

Glowing Comments from Corporate, Entrepreneurial, Sales, Marketing, Government, Educational, and other Leaders about...

No Excuse!

Jay Rifenburg

“We love your new book, *No Excuse!* We implemented your new philosophy company-wide and achieved a 30% increase in sales volume. You can take this book directly to the bottom line. There is No Excuse! for not reading it today.”

—**Kenneth J. Burgess Jr.**
Former President, Morgan Hill, Inc.

“Jay Rifenburg has found the key to personal power, internal motivation, and individual excellence! This book gives a simple, practical blueprint for outstanding performance. Everyone needs to read it.”

—**Brian Tracy**
Author of *Something for Nothing*

“I read your book! Exciting! Filled with good stuff. Have quoted you in two speeches and two TV shows this week.”

—**Ty Boyd, CSP, CPAE**
Founder, Executive Learning Systems, Inc.
Speaker and Consultant

“I am very impressed with the book *No Excuse!* You have gathered a wealth of knowledge and compiled it into a simple, clear, concise volume. I hope its circulation will spread far and wide.”

—**Robert A. Rohm, Ph.D.**
President, Personality Insights, Inc.
Author of *Who Do You Think You Are Anyway?*

“Well done...*No Excuse!* is a tough but caring view of the mission of our lives...read it and use the principles. I recommend it whole-heartedly.”

—**Larry Wilson, CPAE**
Founder of Wilson Learning and Pecos River Learning Center
Co-Author of *The One Minute Salesperson* and *Play to Win*

“Jay Rifembary has given the world a most generous gift. Anyone who reads this book and applies the *No Excuse!* philosophy daily can create the life they want and make a difference.”

—**Jack Canfield, CSP**
President, Self-Esteem Seminars
Bestselling Co-Author of *Chicken Soup for the Soul* Series

“The philosophy and strategies that comprise *No Excuse!* are what is *sorely* missing from the public school curriculum. *No Excuse!* needs to be mandatory for school board members, administrators, teachers, senior high school and college students, and most importantly, parents. The book is a breath of fresh air for our educational community.”

—**Edward Placke, Ed.D.**
Assistant Commissioner of Vocational & Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities for the State of New York

“You have no excuse for not reading *No Excuse!*...or for accomplishing all that you’re capable of achieving as a result! Jay Rifembary’s *No Excuse!* Action Plans could positively change your life.”

—**Michael P. McKinley, CSP, CPAE**
Former President, National Speakers Association

“Imagine you were in a life and death situation. Would anything matter other than getting to safety? Of course not! That’s exactly the attitude that *No Excuse!* conveys. This book will cause every reader to ‘snap out of it’ and get on to living. Jay Rifembary has done an excellent job of showing all of us, youth and grown-ups alike, how to ‘grow up, get over it, and get on with it.’ I think you’ll find this book exciting, and you’ll feel that it’s a very effective wake-up call. I certainly did.”

—**Jim Cathcart, CSP, CPAE**
Speaker
Author of *Rethinking Yourself* and *The Acorn Principle*

“Never before in my lifetime has this society needed the philosophy contained in these pages more. In business, government, education, and religion the time is now to stand up and be totally accountable for our own actions. The antithesis has failed miserably in socialistic countries as well as in social programs in our great nation. It’s time to stop expecting our government to coddle each of us from the cradle to the grave. It’s time to be a *No Excuse!* person.”

—**J. Charles Plumb**
Bestselling Author of *I’m No Hero*
Former Vietnam POW

“*No Excuse!* is succinct. Jay Rifenbary has given the tools to accept total responsibility for your life. When you act on the *No Excuse!* philosophy, you can have freedom and inner peace in all areas of your life.”

—**Miriam Burkart**
Former Director, McGrane Institute

“This book gives you the gifts of a *No Excuse!* life. Read it, apply its principles, and share it with your friends and business associates.”

—**Andy Andrews**
Humorist and Motivational Speaker
Bestselling Author of *The Traveler’s Gift*

“During my 70+ years of being on a constant excursion in life, searching for all the things my curiosity leads me to, I have concluded that the word *excuse* needs to be banished from our vocabulary. I believe this book will draw us closer to that point. It will have immense value to those who take advantage of your philosophy of overcoming obstacles. With this book you have done very well, exceeding all expectations. I hope to use it as a self-guide for myself and as a suggestion to others.”

—**Ida Crawford Stewart**
Former VP, Estee Lauder

“Jay Rifenbary’s work *No Excuse!* is a step-by-step program that will help parents and students achieve success in their daily lives. The pressures of scholastic life and the world of work can be so overwhelming that parents and students alike can struggle without a support system. *No Excuse!* is that support system. It brings to light such needed values as integrity, honesty, commitment, and most of all personal accountability. This work is extremely readable and filled with real-world examples. The book reveals Jay’s commitment to the education of our youth, and through his teachings, his genuine concern for every individual’s personal and professional development. I recommend the book without reservation for businesses, schools, and homes.”

—**Michael McCarthy, M.Ed.**
Superintendent of Mechanicville City School District
Education Specialist, The George Washington University

“Many, many people came to me and were encouraged by your message. I heard, ‘This is something I want to put into practice today,’ and one of the fellows said, ‘Wouldn’t it have been nice if everybody had been here to hear this?’ Exciting reading, enjoyably straightforward, emotionally challenging. *No Excuse!* needs to become a way of life, not only good reading.”

—**Warren Smith**
Former President, Electro-Term, Inc.

“Excuses are a dime a dozen. For every reason something can be done, there are a dozen reasons why it can’t be done. *No Excuse!* gets you to focus on the one and not the dozen. It’s a marvelous book that you will not only get a lot out of, but it’s a book that will get a lot out of you. Buy it today. Read it tonight!”

—**Morris E. Goodman**
President, Miracle Man Productions
Author of *The Miracle Man*

“*No Excuse!* will have a tremendous impact on young and old alike. The philosophy and skills in this book need to be shared with coaches, players, business executives, managers, salespeople, employees’ families, and anyone who is reaching for excellence in their life. Jay’s inspirational thoughts and anecdotes will leave you feeling better about where you are today. By incorporating the *No Excuse!* philosophy into your life, you’ll be able to accelerate to where you want to be tomorrow.”

