

Six Practices to Find Lasting Money and Happiness

# PROSPER



Create the Life  
You Really Want

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By the coauthor of the #1 *Wall Street Journal* and  
*New York Times* bestseller *The One Minute Entrepreneur*

An Excerpt From

***Prosper:  
Create the Life You Really Want***

by Ethan Willis & Randy Garn  
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# YOUR PROSPERITY ASSESSMENT

## HOW PROSPEROUS ARE YOU RIGHT NOW?

We're asking for a very specific reason. In this book, we make this promise: if you follow the practices we will describe, your level of prosperity will grow.

The Prosperity Assessment is a quick, insightful, multi-faceted evaluation, which is divided into three categories: money, happiness, and sustainability. It's easy and even fun to do online, and there's no charge to take it as many times as you want. The assessment should take about ten minutes. For each question, click the ranking that best describes your current situation. You will be asked to identify your perceived levels of prosperity in the three categories and compare them to your actual levels of prosperity. The assessment doesn't stop there however.

In an extended phase of the assessment you can invite your friends, co-workers, or family to take the assessment and answer the questions based on how they view your levels of prosperity. We've found that this type of "360-degree feedback" component helps identify areas that you overlooked, undervalued, or overvalued when

you initially took the assessment on your own. We promise the results will be revealing.

Here is where you can find the Prosperity Assessment: [www.prosperbook.com/assessment](http://www.prosperbook.com/assessment).

Go for it!

## PERSONALIZED RESULTS

After you complete the Prosperity Assessment, you will receive a personalized report. In it, we identify various attributes of prosperity in which you are highly developed, developing, or need development. The report also generates a graph and accompanying materials that give you a comprehensive picture of your level of prosperity. A copy of your personalized report will be sent to you via e-mail so that you can study the results at your leisure. Please keep that report handy because we will ask you to refer to it later.

## DISCOVER WHERE YOU ARE AND WHERE YOU NEED TO GO

Completing the Prosperity Assessment first will make your experience with this book significantly better. The most important part of your prosperity journey at this point is your attitude to a number of situations that we know predict a prosperous life. After you have taken inventory of your current prosperity strengths and weaknesses, we think the results we present will resonate in a different way. They will give you a significant advantage as you begin the path to greater prosperity. So go ahead—put down the book for a minute, and enter [www.prosperbook.com/assessment](http://www.prosperbook.com/assessment) in your Web browser. We think you will be glad you did.

## YOUR PROSPERITY ASSESSMENT

Later, when you have finished this book and made the Six Prosperity Practices your own, we will invite you to take the Prosperity Assessment again. We predict there will be significant differences in your assessment. We believe that you will be even better positioned to leverage the lessons of this book in your prosperity journey.

# INTRODUCTION

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## The Path to Prosperity Isn't What You Think It Is

*The journey to prosperity is like driving a car at night.  
You can only see as far as the headlights, but you  
make the whole trip that way.*  
—unknown

Much of what we are taught about prosperity and how we achieve it is just plain wrong.

Human beings have pursued prosperity since the dawn of civilization. Achingly few have achieved it. More recently, its pursuit has become an industry. There are thousands of books, courses, programs, and videos that promise to create prosperity. Yet for most of us, the path to prosperity seems bumpier than ever.

Today's financial turmoil has shaken everyone's conception of prosperity. Parents are concerned that their children will be unable to attain the same level of prosperity as they have. Everyone in this economy is facing challenges, whether it is college students starting their careers, middle managers trying to get ahead, entrepreneurs hoping to launch a business, or workers getting ready for retirement. All face harsh realities of employment, advancement, compensation, and job security.

## WHAT IS PROSPERITY?

Now, before we go much farther, let's try to define what we're talking about. What exactly do we mean by *prosperity*?

The first question we ask our students is to define prosperity. Probably every one of our students has a unique definition of prosperity. That's as it should be since everyone has a different definition of what a prosperous life would mean for them.

Here's just a sampling of how people we have surveyed around the world defined prosperity.

