

# No More Regrets!

CREATE A BETTER TOMORROW TODAY

30 Ways to  
Greater Happiness  
and Meaning  
in Your Life

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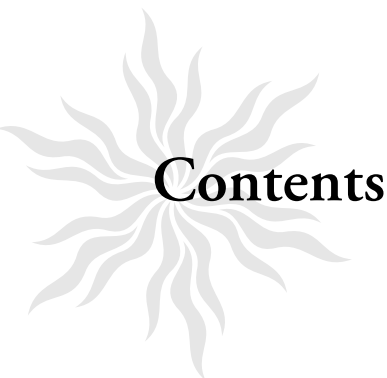
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An Excerpt From

***No More Regrets!:***  
***30 Ways to Greater Happiness and Meaning in Your Life***

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# Foreword

YOU'RE ABOUT TO take a journey: thirty engaging and memorable brief stories will trigger insight into the choices you've made in your life. Not bad choices, not good choices—just choices. Choices that look a little different with the addition of time. Choices that may have caused you to judge yourself and wonder if a different choice would have been better. It's so easy to become self-critical, second-guess our decisions, and agonize over how we'd do things differently if only we could do them over again. What we need is a way to avoid this trap of regret. This is exactly what Marc's book *No More Regrets!* offers, and it has personally helped me recognize the importance of getting rid of regret in my life.

For the last thirty-nine years, I have worked as a teacher, coach, and consultant. While this has brought me much joy and success, I have felt the negative power of regret firsthand. For example, early in my career I was asked to step in as the coach of an aspiring high school tennis team when a colleague of mine suffered a fatal heart attack. We made

it to the championship but we lost in the finals, which is an episode I often revisit. I wonder if those young athletes would have won the title if I had made better decisions as the coach. I also think about how, as a young dad, I made some impulsive parenting decisions that fell short of what I expected of myself. In addition, not taking a strong stand on my personal values eventually jeopardized a relationship with my business partner, whom I truly cared about. Each of these experiences left me feeling like a victim of regret and for a period of time interfered with my self-confidence as well as my ability to continue to learn and grow and be the difference maker I wanted to be.

After reading just a few chapters of *No More Regrets!*, I was struck by a revelation: there is actually a way to avoid regrets. Remember those times when the light bulb went on in your head and all of a sudden you “got it”? That is the experience I had when I read this book. It became clearer to me that while we all have regrets, we are capable of moving past them and putting an end to regret in the future. Personal integrity in my actions and in my decision making will never be easy, but it’s possible and ultimately a choice that I have the power to make. If I can learn to live the values I say I profess, I will still make mistakes but I will have no more regrets. I encourage you to reread this book many times as I have and share it with your friends, family, and coworkers. Enjoy the journey.

TOM CHAMPOUX

Founder and President, The Effectiveness Institute



# Introduction

You only live once, but if you do it right,  
once is enough.

MAE WEST

NONE OF US want to look back on life with regrets or to be that person who reflects on the past and says, “If only I would have spent more quality time with the people I love most in my life . . .” “If only I would have taken that vacation instead of working so much . . .” “If only I would have gone with my gut . . .” “If only I could take back what I said . . .” But how often does that person sound a lot like you and me?

## **Gary’s Gift**

Not too long ago a good friend of mine passed away—he was in his early forties and left a lot of loving friends and family behind. Gary’s battle with cancer lasted several years, and during that time I learned what a true fighter he was. When he was first diagnosed, the doctors told him he had only a few months to live. But Gary refused to give up and remained dedicated to working hard, traveling, and most of all spending quality time with his children in the midst of grueling chemotherapy regimens. Gary had

always lived life to the fullest and was a shining example of how to seize the day and live in the moment.

Six months before he died, Gary came to visit me. We sat on the back patio enjoying the beautiful summer day and reminiscing about old times. But when I asked Gary how he was feeling, he didn't want to talk about it. Instead he asked me lots of questions—what my family had planned for vacation, how work was going, and what my dreams were for the future. Then he asked what my biggest regret was.