—**Daniel E. “Rudy” Ruettiger**
Motivational Speaker & Author of *Rudy’s Insights for Winning in Life*
Inspiration for the blockbuster movie *Rudy*

“Over-regulated, bureaucratic leadership has turned many employees and citizens into whining ‘victims’ that cry for ‘level playing fields.’ If our young, new managers and leaders follow Jay’s *No Excuse!* philosophy, they will truly reinvent our organizations and allow society to evolve to its next level of greatness.”

—**Charles “Chic” Thompson**
President, Creative Management Group
Author of *What a Great Idea!* and *Yes, But...*

“Tremendous! This book has it all, because all success begins and ends with the *No Excuse!* philosophy. Jay Rifenburg brings new life to this great truth because he lives it every day. It’s never too early or too late to adopt the *No Excuse!* philosophy. This book is a living classic. It will be a life-changing experience for those who make this philosophy a way of life.”

—**Charlie “Tremendous” Jones**
Speaker and Bestselling Author of *Life Is Tremendous*

Leaders’ Comments continued on page 334

International Bestseller

No Excuse!

*Incorporating
Core Values,
Accountability,
and Balance
into Your Life
and Career*

JAY RIFENBARY

A *Possibility Press* Book

No Excuse!

Jay Rifenbary

Copyright © 2007 Jay Rifenbary

Published by

Possibility Press

info@possibilitypress.com • www.possibilitypress.com

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce this book or portions thereof in any form or any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by information storage retrieval system without written permission from the publisher, except for the inclusion of brief quotations in a review. All rights are also reserved for translation into foreign languages. No liability is assumed with respect to use of the information herein.

Publisher's Cataloging in Publication
(Prepared by *Quality Books, Inc.*)

Rifenbary, Jay.

No Excuse!: Incorporating core values, accountability and balance into your life and career—Jay Rifenbary.

—2nd ed.

p. cm.—(Personal development series) Preassigned

LCCN: 94-077875. ISBN: 0-938716-23-9 (Cloth)

ISBN: 0-938716-22-0 (Paper)

1. Success—Psychological aspects. 2. Self-realization.

3. Happiness

Psychological aspects. 1. Title.

BF697.5.S8R54 1995 158'.1

QB 194-2377

Manufactured in the United States of America

DEDICATION

To my beloved wife, Noni, and my children, Nicole and Jared, for their patience, love, and understanding of their adventurous spouse and dad.

To my mother, Dorothy, for her lifelong love, patience, and untiring desire to be the best parent possible, which she accomplished.

To my sister, Deborah, for her expertise in language and life.

To my Uncle, T.J., for the love and support he gave me in all that I strived for in my life.

To my dad, George, for the spirit of what he was and what he gave.

Tribute: To all contributors of knowledge, hope, common sense, and love, and all those who strive to make a difference.

A LETTER TO MY FATHER

January 1, 1995

Dear Dad,

This is the first letter I have ever written to you. As you know, I was only eleven when you died, but I never had a need to write to you until now. I am thirty-eight now, and a lot has happened in my life that I know you would be proud of.

I just want to tell you how much I have missed you and how much I have desired your words of approval and reassurance. There were many times in my life that your being there would have meant the world to me. It certainly would have made life's trials more bearable.

The simple hug or touch a father shares with his son I will never feel again, yet I now have the wonderful opportunity to share that with my own children. It took many years for me to become satisfied with me and what I have to offer others around me. I know that while you were here you gave me everything you felt was best, with honesty and sincerity.

I truly love you and ask for your blessing. I ask for your spirit of strength for my family and me. Thank you for helping me find peace within myself and to feel the satisfaction of giving to other people.

Your loving son,

Jay

PLEASE CONSIDER THIS A PERSONAL WELCOME

Dear Friend,

Welcome to what I have endeavored to make one of the most dynamic success programs ever developed. *No Excuse!* is the culmination of the knowledge and experience I have acquired over the years. It will invigorate you to achieve new heights in your personal and professional life. You'll learn more about some of the finest success principles known to man. Forgiveness, self-esteem, and attitude are just a few of the areas addressed.

The *No Excuse!* philosophy can help you unleash many of your hidden desires and talents and teach you how to utilize them to benefit yourself and others you want to help. The premise of *No Excuse!* centers around the concept of self-responsibility. We are each the decision makers and managers of our personal and professional lives whether we realize it or not. Once you understand that you are the one who is in charge of your life, there will truly be *No Excuse!* for you not to achieve the success you want.

People everywhere are sick and tired of irresponsible behavior and mediocrity. They're realizing more than ever the importance of the family unit and good interpersonal relationships. It's time for everyone to stop blaming and complaining, whining and moaning, and taking the stance of a victim. No one is entitled to a free ride, and we all need to start living more self-responsibly.

The world is in desperate need of more leaders in the home, as well as in communities, corporations, and government. The *No Excuse!* approach will help a lot of people grow and become all they can be. I am convinced *No Excuse!* is the right book at the right time; it's a book for 21st Century Leaders. I believe it's a book that can help everyone!

As soon as I adopted this philosophy, my life began to have greater meaning, purpose, and focus. Using these ideas, I took charge and built my life in the way I desired, not at the expense of others but by helping others! I believe you'll find it's a wonderful feeling to have a positive influence on other people and their success. Isn't that what true success is all about?

No Excuse! gives you the foundation to develop the skills you need to achieve the success you have always wanted for yourself and other people you want to help. It's a sincere pleasure to share the philosophy with you. It is my wish that the impact it has had on my life benefits you even more.

Remember, there truly is *No Excuse!* for you not to achieve the success you want in your life.

Wishing you unlimited success,

Jay Rifembary

CONTENTS

Acknowledgment	12
Prologue	15
Introduction— ARE YOU SICK AND TIRED OF PEOPLE WHINING?	19
PART ONE—YOUR FOUNDATION FOR SUCCESS	27
<i>Chapter 1</i> SELF-RESPONSIBILITY —The Basis of a <i>No Excuse!</i> Life	29
<i>Chapter 2</i> THE POWER OF PURPOSE —Your Definition of Success	53
<i>Chapter 3</i> INTEGRITY —Your Cornerstone of Success	79
PART TWO—THE THESAURUS FACTOR	99
<i>Chapter 4</i> PRELUDE TO THE THESAURUS FACTOR —Your Staircase of Success	101
<i>Chapter 5</i> TOTALLY FORGIVE —The First Step	107
<i>Chapter 6</i> HAVE SELF-ESTEEM —The Second Step	135
<i>Chapter 7</i> ELEVATE YOUR ATTITUDE AND ENTHUSIASM —The Third Step	165
<i>Chapter 8</i> SUSTAIN SELF-CONTROL —The Fourth Step	187