**Lisa** *Prosperity is a way of living and thinking, and not just having money or things.*

**Deepak** *Prosperity means having the time and financial freedom to enjoy life at your own leisure.*

**Javier** *Being in the flow, having what you need at the time you need it.*

**Pearl** *The ability to achieve personal growth and financial security without sacrificing family and health.*

**Dieter** *Not living paycheck to paycheck. Not having to worry about money for bills.*

**Monique** *Prosperity is a blend of health, wealth, familial fulfillment, and personal self satisfaction, blended correctly and in balance and harmony.*

**Tom** *To be able to do what I want, when I want.*

**Maria** *Prosperity includes making the best of what you have, accepting the physical conditions that you can't change while working toward good health, giving of yourself to family and friends, working with our community to help those in need, being true to your religion, with enough finances to live comfortably.*



**Larry** *Being debt free with the ability to pay cash for everything and to have cash available for emergency situations.*

**Jann** *Living a rich life, one of love and compassion, wealth and complete joy, one of caring and sharing, filled with laughter and exploration; the joy of loving a child; seeing the world and its wonders—to be able to do this in life is prosperity.*

**Pat** *The ability to weather all storms of life—financial or physical—and to assist friends to cope with their struggles by financially coming alongside them and helping them rise above the tumult.*

We noticed many commonalities. Many of the definitions included terms such as money, wealth, income, security, savings, health, family, and friends. We were struck by how many of the definitions of prosperity included the word *love*. It was also heartening to see how many definitions included service to others, volunteering, serving the community, and other selfless acts.

### **Now It's Your Turn**

Here's your chance to come up with a working definition of prosperity, one that works uniquely for you.

Go ahead, you try it. What does prosperity mean to you? Take a minute to think about it. Write down a sentence or two. We'll wait. And please don't worry about pinning yourself down. We're not going to hold you to what you come up with now. Later in the book, you will have a chance to revisit the question. It should be interesting to see how your perspective on prosperity shifts after you have read this book.

## PROSPERITY DEFINED

We see prosperity as multidimensional. When you are happy, when you have enough money and are at peace with how you are earning that money, this leads to the sustainable state that we describe as *prosperity*. Balancing these three things—money, happiness, plus sustainability—leads to prosperity. The prosperity that we value depends on creating income consistent with our inner selves, our core selves; without that, no amount of external compensation can fully make us happy.

Our definition is represented by the following equation:

$$\text{MONEY} + \text{HAPPINESS} + \text{SUSTAINABILITY} = \text{PROSPERITY}$$

These are terms with lots of meanings. Let us tell you what we mean by money, happiness, and sustainability in the context of prosperity.

### Money

Money is important, no doubt about it. We subscribe to the notion that while money isn't everything, it is an indispensable component of prosperity. Money is not, as has been asserted, the root of all evil. It is the want of money that is the problem, and by "want" we are talking of both the desperation for and the constant unfilled need for money. The lesson of history is that it's the love of money above what we truly value that creates misery.

Money is a key concept of this book. If it wasn't, then it might as well just be another book about happiness. This book is not about happiness—it is about how money interacts with our lives and how we spend our days and efforts earning it. This book is less about a

means to an end and more about the means and whether your true potential and passions are being fully engaged in the process. Once they are, we are convinced that more money will come and you will be able to sustain your efforts and be happiest.

By money, we mean income sufficient to support your goals. Earning enough money is absolutely essential to our concept of prosperity. Earning money is the difference between a business and a hobby. We believe it is possible to be happy with a hobby, but it takes income to generate and sustain prosperity.

The big question, of course, is, How much money is enough to ensure sustainable prosperity? The answer: Enough to support your financial dreams in a way that honors your deeply held values and principles, but not so much that your money distracts or alienates you from those very values and principles. The trick is to make your work feel more like an activity you enjoy than an activity you dread.

## **Happiness**

For the purposes of this book, we are including under the general concept of happiness the following elements:

- State of mind—having positive feelings about ourselves and the world
- Authenticity—living life consistent with our deepest beliefs, values, and principles, and knowing that our earnings are aligned with our passions and purpose
- Commitment—adhering to what we most value, such as family and relationships
- Health and wellness—pursuing a prosperity that supports complete health in mind and body

It is beyond the scope of this book to summarize all that has been written about happiness. Here's how it looks to us. When we jump out of bed ready to live the day as full and completely as we can, when we make money doing what we enjoy, when we are living a life consistent with our beliefs, when we are satisfied with our relationships, when we are in touch with our health, when we are moving forward to realize our dreams, that's happiness.