“My *biggest* regret?” I repeated.

“Yes. If there was one thing in your life that you could go back and do differently, what would it be?” he clarified.

“I need more time to think about it,” I replied, “but since you brought it up, what's *your* biggest regret?”

I watched Gary's tired face grow tormented in the uncomfortable silence that followed. Finally he spoke. “There was a girl I dated many years ago . . . I should have never let her go.” Gary paused, then said, “She was my soul mate, yet I didn't realize it until twenty-three years later. When I got sick, she started calling me in the hospital. It was then that I realized what a deep connection she and I had, one that I somehow failed to recognize when I knew her back in college. I can't help but wonder how my life would have been different with her in it, and I kick myself because now it's too late. When people say that life is short, I literally know what they mean. As my longtime friend, you must promise me that you'll always do your best to live *your* life without any more regrets. For that you



will always thank me.” Gary hugged me, and I knew it was the last time I would ever have the opportunity to spend a quality afternoon with him.

Three things became clearer to me on that day than ever before:

- We all have regrets.
- Our regrets go with us to the grave.
- There is no time like the present to start living life without any more of them.

This wake-up call was Gary’s gift to me and one I now want to give to you. The choices we make in life, as well as the missed opportunities, have a profound impact on our happiness in the end. To start working toward the goal of a life with no more regrets, we first have to understand what regrets are and why we have them in the first place.

## **What Are Regrets?**

My definition of regrets is as follows:

Regrets are the things we do that we wish we hadn’t done *and* the things we fail to do that we wish we had done, both of which result in unhappiness, disappointment, or remorse.

In other words, regrets are all about our actions and inactions. Therefore, regrets are about our behaviors and the feelings of unhappiness, disappointment, or remorse

we attach to those behaviors. For example, if you've ever broken a promise, acted inconsistently with your values, made poor choices, or hurt someone as a result of what you've said or done (or failed to say or do), it was your *behaviors* that led to your feelings of regret.

Understanding regret as a product of our behaviors has direct implications for how we make decisions. Typically we bring a number of elements into our decision-making framework, such as timing, context, opportunity, cost, how we'll feel about the decision after it is made, what the impact will be, and so on.

What this book brings to the table is that for every decision we make, we must *also* ask the following two behavioral questions as a standard part of our decision-making process:

- Will I have regrets if I do it (or don't do it)?
- Will I avoid having regrets if I do it (or don't do it)?

For example, will it cause a fight with my wife? Will I cut it too close to make it to my destination? Will he forgive me if I do it? If I don't speak up now, will I regret it forever? The takeaway here is that many of the decisions we make need to take into account the regret factor. Be sure to ask yourself these two behavior-focused questions as you make decisions going forward if you want to have a life with no more regrets.

Keep in mind that regrets are not necessarily the same as mistakes. We can learn a lot from our mistakes, but

we don't necessarily have to regret them. In fact, some of the best lessons in life come from making mistakes. Essentially, our regrets and our mistakes can differ by the positive or negative feelings we attribute to them. While we will all make mistakes, the key is to avoid making mistakes that we ultimately regret.

One additional aspect of understanding regrets is that our regrets have some common themes, though the sources of our individual regrets are unique to each of us:

- We get stuck in ruts and become prisoners to our regrets.
- We take some things or people for granted.
- We sacrifice our authenticity.
- We stop growing, learning, and evolving.
- We become overly self-absorbed, insensitive, and judgmental.

## **What This Book Offers**

The thirty ways to greater happiness and meaning that I present to you in this book are divided into five overarching strategies for having no more regrets, each of which is based on an identified theme of regret:

1. Get out of your rut.
2. Take nothing for granted.
3. Aim for authenticity.
4. Stretch yourself.
5. Be a force of goodness.

I am confident that out of the thirty ways I offer for living life with no more regrets, at least a few chapters will really resonate with you. Just one or two new insights can be the key to greater happiness and meaning in your life, career, and relationships. In other words, choosing just one action or new way of doing things can lead to a potentially life-changing moment. For example, when you're stuck in a rut, learning a new way to look at that situation might help you get out of the rut and change your trajectory. Likewise, if you view yourself as being a victim of your circumstances, focusing on what is within your control is empowering and can make you realize that you can break out of this state of mind.