<i>Chapter 9</i>	ALWAYS BE HONEST —First Part of the Fifth Step	205
<i>Chapter 9a</i>	ALWAYS DREAM AND SET GOALS —Second Part of the Fifth Step	213
<i>Chapter 10</i>	UPGRADE YOUR KNOWLEDGE —First Part of the Sixth Step	229
<i>Chapter 10a</i>	UNDERSTAND PEOPLE —Second Part of the Sixth Step	241
<i>Chapter 11</i>	REMEMBER TO HONOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS —The Seventh Step	263
<i>Chapter 12</i>	UPRAISE YOUR DETERMINATION —The Eight Step	279
<i>Chapter 13</i>	SUCCEED & BALANCE YOUR LIFE —The Ninth Step	297
<i>Chapter 14</i>	INCORPORATING <i>No Excuse!</i> INTO YOUR LIFE —Putting It All Together	311
	The No Excuse Creed	323
	Epilogue	324
	Who Is Jay Rifenary?	325
	APPENDIX	327
	About the Rifenary Training & Development Center	328
	Other Books by Possibility Press	329
	Resources	330
	Bibliography	331

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

It's impossible to succeed alone. It takes the cooperative, interdependent effort of many people to accomplish anything worthwhile.

This work is a product of many fine people. It is a collection of thoughts, dreams, life experiences, and the wishes of many people for a better world. It is also a reflection, and an expression of the many wonderful people who have had a tremendous influence on my life achievements.

I am grateful for the inspiration and wisdom of many of the great teachers of motivation and success. I am also grateful for my many friends, relatives, classmates, teammates, coaches, teachers, professors, fellow soldiers, Airborne and Ranger instructors, commanders, managers, and colleagues, for their positive support and guidance in all that I strived for. I am grateful for my experiences both at the Lawrenceville School in Lawrenceville, New Jersey, and the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York. Each provided a framework for challenges to grow and learn from and discover what made me *me*.

I am also grateful for my corporate sales and management experiences with Pfizer and HMSS. Each opened my eyes to a different world of how to conduct business and work with others. Finally, I am grateful for the many customers and business associates of my training and development center, retail operations, and other entrepreneurial endeavors. Thanks for your support and sharing my dream of helping others become successful, self-responsible, happy people.

It is important that I mention several specific people who, with their gifts of love, wisdom, understanding, and guidance, helped make the dream of this book a reality. I feel a deep sense of gratitude:

To my wife, Noni, for her constant love, continuing belief, and sup-

port of me through all the years of trial and error. It is easier to achieve when you're married to someone who lives the principles of love, compassion, patience, and empathy. She is my best friend and most helpful evaluator!

To my children, Nicole and Jared, for their unconditional love and innocence, who never cease to amaze me just how great they are. You brighten every day!

To my mother, Dorothy, for her devotion to her family, and the influence of her never-ending determination not to fail herself, her family, or her friends, and her constant saying to me, "You can do it!"

To my sister, Deborah, for her perspective on life and how she inspired me to lighten up when life got tough!

To the memory of my father, who gave me a positive example to live up to.

To my publishers. Without their literary, publishing, and personal development talents and skills, the world would never have known the power of *No Excuse!* nor experienced its lifelong benefits. They are more than publishers; they are teammates and friends in the quest to make this world a place where people recognize their responsibilities to themselves, others, and society.

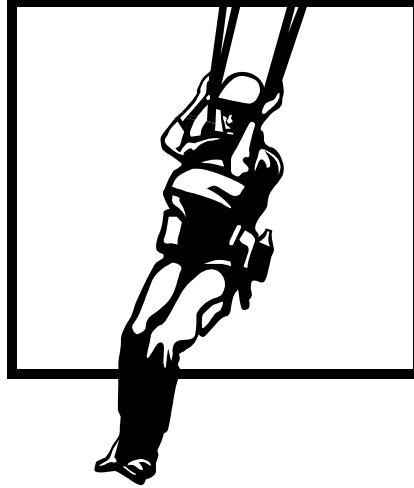
Finally, I thank God for the gifts He has bestowed upon me, including my family, my health, the gift of expression, and the opportunity to make a positive difference in this world.

Jay Rifenburg

A PERSONAL COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE

“I am the sum total of the genetic endowment with which I came into the world, and of all the experiences which have made up my life. Some of them have been good, some bad, but all of them have been mine. What I currently am is what I deserve to be. My life, my reputation, my influence is the mirror of the choices I have made. If I am not everything I can be, it is because I haven’t chosen to be more. I am determined not to live in my past, which I cannot change, or to waste time waiting for the future, which I cannot guarantee, but to live in the emerging reality of the NOW, which is all I have. I cannot do everything, but I can do some things. I certainly cannot do everything well, but I can do some things well. I cannot guarantee I will win, but I can promise I will not allow losing to become a habit, and if I fail, it will not be a failure of nerve. So I will stand tall, feel deeply, think large, and strive mightily, remembering what I accomplish probably won’t change the course of human history, but what I attempt will create the course of my personal history. Toward making this declaration a reality, I hereby commit myself.”

—JOHN COMPERE



PROLOGUE

I'm twelve hundred and fifty feet above the earth. My parachute hasn't snapped me out of my fall. I can't look up to see what's going on. My head is caught in a vise of tangled lines and my chin is hammered into my chest. Instinct and images recalled from training films tell me my parachute is trailing above me like a ribbon. The world around me appears chaotic and unconcerned about my dilemma. The drone of the plane above is gone. The sound of the wind and my awareness of the earth and sky is lost as I shut down and shut out. I can hear only my thoughts and feel my pounding heart.

I had only myself and my pack when our Airborne training unit boarded the C-130 Hercules transport plane for our *first* jump. As I stood in the belly of the plane, I felt all alone. All I had was on me and within me. Suddenly I was standing in the open door. I would be the first to fling a half-yearning, half-reluctant body out into space. "Go!" was the final word I heard from the Jump Master. The rush of wind, when it seems to pull you out the door, is the greatest thrill. All of a sudden you're suspended in mid-air, but only for an instant. As you start to fall, nature instantly measures your mass and determines your destiny according to its laws.

My parachute was carefully packed...or was it? It's supposed to blossom and save me from falling to certain death. The laws of aerodynamics and physics are crucial. I knew this intuitively and through my education. They need to become allies. If not, my twisted lines will hold me hostage until I die!