### **Sustainability**

We believe that sustainability is the third and most overlooked component of prosperity. The concept of sustainability in the context of wealth is elastic and in flux, but we think that if you can answer “yes” to these four questions, the prosperity you seek is more likely sustainable than not.

1. **Can I feel good about it?** People rightly get anxious when the money they make comes from doing something outside their comfort zone. Sustainable prosperity comes when we align our earnings with what motivates us and gives our lives meaning. When we love the work we do because we care about it, we become more attentive to detail, more committed to excellence, and more productive. After all, if you love what you're doing, it's not work. More importantly, working from your core shields you from being defeated by the occasional setback or failure.
2. **Can I sustain the work required over the long term?** Basically, do you have the passion and interest to keep at it for years and decades? Burning out or destroying your health by doing something that saddles you down is not a long-term solution, and any prosperity you generate using such approaches eventually evaporates. If you wake up each day in dread of going to work, in the long run you won't be good at your job, and you

won't be as successful. Someone who is passionate about the work will likely outperform you.

3. **Is the prosperity I contemplate ethical, beneficial to others, and environmentally sound?** Success can no longer be measured by economic profit alone. You also need to ask whether it is ethical, moral, and of value to others. Is your ethical compass pointing true north? Only wealth that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs is sustainable wealth.
4. **Does it offer lasting value?** There's no room in sustainable prosperity for get-rich-quick schemes or flash-in-the-pan opportunities. Sustainable prosperity is based on the law of the harvest, the deliberate concentration of the life you want. And not just for you, but also for the communities in which you work and live.

## PROSPER FROM THE INSIDE OUT

Most people think of prosperity as an external event, something outside their control, something that happens to you, like an inheritance or winning a lottery.

Is that the way you think about prosperity? In such an externally driven state of identity, life seems uncertain and fragile. Everything that happens to us defines who we are. We become our circumstances. The more we envision prosperity as something that exists "out there," as something to be dominated, the less likely it will satisfy us. It will be as if we wrestled a fine suit of clothes to the ground only to find that it just doesn't fit very well.

We have a neighbor who just came back from a whirlwind vacation. He visited ten European countries in as many days. "I did Italy in

one day,” he boasted. We agree that he “did” Italy, but what did Italy do to him? How was he changed? Was his perspective altered in any way? What does he have to show for his collision with a different language and culture? He may have happened on Italy, but did Italy in any meaningful sense happen on him? Our neighbor is satisfied with his vacation, and we have no wish to criticize him. But for us, prosperity is a pursuit—not just a stop along your path through life. This book is designed to help you achieve the kind of prosperity that’s sustainable over a lifetime.

### NOT ALL POLARIS POINTS ARE HONORED

People who ignore their Polaris Point do so at peril of their health, happiness, and prosperity. A good example of this is a very talented songwriter we’ll call Jessica. She not only has a passion for song writing but has a real aptitude for it. One of her first songs was selected and recorded by a leading country artist. Jessica received over \$1,000 for that song, plus royalties, and she says it was the sweetest money she has ever earned. We think that she has more than enough natural talent to compete with the best songwriters in Nashville and make a decent living doing what she loves.

But to pursue her Polaris Point, Jessica would have to take a leap and quit her job.

Jessica is not yet ready to do that. She is currently working at an insurance company, in a secure job with a salary of about \$35,000 per year. She has health insurance, paid holidays, and other benefits. The job meets her financial needs—but those are the only needs it meets. Jessica is miserable chained to a desk. All she wants to do is write songs, mingle with musicians, and be part of the Nash-

ville professional music scene. She fantasizes about writing a hit song, and then she goes back to the task at hand. She realizes that the gap between what she most wants and what she is willing to settle for is eating her up. Jessica regrets every day she fails to follow her Polaris Point, but so far she has not acted.

## THE PROSPERITY JOURNEY STARTS WITH QUESTIONS

These are just some of the questions this book asks you to consider. You can answer these questions by yourself, but some people find it easier to do with a partner. Make sure to write your answers down.

1. What does my ideal lifestyle look like?
2. How much money do I need to maintain my ideal lifestyle?
3. What can I do to improve the most important relationships in my life?
4. How important is a sense of physical well-being?
5. How much exercise do I need each week?
6. What can I do to improve myself?
7. What can I do to improve my self-image and self-confidence?
8. How do I see my spiritual relationship to prosperity?
9. What makes me happiest? Why?
10. How much do I value an environmentally sustainable life?