## **Making the Most of This Book**

So here's how to use this book: first, you can use it for yourself, at work, in your career, with your family, or in your relationships. As you are reading each chapter, evaluate how well the message fits for you. If it's a good fit, ask the following:

- What insights does it provide?
- What does it inspire you to stop doing or start doing?
- How will this impact your life?

Next, for a chapter that you feel would be a better fit for someone else in your life, be sure to share it with that person and encourage him or her to take action. Then move on to the next chapter because the key to living *your* life

with no more regrets is there, just waiting to be revealed. At the back of the book, I've also provided easy-to-follow next steps for taking action along with a No More Regrets! Game Plan tool that I think you will find useful.

Finally, make “No More Regrets!” both your credo and your commitment for the future—avoid repeating past regrets and prevent new ones from occurring. Following are my stories, many of them personal, about what it means to do just that. My goal is to get you to reflect on your *own* stories of when you've been stuck in a rut, taken something or someone for granted, struggled with being authentic, stopped growing or learning, or needed a reminder of how to be a force of goodness in the world. I encourage you to share these experiences with me and a growing community of enthusiastic readers on the official book Web site: <http://www.no-more-regrets.com>.

I look forward to hearing from you!



**None of us want to  
look back on life  
with regrets.**

*~ What is your biggest regret in life and  
how did it impact you?*



**PART ONE**

# **Get Out of Your Rut**

- 1 Stop Doing What Isn't Working**
- 2 Pick a Place to Start**
- 3 Make Peace with Yourself**
- 4 Turn Adversity into Opportunity**
- 5 Avoid Victimitis**
- 6 Steer Clear of Toxic People**



# Stop Doing What Isn't Working

NOT TOO LONG after we got married, my wife and I got into a rut. We were working dead-end jobs for bosses we didn't like and were barely making enough money to pay the monthly bills. We were happy as a couple, yet we were unhappy with our professional lives. Between the two of us, we had racked up more than six figures in student loan debt. In addition, we had moved to an area of town that was more affordable and closer to our jobs, but this had taken us farther away from our friends and the coastal part of San Diego we loved most. Despite our best efforts, we couldn't see how our situation was going to change any time soon.

I started teaching at two community colleges in the evenings to supplement the income from both of our full-time jobs. We also started selling personalized gifts at the local flea market—not exactly our strong suit, but my wife had a knack for calligraphy and I was decent at sales. Every weekend we'd haul display cases, folding tables and chairs, and all of our products in the back of my tiny convertible



to our even tinier booth at the swap meet. It was quite a spectacle and an exhausting process. More than anything, though, we regretted the fact that we were working so hard and had so little to show for it.


One unseasonably hot Saturday after spending eight hours on the asphalt-paved flea market lot, we'd finally had enough. We were poor, stressed, and miserable. We were tired of trying to manage our odd jobs on top of our real jobs and still getting nowhere. It just wasn't working! After a long talk that night, we agreed we needed to make a drastic change. We got out a map and decided that we were going to move to a place where it was much cheaper to live. While we hated to leave San Diego, we knew that one day we'd come back on our own terms when it was the right time.

Starting our new life adventure was an incredibly liberating experience. We resigned from our jobs and shut down our personalized gift business. We set new professional and personal goals. We worked out the logistics of moving and got excited about the future. What quickly became clear to us is that when you stop doing what isn't working, you free up enormous amounts of creative, productive energy and liberate yourself from the shadow of regret.

Within a year after moving, we were able to get ourselves financially back on our feet and in active pursuit of our professional goals. I started writing my first book and worked on getting a consulting business off the ground while my wife was busy running a children's nonprofit charity organization. The following year we were finally

able to buy our first house, and soon after that we welcomed our first child into the world. We encountered plenty of obstacles along the way, but we just felt happier and more in control of our own lives.