“No excuse, sir!” I thought back to my West Point training. No whining. No complaining. No blaming. Get on with it! Accept responsibility. I wanted to be Airborne, and was I ever. All I wanted now was a safe landing. I just wanted a chance to achieve what I desired in life. I wanted a successful military and business career; I wanted to be a loving husband and father; I wanted to be a leader who makes a difference in the lives of others. The future I dreamed about was instantly being tested by my willingness to risk.

My survival was at stake. I had animal instinct and past experiences to rely on...my study of yesterday’s pre-jump instructions...the academic, physical, emotional and spiritual discipline that got me into and through the United States Military Academy...my studies in nuclear physics, chosen because it was the toughest subject...my ninth-grade determination in swimming that formed championship proportions and drew me into poised, playful, social proficiency...my triumph in overcoming the humiliation I felt at having to repeat 7th grade...my mother’s dauntless conviction that her only son, fatherless from age 11, would be a man of excellence. Finally, I had my father’s heroic stature, his too frequent absences while he was alive, and his achingly illusive presence since his death.

“No excuse, sir! No! Whose fault is this, anyway? Did someone pack this parachute incorrectly? Did someone...did I...slipup in putting it on? Who’s going to be in trouble for this mistake?

No excuse! Cut through the garbage. *My lines are twisted.* Do something!

“*If the Lines Become Twisted...Bicycle!*” All at once, my legs and brain remember. My feet are in heavy combat boots, never intended for flying or pedaling, but they must be put into motion. Miraculously...in action, the laws of physics are wonderful...the lines untwist. Like a newborn coming from the womb, whose lungs fill with that first breath of air, the parachute “explodes,” forming a beautiful floating canopy. It jerks my freed head upward to behold the wonder. It gives me life and time to enjoy the glory of the world waiting for my touchdown.

If my mind drifted, even for an instant, to make an excuse, it would have fatally distracted me from the enormity of my predicament. I would not have reacted fast enough to remedy the situation.

Is this what we want when we jump into LIFE? Are we looking to explore new sensations...to push at the borders of our experience? Do we

want to harness the forces that would control us? Do we want to grow and become better people? Do we want greater capacity for life and a deeper understanding of nature and other people?

Like an opened, gliding parachute, *No Excuse!* can help carry you over whatever thresholds you choose to cross. *No Excuse!* can help give your life a whole new meaning. *No Excuse!* can help you lead a successful, happy, fulfilling life of personal growth. *No Excuse!* can help you grow and become the best you can be, and make a difference. You can feel as if you are special and valuable...because you are!

RISK TO BE FREE

“To laugh is to risk appearing a fool. To weep is to risk appearing sentimental. To reach out for another is to risk exposing your true self. To place your ideas, your dreams, before the crowd, is to risk their loss. To love is to risk not being loved in return. To live is to risk dying. To hope is to risk despair. To try is to risk failure. But risks need to be taken because the greatest hazard in life is to risk nothing. The person who risks nothing does nothing, has nothing, is nothing. He may avoid suffering and sorrow, but he simply cannot learn, feel, change, grow, love...live. Chained by his beliefs, he is a slave; he has forfeited freedom. Only a person who risks is free.”

—EDWIN LAND

ARE YOU SICK AND TIRED OF PEOPLE WHINING?

The principles in *No Excuse!* have given me the understanding to reach heights I hadn't dreamed of. They can do the same for you when you put them in place and use them. They'll give you the tools to scale any mountain. At first they'll assist you like excited, new-found companions met at the start of an adventure. With time and practice, they'll be your reliable, comforting friends, always ready to help you handle challenges. These principles can lead you to true wealth, which is so much more than just money. They can help you change untapped ambition into success.

I have put together the *No Excuse!* principles based on my own experiences. I have drawn particularly from my years at West Point and my Airborne Ranger experiences. My years as a military officer, corporate executive, business owner, lecturer, and motivational speaker, as well as a spouse and parent, have been invaluable in creating the *No Excuse!* philosophy.

Fundamental to the philosophy is that people need the dignity of satisfying work to make their lives and the lives of others better. B.C. Forbes, founder of *Forbes Magazine* and author of several books, suggested that, "Whether we find pleasure in our work or whether we find it a bore depends entirely upon our mental attitude toward it, not upon the task itself." *Whenever we combine labor and love, true success follows.* That's what the foundation of *No Excuse!* is all about. It can guide you to work smart at a life you love living.

Guard against drudgery and discouragement in everything you do. Know that your work contributes to your well-being, as well as that of others. It is absolutely essential to your personal and professional development to understand that, *anything you let get in the way of applying yourself to your goals is only an excuse!*

No Excuse! is designed for people who want to make life better for

themselves and others. They also need to be humble enough to be guided and encouraged to do so. *No Excuse!* is designed for people who want to lead fulfilled lives. It's for those who are willing to accept responsibility for their own success, as well as play a responsible role in the success of others.

No Excuse! is designed for people who grow to understand and accept that success and failure are simply the outcomes of their behavior. Failure is a lesson to prepare us to achieve the outcomes we want. It's a stepping stone.

For many, it's not easy to accept success for themselves. They see success only in the lives of others, which can cause them to develop apathetic, defeatist attitudes.

It's difficult to recognize our own success if we're caught in a web of negative thinking. *No Excuse!* means we accept responsibility for thinking positive. Dwelling on failure holds us back from having the results we want. Once we learn the lessons from them, we can let go of our failures and mistakes. *No Excuse!* is designed for people willing to eliminate the negative thinking that thwarts and overburdens their efforts. *No Excuse!* supports your efforts to identify, work toward, and achieve your dreams and goals.

The exercises in this book are meant to challenge you to explore your own thoughts, feelings, and perceptions. They are particularly meant to challenge your hidden thoughts so you can realize wisdom, strength, and goodness. More of your energies can then be used to serve others while achieving your dreams and goals.

What's your reward for this challenging work? How about getting rid of the fears of rejection and failure so you can move on? Many of us carry around excess baggage, full of excuses. They may always be there, ready to keep you in "safe" and sorry places when you fear failure and rejection. As you begin living a *No Excuse!* life, you'll have less room for excuses.

By using *No Excuse!* principles, you'll come to the day when you can honestly say *No Excuse!* because you won't need any. You'll eliminate that bad habit. You'll learn how to truly define success for yourself. You'll learn from your own experiences that there is *No Excuse!* for you not to be successful.