We listen very carefully to what our students say about what they value. But sometimes we can't hear what our students are telling us because their actions are so loud. In the most extreme cases, we sometimes say, "Don't tell us what you value. Show us your credit card statement, and *we'll* tell you what you value."

## DOES MONEY MAKE YOU HAPPIER?

Perhaps the central belief most common to our students is that high income is directly associated with happiness. It seems to them that the more money they have, the happier and more satisfied they will be. We've learned that it does little good to challenge this belief even though we know it is not always the rule.

The most certain thing we can say about wealth and happiness is that money does indeed make one happier, but only to the extent that people can meet their basic needs such as food and housing. In other words, if a person is in poverty—lacking enough food to eat, decent housing, and transportation—and feels unhappy about it, then certainly money will contribute to happiness. When happiness is related to basic human needs, there's nothing better than money to ensure happiness.

But that relationship quickly breaks down when one's basic needs are satisfied. After that, measured happiness levels change very little as incomes grow over time.

## MORE THAN MONEY

Prosperity is always about a determination to change one's situation, and almost always that determination has something to do with money. We respect this relationship. Determination and money certainly go together. We think the pursuit of money is commendable and respectable. It is one's intentions that need the greater inspection.

At the same time, prosperity is about more than just financial success. Of those who actually achieve financial success, we have seen



that the victory is often short-lived, inconsistent, or anticlimactic. At the same time, we have coached some people to create lives of breathtaking wealth, balance, and, yes, grace. We call this sustainable prosperity.

The following story illustrates the power of how people see the world in a different light when they are in touch with their true values.

In the wake of a terrible hurricane that did a lot of damage to coastal communities in North Carolina, a beach geologist was being interviewed. The reporter asked him what hurricanes do to beaches. Now, most people know the answer to that question. Hurricanes are very destructive. Beaches are torn up, and residents get very upset. At one point during the interview, the geologist said, “You know, I can’t wait to get out on those beaches again as soon as this storm has passed.”

“What do you expect to find out there?” the interviewer asked.

Before reading further, how would you answer the question? After a destructive hurricane, what would you look for?

Here’s what the geologist said: “I expect to find a new beach.”

What would it mean if we looked at change as that beach geologist does, where we look beyond our current way of thinking? Where we could celebrate the newness that was just revealed rather than grieve for what was lost? The story reminds us that too often we are surprised by change in a way that makes it impossible for us to welcome it. We actually see newness as a stumbling block to our plans.

We invite you to equate reading this book as a fresh look at a brand new beach in your life. Look at it as a brand new view of how money and happiness are balanced in your life.

## JOIN US FOR THE PROSPERITY JOURNEY

The best way to determine your definition of prosperity is to be crystal clear in your own mind about what a life of prosperity looks like for you. The more detailed you can be about your circumstances, desires, and goals, the closer your definition will be. This is not just an academic exercise. Based on watching thousands of students working to realize their visions of prosperity, we can tell you that the more clearly you can articulate what exactly prosperity means to you, the more likely it is that you will achieve it.

To each reader, we want you to know it is our life's work to help you *Prosper*. We look forward to being your guides on your journey to prosperity. We invite you to define it, create it, and live it!

## CHAPTER I

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# LOCATE YOUR POLARIS POINT

*The Master in the art of living makes little distinction between his work and his play, his labor and his leisure, his mind and his body, his education and his recreation, his love and his religion.*

*He hardly knows which is which. He simply pursues his vision of excellence in whatever he does, leaving others to decide whether he is working or playing. To him, he is always doing both.*

*—from the Buddhist tradition*

By your Polaris Point, we mean the ultimate destination that guides you, that inspires you when you're making progress, and that rights you when you get off course. It's the sparkle that lights your way in the dark.

In astronomy, there is but one Polaris, otherwise known as the North Star. Among the billions of stars, it is unique in that it is the beacon most nearly aligned to the north spin axis of the Earth. As the Earth turns, stars and constellations move through the sky—but not Polaris. It stays fixed in the sky relative to Earth, and any time it can be seen, true north is revealed. The result has guided travelers since the dawn of human history.

