if . . .” For example, you will continue to grow if you always make your future bigger than your past. That’s the way life works. You can rely on it. By understanding the laws, you can more consciously and predictably keep yourself growing, just as scientific laws help us to predict the outcomes of actions in the physical world.

Aligning your behavior with these laws gives you more control over your own future, which allows you to increase your freedom and self-determination. It also places the responsibility for your growth squarely on your own shoulders. You can choose to engage with life in this way, or not. Growth is not always easy, but the rewards are great. Life presents us with opportunities to grow almost constantly, so when you make growth a central goal, life will always appear to be full of opportunity.

As you become more growth oriented in your behavior and thinking, and you begin to experience how this impacts your life and the lives of others, it becomes

increasingly clear that the rewards of this approach greatly outweigh its challenges. The desire to grow is nothing less than the love of existence—a passion for being here and a deep desire to fully explore life. When you commit to aligning your actions with the principles embedded in these ten laws, you also commit to making the most of the life you've been given—all of it. And, after all, what greater gift could you possibly give to yourself, or to the world, than that?

Law One

Always Make Your Future Bigger Than Your Past

A bigger future is essential for lifetime growth. The past is useful because it is rich with experiences that are worth thinking about in new ways—and all of these valuable experiences can become raw material for creating an even bigger future. Approach your past with this attitude, and you will have an insatiable desire for even better, more enjoyable experiences. Use your past to continually create a bigger future, and you will separate yourself from situations, relationships, and activities that can trap you there.

Your future is your property. Because, by definition, it hasn't happened yet, it exists only in your mind. This means that you can choose to make it whatever you want. The act of making your future bigger than your past is the very act of growth itself: the bigger future is the vision, and growth is what makes it real. A bigger future includes anything you want to see that's somehow an improvement on what's true now: greater learning, contribution, opportunities, capabilities, understanding, confidence, quality of life, compassion, connectedness. The list goes on and on, limited only

by what you can imagine. Some people's bigger futures are mostly about themselves, and others' encompass contributions to many other people and things.

Believing in a Bigger Future

In order to make your future bigger than your past, you first have to believe that it's possible to have a bigger future, no matter what stage you're at in life or what your circumstances are. Often, this belief alone is enough to keep you growing.

By anyone's standards, Dan Schmidt is a very successful entrepreneur. He has grown and continues to run several successful companies. He has been very well rewarded financially, but he prefers to focus on what it has allowed him to create for others: giving young people opportunities that don't exist elsewhere in his industry, and creating jobs and a positive working environment for his teams. Yet Dan knows that something doesn't feel quite right anymore. For the last six months, he's been trying to figure out what his bigger future looks like. Sure, he can wake up every day, do the same things, and get the same results, but he's looking for the next big challenge—the next uncomfortable stretch that will allow him to apply his talents and build on what he's already accomplished in more meaningful ways, so that he can create not just wealth and jobs and opportunities for others, but a legacy.

Because of this burning need to find what's next, Dan notices things that he might not have seen before. He hears an ad on the radio about cremation versus burial and wonders who will end up with the urn, or if there's a more significant legacy he can leave for his family. He thinks about the volunteer work he does for an environmental group and questions whether that might somehow hold the key to what's next. He's trying different things and opening himself to seeing in different ways. This, in itself, is growth.

As he continues to run his businesses and live his life, he's also applying his creativity and ingenuity to trying to figure out this one big question: if everything I've done so far is just the beginning, what's next? Dan's quest for what his bigger future will look like is causing him to grow in ways that go beyond what his businesses and all his accomplishments to date have done.

Well, fine, you may say. Dan's a successful entre-preneur and he's used to growing. He has lots of money and resources and he's his own boss, so of course he can think about a bigger future. What if you're poor and no one has ever told you that you can do anything better than what you're doing now or what your parents did? Or what if, no matter what you do, you can't seem to get ahead? Our answer is, even in those circumstances you can still have a vision of a future that's bigger than your past, and make it real.

The Courage to Think Big

Take the case of Hilda, Catherine's mother. Hilda grew up in a very poor family, the third youngest of eight children. In fact, her family was so poor that her parents couldn't afford to support their children while they finished school, once they reached legal working age. All of Hilda's older brothers and sisters had quit school at 16 and taken whatever jobs they could get to help earn their keep. In the 1950s, the prospects of a decent future for a girl of 16 without a high school diploma were grim. Hilda was a good student and, fortunately, quite headstrong. She had a burning passion to become a teacher, but of course to do this she would have to complete her education. So Hilda made a brave decision: she decided to leave home and go it on her own, supported by scholarships that some encouraging teachers helped her to find. At 16, she left her family home forever and went to live at the YWCA. She finished high school and then university, became a teacher, and taught for more than 30 years.