When I devoted myself to developing and living out *No Excuse!*, I made a personal and professional decision to walk away from what I

thought was security. I would risk everything I had accumulated and have no one to blame, not even myself, if I failed. I had to realize that blaming myself would only be another way of defeating myself. This helped me remember my formal introduction to the *No Excuse!* philosophy.

I entered West Point in July of 1976. It's a place where the phrase "No excuse, sir!" is uttered by cadets every day. It's one of the four answers a plebe (freshman) may give when addressed by an upperclassman. The others are "Yes, sir;" "No, sir;" and "Sir, I do not understand." In 1976, when I was 19, "No excuse, sir!" meant no more to me than a way to end an uncomfortable one-sided conversation. I was too frightened and intimidated to understand why such rigid limitations were part of military training.

Thirteen years later, on a night in 1989, I had a powerful insight: *No excuse, sir!* was a basic statement that left nowhere to hide. It had played a vital role in my development as a thinker and a doer. *No Excuse!* thinking was basic training. It was "Achievement 101." With every repetition, the *No Excuse!* response emphasized the benefits of cleaning the slate and getting on with the search for solutions. There was no time to waste in unproductive excuse-making.

I was standing alone in my office, alone in the hush following a grand opening party for the business I had just started. For years I had dreamed of doing this, and I seized the moment. To get there, I had let go of a secure, flourishing career where I was methodically making my way to the top.

It was a difficult decision, about as hard as deciding not to make the military my career. I was driven by the desire for a different life. Fortunately, I was blessed with my wife's encouragement and support as I wrestled with decisions and made them.

I was happy about how I had gotten to where I was that night. But when the celebration was over and the hundreds of friends and supporters had gone, why did I stand there feeling so alone and frightened? When opening my own business was a dream come true, something most people only fantasize about, why did I feel so unaccomplished and unhappy?

I was filled with a rush of longing for my dad. I had never missed him so much; I never wanted his touch and approval as much as I did then. A yearning for what might have been surged through my heart. It was as

though I was faltering on the edge of a cliff. I stood there until a peace came over me, as I sadly acknowledged it was time to let go of my father's death. It could not serve me as a reason or an excuse for making future decisions. It could never be an excuse for not attempting anything. His approval could not serve as motivation for attempting anything either. This would be true even if he were alive.

I realized I was now an adult, moving on to create the life I wanted for myself and my family. What I accomplished was achieved through honesty, sincerity, and commitment. It was also the result of vigorous effort in partnership with people I respected and loved.

In this moment I began my life as a self-responsible person. It's incredibly important to release the need for approval when we begin traveling on the road to fulfillment. I realized, for the first time in my life, how crucial it is to create a life based on our own expectations. *In general, the real or imagined expectations of others simply don't matter.* Of course, if you are in a job situation, you may need to align some of your personal expectations with those of your boss. But be careful that your actions are in line with your value system and what you know to be right.

While feeling the great emptiness of my father's absence, I understood what was needed to begin living a full, mature *No Excuse!* life: self-respect, self-responsibility, and self-acceptance.

No Excuse! was born that night. It meant more freedom and power over my own destiny than I had ever known. Up to that point, all my achievements had only been on loan to me. Now I finally owned them and could benefit more fully from the lessons learned along the way.

I committed to moving on. I felt secure in my ability to produce. I believed in the Golden Rule (Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.) and my ability to live and prosper by it. I was grateful for the love and support of significant people in my life. I was especially thankful for Noni, my loving wife, best friend, and business partner. Once I had made the decision, tremendous relief and exhilaration replaced the anxiety I'd been living with for so long. I could now experience the power of the growth that occurs from responsibly crossing the threshold into new maturity and awareness.

Your Life Is in Your Hands

High on a hilltop overlooking a beautiful city, there lived a wise old

man. The local children were taught to seek his guidance and respect his teachings.

One day, two boys devised a plan to confuse the old man. They caught a small bird and headed for the hilltop. As they approached the seated figure, one of the boys held the little bird cupped in his hands.

“Wise old man,” the boy said, “Can you tell me if the bird I have in my hands is dead or alive?”

The old man gazed silently at the two boys, and then said: “If I tell you the bird locked in your hands is alive, you will close your hands and crush the life from it. If I tell you the bird is dead, you will open your hands and it will fly away to freedom.

“Son, in your hands you hold the power of life and death. You have the power to choose destruction and the end of a spirit and a song. Or you can choose to free the bird so it has a future, with all its potential. You are wise to know you can choose between life and death.

“If you allow my answer to determine whether the bird lives or dies, you will have given away your power. You will have also given away your responsibility to make the correct choice, and to rejoice in your own strength and wisdom.”

The boys came down that hill a bit wiser. The old man, in respecting their desire to test themselves and his authority, proved to be a leader and a teacher. He perceived their rebelliousness as an underlying desire to relinquish their self-responsibility. By refusing to cooperate, he contributed to their self-awareness and growth.

We Are the Decision Makers—*The Choice Is Yours*

You and I need to be the decision makers in our own lives and careers. It is also our responsibility to allow and encourage others to do the same. We all have the power to choose, and our accumulated choices largely structure the lives we lead. *Acknowledging we have choices is a first step toward accepting self-responsibility.* Choosing to exercise our personal power by making choices is a challenge and joy in and of itself.

Children are exposed to society’s expectations every day, through their parents/caretakers and other family members; in our places of worship; through their peers and schools; and through movies, television, books, and music, to name a few influencing factors. Some of the expectations are positive and some are negative.

How often are children taught that their first responsibility is to reflect

on whether a certain direction is right for them? Did anyone ever tell you that? If so, when did you start doing it? Did you stop? Did anyone ever teach you how to think? Or were you, like many of us, taught to listen to parents and others without thinking for yourself?

This book will help you discover the power within yourself—the power to choose and act. It’s a message meant to reach you where you think and feel, in your mind and in your heart, where it really counts. I hope *No Excuse!* will serve you, just as the wise man’s words served the boys. I hope you will acknowledge your power and use it for the good of all. When you use your power to obtain something truly in your best interest, as long as you aren’t causing harm, it’s also in the best interest of others.

Use the principles explained here to make choices that are in your own and others’ best interests. Your alternative would be to adopt the behavior patterns of many who blindly follow the dictates of society and others, or blindly rebel against them. Either extreme is equally self-destructive and not self-responsible. Just the fact that you are reading this book is a strong indicator that you are doing your best to make wise choices.