Polaris, the North Star, has ensured the fortunes of countless navigators on land and sea, and the concept of the Polaris Point can help guide you. All it requires is that you carefully choose a spot on the horizon, making sure to steadily move toward it. This is your Polaris Point. For the time being, think of it as defining the only direction worth following.

In this chapter, we will help you locate your Polaris Point.

## YOUR UNIQUE POLARIS POINT

Everyone's Polaris Point is unique. It's the envisioned future of what you aspire to become, to achieve, to contribute, to create and how all of that relates to money. A true Polaris Point is clear and compelling without being overly restrictive. It serves as a unifying focal point for your ongoing earning efforts, a goal that inspires creativity, and a catalyst for profound action (see Chapter 6).

Here's the way we think about the Polaris Points. Imagine that you are at the end of a well-lived life in which you have met all the goals you have set for yourself. You have no regrets. You are invited to your own funeral. Now, what is it that you hope people will say about your life? If you've aligned your life with your authentic self, chances are many of the eulogies will mention your Polaris Point—not because they heard you talk about it, but because your actions and contributions spoke convincingly to them.

## WHERE'S THE MONEY?

A Polaris Point is unique in that it always addresses your relationship with money. Yes, it usually also talks about your ethics, values, and passions. It can reflect your hopes and desires for happiness and

prosperity. But it always defines a fundamental aspect of how important money is to you. Whatever amount of money you believe you will require, your Polaris Point has something to say about how your sense of prosperity determines the income you intend to generate.

Let us show you what we mean. We asked five people to share their Polaris Points.

**Ellen** *Teaching is my joy and passion. Seeing the transformation in young people's lives is what I want to spend my health, wealth, and self doing for the rest of my life. Instead of filling bank accounts, I want to fill the minds of future leaders with knowledge and integrity. I want to do this side by side with my husband.*

**Floyd** *I want to provide for members of my family and extended family who do not have the means to achieve their own dreams and aspirations. I am okay working sixty hours a week as long as it provides for their aspirations and I can maintain healthy strong relationships with them. Money is less important to me than a lasting legacy.*

**Hector** *I want to leave a legacy of honor, service, and excellence for posterity. I am dedicated to a lifetime of defending my country as a member of the armed forces. I know I will not make as much as I could in other professions; however, a pattern of honor and safety for my children is more valuable than gold.*

**Steven** *I desire to live my life to the fullest. Money is best invested in experiences. I want to create a life that is a string of exceptional life experiences. In order to do this, I need to create substantial income that allows me to have flexibility. I will work hard, but I will also play hard. I will not let the pursuit of money overtake my goal "to seize the day."*

**Tamara** *I want a life that is simple and worry-free. I want to put down roots in a neighborhood and live there for a long time. I want to only work twenty to thirty hours a week and enjoy the time with my children,*

*friends, and pets. These relationships will come before the pursuit of material things, not the things I need. I am willing to spend much less and live in a smaller house in order to do this. I will control money, and it will not control my quality of life.*

## THE AUTHORS' POLARIS POINTS

For most people, determining their own Polaris Point and putting it into concrete language can be one of the most challenging tasks they will ever face. We ourselves struggled with the process of identifying our Polaris Points, and we think it might be helpful if we showed you a bit of how we arrived at them, a bit about the circumstances from which they originated, and how we express them.

**Ethan Willis** *Before I give you my own Polaris Point, I'd like you to know a little bit about me. While growing up in Southern California, I cannot remember a house that my family ever owned. My six brothers and sisters shared everything. What I remember most is that, while there was not much to share, we all got along, and we were happy sharing. It wasn't until much later that I realized how little we actually had. Still, it often seemed to me that our family enjoyed some seasons of prosperity.*

*My mother worked as a night shift nurse helping deliver high-risk babies. She taught me that I could be anything in life if I just found the right solution and applied it. My father was born on a dairy farm and taught me the value of getting up early and working hard. He would leave the house at 5:00 a.m. to work at two different hospitals as a respiratory specialist, and not come home until late. But however tired he was, my father would wake all the children at 4:30 a.m. for family prayer before he left. We read scriptures and expressed gratitude for the blessings of life.*

*My father's goal in life was to provide for his children a better life than he himself had. In this goal, my father was clear that a better life meant more than just money. He spoke about the importance of being happy*