The world is full of stories of people who, like Hilda, grew up without a lot of resources or encouragement but nonetheless believed that a bigger future was possible. Some of them are celebrities like Oprah, but many are ordinary people whose stories are less well known. What they all have in common is that they made a decision at some point to have a bigger future—in some cases a much bigger future.

Small Steps Keep You Growing

But what if you're older or in poor health, and you have many great memories and experiences behind you but perhaps only a few years left? How do you make your future bigger than your past in that case? Even if you suspect that only days, weeks, or months remain after a fully lived life, you can still make your future bigger than your past. Growing can be as simple as making an effort to learn something that increases your perspective on the world, or using the time you have left to make a new kind of contribution.

Antonio Pijuan is a spry 98-year-old Spaniard, living outside Toronto, who still has strong opinions and an appreciation of pretty women. Earlier in his life he was a farmer in Catalonia, and he experienced the Spanish Civil War and two world wars firsthand. Antonio remains intensely curious about the world despite having lived through almost a century of history. Because he's not as agile as he used to be, television has become his window on much of what's new and interesting. After seeing a feature on the Bata Shoe Museum in Toronto, he asked his granddaughter, Lisa, to take him there. He couldn't believe that there could be so many shoes in one building! At the end of the day, he said to her in Spanish, "Thank you. I learned so much today."

This is an example of how a bigger future doesn't have to be grand or flashy. It doesn't have to involve

great leaps forward. Most growth happens as a result of many small steps. The key is to keep taking them.

Making the Most of the Future You've Got

Sometimes people's futures get cut short by events beyond their control. But a bigger future is not about how much time you have left; it's about what you do with that time. Here's where we pick up the story of Hilda again.

Hilda truly loved teaching and learning. Both were intrinsic to who she was. She knew she was making a contribution to her students' lives, and their success and appreciation were her greatest rewards. It often seemed that she learned as much from them as they did from her. Once, on a trek in Thailand, after going missing in a hill tribe village, she was located sitting outside a hut surrounded by all the local children. They were teaching her words in the Lahu language, and she was teaching them words in English. Bursts of laughter had given them away.

At 59, Hilda was diagnosed with a rare, untreatable form of cancer. By the time the tumor was found, she had only a few months to live. Within moments of receiving this news, she made a decision to turn her remaining time into the most significant learning and teaching contribution of her life. She resolved to handle her situation with all the grace she could muster and to

be an example to others of how to deal with dying in a dignified, conscious, and thoughtful way. Her first student was a young doctor who had jumped the gun and told her the night before her official diagnosis that she didn't have cancer. Gently but clearly, she explained to him how his misinformation had affected her, and her family and friends. It was a lesson he would surely not forget.

She went on to inspire many people over the following months with her attitude and courage. Dying is a difficult subject to educate people about because most of us don't want to face it. Somehow, she managed to balance hope with pragmatism—not giving up, not being in denial, but realistically and calmly talking about the future and what might happen.

When Hilda died, five months later, the funeral home had to open an additional wing to accommodate all the unexpected visitors. More than 300 people went to pay their respects and celebrate what her life had meant to them. As bravely as Hilda had lived, starting with her big decision to leave home at 16, she died even more courageously. She had been determined to squeeze every growth opportunity out of her last few months, even though in many ways her physical quality of life had been severely diminished by the disease. No matter what your circumstances, you can always make your future bigger than your past. Use what you've learned and done as a foundation for something bigger—bigger questions, bigger contributions, bigger

achievements, bigger learning. Allow what you know to point you toward the vastness of what you have yet to discover. All of these things will keep you growing to the very last days of your life.

Where Do I Start?

Ask yourself a future-focused question. If you're wondering how to think about what your bigger future might look like, a question is a good place to start. It could be a question like Dan Schmidt's: if everything I've done until now is just the beginning, what's next? Or it could simply be the question, if I were sitting here three years from today, looking back on today, what would have to have happened in that time for me to be happy with my progress? In The Strategic Coach Program™, we call this The R-Factor Question®, where *R* stands for *relationship*. In this case, it's helping you to establish your relationship with your own bigger future.

Set goals. Creating goals for yourself automatically takes you out of the past and creates a bigger future. If you're having trouble coming up with meaningful goals, a good way to start is to write down five or ten of your accomplishments from the past year and then think about what would represent a further achievement in each area. This is really an exercise to get you answering Dan Schmidt's question. You will begin to see what you've done and what's next.

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