The outcomes we experience in life are largely dependent on our choices and actions. The lessons I learned that night have been confirmed every day since. *Our actions, based on clear self-awareness, accompanied by self-responsibility, can create turning points in our lives.*

When you live a *No Excuse!* life, you will never again allow yourself to be pushed by circumstances or other people’s desires that aren’t in your best interest. You will clearly see where and when it is your opportunity and responsibility to make a decision. You will accept responsibility for the actions you take that contribute to your failures and successes. You will not blame anyone else for your failures, nor be self-centered regarding your successes. You will always be aware of the part you played in both. You will rejoice in your successes and view your failures as learning experiences. When you live a *No Excuse!* life you will be drawn toward your dreams.

The *THESAURUS* Factor and the *Staircase of Success*

The principles you find in this book constitute the treasury of my life. It is a treasury that increases every day and each time it is used. It con-

tains truths that are essential to live a happy, fulfilled life. As you use these ideas, they will help you increase your understanding of life, giving you the opportunity to increase your prosperity in all areas.

Why was the idea of *No Excuse!* and building a *Staircase of Success* developed? To organize the principles of success so they are easy to understand and apply. I wanted to create a method everyone could use to make a difference in their lives and the lives of others.

Why are success principles so important? They're similar to the fluids in a car. You could have the fastest car on the track, but if you neglect the fundamentals, you won't even finish the race. Things like gas, oil, and water, while simple, are vitally important.

You can be on the fast track of success, but if you neglect the fundamentals you won't even be able to finish the greatest race of all, let alone win. Concern yourself with things like honesty, integrity, purpose, desire, and letting go of the past. Do you ever think about them? Most people are so concerned with the challenges of daily living, they rarely or never stop to think about the essential ingredients of success.

I wanted to find a synonym for success I felt would be appropriate to use as an acronym. I pulled out a thesaurus, but couldn't find a word I liked. Then I started thinking, "What does *THESAURUS* mean?" I went to a dictionary and found that it means "a treasury of ideas; a treasury of knowledge."

That's when I decided *THESAURUS* was a great word to describe the treasury of ideas on success that I wanted to share. And that's exactly what the *Staircase* is built on. Your *Staircase of Success*, the *THESAURUS Factor*, takes each letter in the word *THESAURUS* and uses it as a step.

In Part I, we'll cover the foundations of success: self-responsibility, purpose, and integrity. This will prepare you for your journey along the *Staircase of Success*, which is explained in-depth in Part II. Keep an open mind and have fun. It's going to be an exciting journey!

THE OPTIMIST'S CREED

“Promise yourself: To be so strong that nothing can disturb your peace of mind. To talk health, happiness, and prosperity to every person you meet. To make all your friends feel that there is something in them. To look at the sunny side of everything and make your optimism come true. To think only the best, to work only for the best, and expect only the best. To be just as enthusiastic about the success of others as you are about your own. To forget the mistakes of the past and press on to the greater achievements of the future. To wear a cheerful countenance at all times and give every living creature you greet a smile. To give so much time to the development of yourself that you have no time to criticize others. To be too large for worry, too noble for anger, too strong for defeat, and too happy to permit the presence of trouble.”

—MCLANDBURGH WILSON

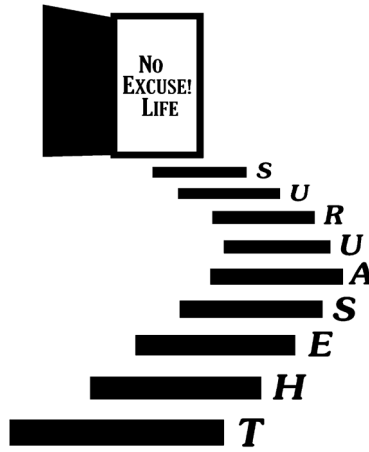
Part One

**YOUR
FOUNDATION
FOR
SUCCESS**

THE MAN IN THE GLASS

“When you get what you want in your struggle for self, and the world makes you King for a Day; just go to a mirror and look at yourself, and see what THAT man has to say. For it isn't your father or mother or wife, whose judgment upon you must pass; the fellow whose verdict counts most in your life, is the one staring back from the glass. Some people may think you're a straight shootin' chum, and call you a wonderful guy; but the man in the glass says you're only a bum, if you can't look him straight in the eye. He's the fellow to please; never mind all the rest, for he's with you clear up to the end. And you've passed your most dangerous, difficult test, if the man in the glass is your friend. You may fool the whole world down the pathway of life, and get pats on the back as you pass; but your final reward will be heartaches and tears, if you've cheated the man in the glass.”

—DALE WIMBROW SR.



Chapter 1

SELF-RESPONSIBILITY

The Basis of a No Excuse! Life

Attention! At ease. You may have picked up this book to learn what a more successful life is all about and how to achieve it. In the simplest sense, the answers lie in the title—*No Excuse!* Once you become alert to the opportunity to make a productive decision, and are willing to take responsibility for it, the payoff can be a happy, fulfilling life.

I could tell you to go no further than that and be on your way. I could tell you to read no more, close this book, and start living the life you want. Well, it doesn't work quite like that.

As Ben Sweetland said, "Success is a journey, not a destination." It's also a learning process. Therefore, it is often helpful to learn about the experiences of someone else who has overcome obstacles that may be similar to yours. Perhaps some of the experiences I've had in learning to live a *No Excuse!* life can help motivate you toward living the life *you* want.

When I aspired to write this book, I had to get through all the roadblocks, all the really "good" excuses not to do it. I had to avoid distractions like raking the leaves, making more coffee, and the multitude of other things I could do to avoid it. I had to imagine you starting here and getting inspired and instructed along the way.

What an important combination—*inspiration and instruction*. They're tools that can help you achieve more and live your dreams. Whatever your dreams and goals may be, inspiration and instruction are key components in beginning your journey toward the life you want.

Maybe you're not sure about what you want out of life. You might be emotionally reluctant to admit it. That's okay. Many people have been beat up and put down so many times that they've given up on their dreams. My suggestion is to do whatever it takes to—***Snap out of it!*** You can do it.

I've set and achieved some extraordinary goals by living a *No Excuse!* life. I'm not saying this to brag. I just want you to know that you, too, can do the same, using the ideas in this book. When everyone feels free enough and is encouraged enough to achieve their goals, this will be a better world. So I've taken the challenge and set the goal to let others know that it feels good to be self-responsible.