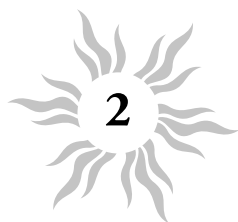
Don't expect life to be any different if you keep doing what you've always done. Whether you're in a bad relationship, the wrong job, or a place in your life where you feel stuck, have the courage to shake things up and cut your losses. Free yourself from the regret of the situation you're in and take a new direction. Stop doing what isn't working so you can start doing what works.



Stop doing what  
isn't working so you  
can start doing  
what works.

~ *What in your life are you doing that isn't working right now?*

~ *If you stopped doing it, what would happen?*



## Pick a Place to Start

EVERY JANUARY 1 we engage in the long-standing ritual of making our New Year's resolutions. Some of us actually write them down; others just commit them to memory. In addition, some of us postpone the exercise indefinitely despite our best intentions. But all of us go through the process of at least *thinking* about what we should put on the list of goals we hope to accomplish in the coming year. Historical favorites include losing weight, earning more money, getting a different job, making new friends, creating greater work-life balance, putting old photos into a scrapbook, eating healthier foods, taking a longer vacation, exercising more, and procrastinating less.

The problem of course with most of our "to do" lists—whether they include our yearly resolutions, tasks at work, or things we need to get done around the house—is that we put too much on them. It's not too long before the stark realization sets in: we may never get everything done. This can be overwhelming and ultimately lead to feelings of regret if we don't complete the entire list or if we don't

give it our best effort because we are trying to do too many things at once. Regret may also be the result if we spend so much time overanalyzing how to get it all done that we wind up getting little or nothing done.

So where do we start? Several years ago a man named Lee Staggert called me about getting some personal coaching on how to better organize his life. Specifically, he wanted to increase his effectiveness in accomplishing his daily tasks so he could focus more on working toward his goals for the future. Lee was the type of person who was used to feeling like he could accomplish anything he set out to do, but lately he had been falling behind. As an example, he was receiving over one hundred e-mails a day and getting to only the ten or so that were the highest priority. The rest of them just sat in his in-box and accumulated throughout the month, leaving him with literally thousands of unopened e-mails that he'd purge on the first of the next month in order to give himself the illusion of a fresh start. Clearly this did not solve the problem and was only making it worse.

Beyond that, Lee was up against the clock to fill two vacant positions in his office in the midst of trying to grow a new business venture. He was also required to attend a barrage of daily meetings, which just sucked up more of his time. Finally, he was finding less and less quality time to spend with his family since each night he brought home work that he couldn't get done at the office. It may come as no surprise that Lee was stressed, overwhelmed, and frustrated.

My counsel to Lee was simple: “Pick a place to start,” I said. “Choose one thing on your ‘to do’ list that will be a big source of regret for you until it gets resolved.”

“What about all the rest?” Lee asked.

“It’s not like you’re going to forget about the other items on the list,” I reassured him. “You’re just going to find a starting point where you’ll put the greatest focus for the time being. The problem right now is that you’ve got so much on your list, you don’t know where to begin.”

While Lee wasn’t completely sold on my advice, he said he’d give it a try and chose to start with e-mails. His initial goal was to cut his end-of-month unopened e-mail load in half by setting aside “e-mail elimination time” twice a week for one hour a shot. In just four weeks, however, Lee wound up reducing his unopened e-mails by 70 percent. By the end of the following month, he was down 85 percent! Becoming more efficient at managing his e-mail load also allowed him to spend more time targeting the next items on the list. It wasn’t long before he had freed himself from the regret of feeling ineffective and overwhelmed.

It’s better to do one thing well as opposed to a lot of things poorly. When tackling your own “to do” list, don’t try to take it all on at once. Instead, consider which item on the list will give you the greatest sense of satisfaction and return on your time investment once addressed. Then choose a starting point so you can begin working toward success. This will help you feel energized because you’ll have a strategy in place for moving forward. Pick a place to start and you will no longer feel stuck.

this material has been excerpted from

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