## LOCATE YOUR POLARIS POINT

*and living purposefully. I was a teenager when my father died of cancer. To honor his sacrifice, I committed to deliver on the goal that he set on behalf of his children. My conscious path to prosperity began at that moment.*

*I first sought God's presence. I wanted to understand what this life was really about, where my father went, and what I could do to ensure I could be with him again. After passing up such opportunities as playing baseball for a Los Angeles Dodgers scout team, I decided to go to Brazil on a volunteer service mission. During my time in one of the poorest parts of Brazil, I learned something about poverty and prosperity.*

*When I looked closer, I saw something totally unexpected. People in the exact same circumstances with the same levels of income experienced their situations in completely different ways. Some families dwelled in abject poverty. But others, with no more resources to their names, lived lives that looked much more satisfying, even prosperous. I was fascinated by the clear implications that, on some level, poverty and prosperity are states of mind.*

*When I returned to the United States after two years, I knew two things: (1) prosperity is a choice, and (2) only you can define how much money you need to be prosperous. I set a goal to earn enough money and do it in a way that helped others do the same. That was the beginning of my Polaris Point. Since then, I have pursued prosperity in many ways: from feeling trapped by my job, moving up the corporate ladder; to bootstrapping my business, scraping to make payroll each week; to selling pest control services door to door, raising five children, balancing family relationships and the demands of the world; to working with famous authors and millionaires, experiencing Harvard Business School's perspectives of prosperity, seeing people in eighty countries strive for prosperity, employing over 2,000 people, and struggling to find balance between money and happiness and purpose.*

*My last fifteen years have been spent trying to define, live, and teach prosperity. We all have a story, and I hope sharing a little of mine can help you understand how I might be able to help you on your path.*

### ETHAN'S POLARIS POINT

*I will put off instant gratification for long-term prosperity. I will treat my time as an asset. I will invest the greater amounts in the things that will last longest. My greatest priorities are my wife, children, extended family, dear friends, and commitments to the Divine. Earning will be to support my family and to build people, businesses, and ideas that will better the world. The earnings of profits will be the applause customers give me because of the value they receive.*

**Randy Garn** *I grew up in a small town with parents who taught me the value of integrity and hard work. My father and mother both taught at the local high school. My mother was the English teacher and debate coach. My father was the athletic director and the head football coach of the high school football team.*

*One of the central learning experiences of my life was watching my father coach and inspire student athletes to reach their full potential, and not always just in football. His example cemented in me the power of teamwork and the importance of a good coach. From my father, I learned that if I wanted something and worked hard for it, then nothing was impossible. I learned that money was important, but many other things were more so. To me, the great sources of well-being and happiness are the relationships that I nourish and which nourish me.*

*I have always tried to live each day to the fullest and have a cheerful, positive outlook in every circumstance. I have only one life to live and only one opportunity to leave my mark on this world. I want to take that opportunity and leave the world in better shape than I found it. In my view, the very best way to do this is by helping as many other people as I can and looking for the best in other people rather than the flaws. To lift another person, you have to be standing on higher ground.*

*I have a great passion for innovation and entrepreneurship. I love helping other businesspeople grow and flourish. I am especially proud of my role in helping start several businesses and steward them to success,*



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*jobs, profits, and value for others to enjoy. Having enough money is important, but my passion is helping people take an idea and transform it into a thriving business.*

### **RANDY'S POLARIS POINT**

*I found my Polaris Point when I came to understand that through technology, education, and hard work, I can help change the world one person at a time. I love being a coach, a guide, a positive motivating force in another's life. I cherish human relationships. I have a unique ability to connect people together in a way that creates lasting value. Money is important to me, but my passion is being the connection between what others desire to become and how to get there. I truly love to see others succeed.*

## **POLARIS POINTS IN ACTION**

In his book *The Transparent Leader*, Herb Baum, the former chairman and CEO of Dial, illustrates how Polaris Points operate by working to keep people aligned with their highest aspirations. There is intense competition between his company and Colgate in such areas as soap, shampoo, and other billion-dollar market segments. He recounts receiving a telephone call from Reuben Mark, the chairman and CEO of Colgate-Palmolive:

I have a lot of respect for the company [Colgate], and I knew Reuben to be an outstanding CEO with an excellent reputation. The day he called, he said that he had in his possession a CD containing Dial Soap's marketing plan for the year. It had been given to him by a member of his sales force (a former Dial employee who had taken it with him when he left to join Colgate), and it meant that one of Dial's most important product line's strategies had been revealed, and could result in the loss of revenue, profits, and market share.