I encourage and challenge you to make the commitment *now* to do whatever it takes to live your dreams. The time is now! The missing link may simply be that nobody ever told you how exhilarating it is to assume responsibility for your own life, dreams, and goals.

With this part of the book, you'll start mastering the basics of *No Excuse!* You'll build self-confidence as you develop a life plan to guide you. You'll envision the success you've always wanted. As you later move through the steps of the *THESAURUS Factor*, your *Staircase of Success*, you'll learn everything you need to accomplish your goals. Best of all, you'll experience more control over your life than ever before. This will lead to reduced stress and a gratifying sense of accomplishment.

Of course, it's likely that you're going to need to make some changes. As you might expect from a book titled *No Excuse!*, *if you want some things to change in your life, you need to change some things in your life*. After all, insanity could be defined as “doing the same thing and expecting a *different* result!” If you're waiting for your life to change, guess what? It waits! It is highly unlikely that someone will come to your door and offer you an exciting life.

Applying the principles in this book will give you the opportunity to eliminate the negative thinking that has formed seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Start believing your dreams are attainable.

As you apply the principles of *No Excuse!* and discover you can reach

your dreams and goals, you'll realize that you can be happy, successful, and fulfilled in all areas of your life. Grow and become whatever you want to be. Assume self-responsibility and take appropriate action.

If you have a healthy desire to be successful, then you're ready for *No Excuse!* living. You're then ready to make the most of yourself and your opportunities. If your patterns of personal management are crippled by ignorance and self-doubt, I suggest you prepare to let them go. From now on, you'll have the opportunity to live your life with new understanding.

Before we get to the *THESAURUS Factor* in Part II, let's put the cornerstone of your new *No Excuse!* life in place. Let's begin with the fundamentals. Consider starting to build your success by making self-responsibility one of your greatest strengths.

From Roadblocks to Enrichment

Responsible parents want their children to have a healthy respect for life. Yet the warnings, advice, and encouragement we receive as children sometimes defeat that intent. In some instances, the message gets so serious that happy feelings seem wrong and inappropriate. Being good begins to be frightening. Do we believe being responsible isn't any fun? Have you ever felt that way? *No Excuse!* can help you change your mind. Living responsibly can be *great* fun! Few things will lift your mood and strengthen your confidence as much. The pleasure of self-responsibility expands dramatically as you live it.

Does that mean it's easy? No, not necessarily. But it is simple. Clearing a space for a self-responsible act can be challenging. Once you've done it, however, it gets easier. Euphoria creates energy. Your determination grows with every experience of mature, decisive action. Whether it leads to success or failure, a self-responsible act increases your power to move on. You are gathering momentum toward the life you want.

This book includes mental exercises that will challenge your thinking and cause you to explore your inner feelings. It will help you identify the obstacles that have stopped you from achieving your goals. Maybe you let inexperience or a difficult experience hold you back. Perhaps, for the first time, you'll understand what happened and why.

Look for other things too. Most of all, watch for signs of the strength, courage, wisdom, and inner beauty you already possess. These are the foundation blocks for you to build your future on. A greater understand-

ing of the excellent qualities you have to offer is part of what's in the pot at the end of the rainbow! What about the baggage you're carrying as you travel toward it? Every time you rid yourself of an excuse, your load gets lighter. You have more room for the useful things you need for the journey. Every time you work to remove a roadblock, every time you see an excuse and allow it to evaporate, the qualities you value are enhanced. Your life is enriched.

No Excuse! teaches you to recognize your fears, without letting them stop you. You'll use them as a resource to point the way to your heart's desire—the direction in which your greatest successes lie. *Whenever you sense a fear of failure or rejection, realize that you are getting closer to your heart's desire.* Let it be a sign to you that opportunity is near, and it's time for you to call on the inspiration and instruction of *No Excuse!* Challenge the cloudy and often deceptive nature of the excuses that seem to protect you from failure and rejection, at the cost of success and triumph. Get ready to cross new thresholds with a greater sense of who you are and what you are capable of doing.

My decision to leave the corporate life to launch a business is one example of how adding challenges brought unexpected growth. I carefully calculated the costs and benefits. At that time, I couldn't imagine that the *No Excuse!* philosophy would emerge. I gained a greater understanding of something that had always troubled me: Why do some people reach for and attain fullness of life, while most don't? Most people make excuses! They excuse themselves from living a better life. Don't be one of them.

Getting Your Wheels Turning

Do you remember the times you surprised yourself, and perhaps others, by taking charge of a risky situation and bringing it to a successful resolution? I hope you've had experiences like that because they help you develop a confident maturity. Recall a moment from your past when you felt exhilarated by success, perhaps a moment when you achieved a goal. Stop here and don't go on until you do. Dwell on that memory. How sweet it is!

The memory of your past successful performance plays an important part in how you mold *No Excuse!* for your own needs. I'll prompt it by recalling one of my own experiences. It's an almost universal memory for Americans who grew up in the Twentieth Century.

You are sitting on a hard triangular seat, but it's not on your trusty tricycle. You're up on a two-wheeler, wobbly, legs dangling. Your feet are slipping from the pedals, toeing the ground right and left to keep yourself from losing balance and tipping over.

A parent's hand grabs the seat, balancing you until you're moving fast enough. Remember how they kept pace with your fledgling efforts? They were more confident than you that you could do it.

Remember the exhilaration you felt when you could finally ride and control the bike? The laws of physics formed a network of support. They enabled you to succeed at something that had seemed scary before.

Let's go back to why you wanted to ride a two-wheeler. Remember how great your tricycle was? When you were on it, you didn't even have to think about it. You could go backward and forward or turn, and not fall! Why were you choosing a wobbly bicycle over a stable tricycle?

Did you outgrow the tricycle? Had your knees started hitting the handlebars? Had you begun compensating with an awkward legs-akimbo style of riding? Try to remember. What told you it was time to move on to a new challenge? Were there people helping you explore options and consider alternatives? A larger tricycle? A pedal car? Why were the right decisions, the right size bicycle, the level terrain, the guiding hand that knew *just* when to let go, provided for you?