"Herb," Reuben said, "one of our new salespeople gave this CD to one of my sales managers. I'm not going to look at this information,

and I'm sending it back to you right now. I'll handle it on this end." It was the clearest case of leading with honor and transparency I've witnessed in my career. After all, who expects a CEO to call his competitor and tell him they have a copy of their detailed business strategy? If he hadn't, I never would have known, but that one call gave me more insight into his character than anything else.

It wasn't hard to see why he had been so successful in his career. He knew he didn't need to gain an unfair competitive advantage to succeed, even when he was presented with the opportunity. He chose not to abandon his leadership style, and he had the courage to stick to his principles even when it meant giving up confidential information that could have helped his company gain an edge. (Baum and Kling 2004, 31)

To us, what Baum called leading with honor and transparency actually describes the Colgate CEO's Polaris Point. We'd guess that early in his career Reuben Mark decided that the only legitimate success was success that he earned and that he would not tolerate nor take unfair advantage in any form. The honor and transparency that Baum described are very real because they are consequences of Mark's Polaris Point. Everyone can be tempted to violate what one knows to be right. Being clear about how he would or would not make money guided his business decision. When temptation strikes, it's very important to have solid Polaris Point values to guide you.

## POLARIS POINT MENTORS

Some people instinctively know what their Polaris Point is. But most people, like us, have to work at it.

One great way to get a clearer view of what your Polaris Point might be is to think about the people you most admire. We think

of these people as Polaris Point Mentors. They can be people you know, such as your parents or a beloved teacher. They can be world leaders, famous scientists, athletes, astronauts, or other celebrities that you view from afar. The odds are that if you feel this person's life represents something you yearn to emulate, there is an element of your Polaris Point in that person's experience.

Clayton Christensen, an influential professor at the Harvard Business School, is an individual who is absolutely committed to a Polaris Point that, to us, is about the integrity of never compromising over the things that matter most (Christensen 2010).

Most of us know the difference between right and wrong, but sometimes it's tempting to loosen our standards. We whisper to ourselves, "Okay, I know that as a general rule I shouldn't be doing this. But in this particular extenuating circumstance, just for me, just this once, it's not so bad. I'll never do it again." Sound familiar? Many of us go through these rationalizations. This often happens with the choices we make in how we go about making a living.

The technical term for this moral wiggling, Professor Christensen taught us, is the *marginal cost*. The marginal cost of doing something wrong "just this once" always seems alluringly low. It suckers you in, and you don't ever look at where that path ultimately is headed. This compromises your Polaris Point.

### **PICK YOUR POLARIS POINT OR ELSE IT WILL PICK YOU**

When it comes to deciding on what your Polaris Point should be, just make sure your aim is true. That's why starting with what you already have and working from your core are so critical.

In the movie *Up in the Air*, Ryan Bingham (played by George Clooney) has a Polaris Point that consists of collecting 10 million frequent flier miles. Bingham believes that when he finally gets all those miles, he will be happy. He fantasizes about the perks and status that will result: the front-of-the-line access, premium seats, lavish attention, free wine, and, most of all, being recognized by name. Status, even more than money, can be a powerful motivator. When Bingham finally hits his 10-million-mile goal during a flight from Chicago to Omaha, the chief pilot of American Airlines makes it a big deal while presenting the coveted graphite card that allows him to access his own private customer service representative. But the satisfaction is short-lived. Bingham's interest in this goal was already waning—he'd already started looking elsewhere for fulfillment—and that's why this moment was so sad.

Happiness theory suggests that personal priorities are very important in determining one's satisfaction. For example, people who emphasize generosity and selflessness and feel good about giving away a part of their prosperity tend to be happier than those who focus on obtaining more and more material goods. In the film, Ryan Bingham experiences this phenomenon. Although now he can book first-class vacations to exotic locations anywhere in the world without cost, he has little interest in getting on another airplane. But he gets satisfaction from transferring some miles from his account so his sister can finally fulfill a life-long dream to visit Paris.

If you find that you're being evasive about your Polaris Point, chances are that something is out of alignment and your path is likely not sustainable. We see this evasiveness played out in *Up in the Air* when Ryan Bingham talks to Natalie, a young woman he is mentoring.

## LOCATE YOUR POLARIS POINT

**NATALIE:** Okay, you gotta fill me in on the miles thing. What is that about?

**RYAN:** I don't spend a nickel if I can help it unless it somehow profits my mileage account.

**NATALIE:** So what are you saving up for? Hawaii, South of France?

**RYAN:** It's not like that. The miles are the goal.

**NATALIE:** That's it? You're saving just to save?

**RYAN:** Just say I have a number in mind and I haven't hit it yet.

**NATALIE:** That's a little abstract. What's the target?

**RYAN:** I'd rather not [say].

**NATALIE:** Is it a secret target?

We recommend going public with your Polaris Point for a number of reasons. First, if you can be open about your destination, it's a good sign you're on a path that's sustainable. Transparency is good. Second, being visible with your destination allows others to accompany you or even assist you.

## THE ONLY DIRECTION IS NORTH

The one direction in the pursuit of prosperity is the bearing indicated by your Polaris Point. Whenever you are unsure if you are on the right path, all you have to do is locate the Polaris Point. Keep your eyes on your own personal Polaris Point, and you will always be moving in the right direction.

As you tack toward your Polaris Point, you will find yourself off course from time to time. This is normal. The important thing is that you notice when you are off the path and make small corrections.

It turns out that without a reference point, people literally walk in circles. New research from the Max Planck Institute for Biological Cybernetics in Tübingen, Germany, found that without a reference point, people just can't walk in a straight line (Souman et al. 2009). Using GPS devices, researchers studied participants who walked for several hours in the Sahara desert in Tunisia and in the Bienwald forest in Germany. The results showed that participants were able to walk in a straight path only when they could see the sun or moon; as soon as reference points disappeared behind clouds, participants started walking in circles without even knowing it. No exceptions.

That's why it's absolutely necessary for you to have your Polaris Point in mind at all times. Without it, you may think you're making a straight line toward prosperity, but it's probably an illusion, and in reality your progress is at best very inefficient or at worst going nowhere fast. Everyone needs a reference point.



## LOCATE YOUR POLARIS POINT

### *Prosperity Steps*

This exercise will guide you through the process of identifying your Polaris Point and framing a statement that describes it in actionable terms. The process starts by clarifying your values and their relationship to money. After you go through the first three steps, you will be ready to frame a Polaris Point informed by your most deeply held values.

Complete this Prosperity Step online at [www.prosperbook.com/PS1](http://www.prosperbook.com/PS1).

### **What You Value Most**

Identify your important work and personal values. Make a list of things you want most in life. Upon completion choose the top ten.

### **Elimination**

Now that you have identified the top ten things, eliminate seven more until you are left with your top three most important things. They are likely to be the basis of your Polaris Point.

### **Evaluation**

With respect to the top three remaining on your list, consider the following questions.

1. What do your selections have in common?
2. Does the way you earn your income today align with the things most important to you?
3. What does the list say about what you are expecting from yourself?

4. How would your life and career be different if you consistently focused on those things you value most?
5. Does this list reflect the way you actually conduct your life?

### **Define Your Polaris Point**

Write out an identifying statement that embraces the three things you deeply value most. Start the sentence with “My Polaris Point includes . . .”

Next, write out a framing statement of your Polaris Point, embracing those three selections.

#### ***Example***

Suppose the three selections were meaningful career, enough money to retire at sixty years old, and a deeper relationship with Terry.

#### ***The identifying response***

*My Polaris Point includes a meaningful career, enough money to retire at sixty years old, and a deeper relationship with Terry.*

#### ***The framing response***

*I promise to guide every aspect of my life by my commitment to a meaningful career and focusing on my retirement plan in order to retire at sixty, while continuing to build a deeper relationship with Terry.*

Now, there are millions of ways to express a commitment to any set of priorities. In fact, there are probably as many Polaris Point statements as there are people in the world. We can't put words in your mouth—only you can do that. We know it's not easy: defining your Polaris Point requires real self-interrogation followed by sustained reflection of what matters most. It often feels like the hardest work in the world.



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