Pedal Power

Before we examine these questions, and explore how the physical, mental, and spiritual components of life work together to help you overcome each obstacle, it's time for some sheer pleasure. *Feel it.* Feel it happening. *Your face parts the air. The wind whispers, gently passing by your ears. Your arms and hands loosely guide your direction, confident and comfortable on the ringed ridges of handlebar guards. Your feet press the pedals, pumping and coasting in natural rhythms of motion. You're excited and free!*

This is the feeling *No Excuse!* gives you. It's exhilarating and freeing. It's the feeling of honest personal power—the power to choose and act. Self-responsibility is the key.

We could also examine the moment you mastered your tricycle. It's important to recapture a moment of self-responsibility. Recall the pedals

responding to your legs. Recall the forces of nature brought into play by your ability to coordinate your effort. Recall pushing the pedals and turning the big front wheel.

Pushing pedals! Turning a wheel! Going from stop to start! Did you go backward or forward your first time? It doesn't matter. You were in motion, turning at will. Your mind communicated the idea of "leaning in the direction you wanted to turn" as your arms and hands ever so slightly moved the handle bars in a moment of almost miraculous coordination.

Would you like to experience that feeling of mastery again and again? Well, you can! The choices you make as an adult living a *No Excuse!* life can be more thrilling and fulfilling than any childhood challenge ever was.

Be the Hero in Your Own Life

Were you taught that life is a struggle? This perception causes a lot of unhappiness. To struggle implies you are in a negative, no-win state. This dim view of life acts as a self-fulfilling prophecy and leads to negative results. It's an attitude of defeat. This is not to say that life isn't challenging. Without challenges your life would be boring; you would experience little, if any, personal growth. Challenges test you and help you stretch to new levels of achievement. As you incorporate *No Excuse!* into your life, you'll find that doing it without a struggle mentality is more effective, just plain easier, and a lot more fun.

Strive for the excitement and joy self-responsibility brings when you accomplish a goal. If you are reluctant to leave the comfort zone of hiding in shadowy fears, that's where you'll stay! It's your decision when to step out. The choice is yours.

It's a wonderful feeling when you understand and accept that outcomes depend on actions. This is the cause-and-effect principle. Even if you choose to stay in the shadows of your fears and you accept responsibility for it, you have reached a level of awareness that most people will never know.

You can be a hero in your own life story. Whether or not this is apparent to anyone else is irrelevant. It is only important that you have reached this fundamental realization; it's essential for any meaningful accomplishment. Although your decision-making process can be influenced by others and the environment, it is ultimately *your* decision to act or not to act. *The actions you take largely determine how you live your life.*

A Knight to Remember

The Knight in Rusty Armor is a favorite story of mine that I'd like you to have as a traveling companion on your *No Excuse!* journey.

In the opening pages of Robert Fisher's symbolic book, we meet a knight at the top of his career. No other knight had rescued more damsels in distress. No other knight had slain more dragons or ridden off in as many directions looking for the latest crusade. This knight was also famous for his armor. Its brilliance told the world (and reassured him too) that he was *the* example of a good, kind, and loving knight. That's what he wanted to be, and that's what he happily thought he was.

His wife Juliet and son Christopher, however, were not so happy about him. It seems the armor never came off anymore; a knight needs to be ever-ready for battle, and never let his fans or his guard down. Christopher didn't know what his father really looked like, or felt like, and Juliet couldn't remember. She had experienced enough of a life reduced to rigid and unfeeling embraces. She delivered an ultimatum: The armor gets hung in a closet, and the knight spends more time with her and Christopher, or else.

Was Juliet the damsel he once rescued? The knight pondered his predicament. He began to suspect getting the armor off would be a problem. He woke up to the fact, thanks to his wife, that he had lost himself in his own foundry-wear. What he didn't know, and she didn't either, was how he could get it off. When even the best efforts of his bully blacksmith failed, the knight started out on a journey for help.

First, he made the trip to bid farewell to a king he had worked for in the past. The king wasn't available, so the knight spoke to his jester about his dilemma. The man scoffed at the knight's notion that his situation was unique. "We all get trapped in our own defenses from time to time," he assured him, and he gave him the magic word. Merlin was the "can opener" the knight needed.

In the lonely woods, the knight eventually met Merlin. Finally, he was too weakened by his wandering to run from the truth. However, Merlin's direct observations didn't sit well with the knight. "Perhaps you have always taken the truth to be an insult," Merlin responded to the knight's indignation.

The knight's rehabilitation began. In the company of a squirrel and pigeon, who supported and cheered him, he would travel on the Path of Truth. He would enter three castles along the way: the Castle of Silence,

the Castle of Knowledge, and the Castle of Will and Daring. He would leave each of them remarkably changed within and without.

His armor would gradually fall off. Each life-changing experience was accompanied by torrents of tears that rusted the armor in critical places. Each insightful moment was followed by a piece of rusted armor falling from the knight's face, head, arms, and hands. Increasingly less burdened, the knight was better able to climb the steep mountain slopes toward his goal.

The lesson the knight learns from the animals is *acceptance*. "When you learn to *accept* instead of *expect*, you'll have fewer disappointments," Rebecca, the pigeon, tells the knight, as he stands at the door of the Castle of Silence. At the Castle of Knowledge, the knight learned the difference between expectations and ambition. Merlin then reappeared and said, "Ambition that comes from the mind can get you nice castles and fine horses. However, only ambition that comes from the heart can bring happiness.

"Ambition from the heart is pure. It competes with no one and harms no one. In fact, it works in such a way that it serves others at the same time."

With each successful lesson learned, the knight found himself again on the Path of Truth. Each time he was encumbered by less and less of his armor. His insights, which were lessons in self-knowledge, continued to bring tears of recognition, remorse, and relief...as chunks of armor continued to rust and fall from him.

At the third and final castle, only his breastplate remained as the unlikely trio faced the dragon guarding the Castle of Will and Daring. The knight advanced bravely toward the dragon because he believed that fear and doubt were illusions. As the knight's fear and doubt grew less and less, the dragon grew smaller and smaller, and finally disappeared.

Once again on the Path of Truth, he was within sight of the mountain-top. Hand over hand he pulled himself toward his final goal. He clung fiercely to the rocky surface, only to learn that his last challenge would be...*to let go*. He fell into the abyss of his own past. He recognized fully, for the first time, the responsibility he bore for his own life. He realized the necessity of shedding judgments that others are to blame for his mistakes and failures.

Faster and faster he dropped, giddy as his mind descended into his heart. Then, for the first time, he saw his life clearly—without judgment

or excuses. In that instant he accepted full responsibility for his life, for the influence that he allowed other people to have on it, and for the events that he had permitted to shape it.

From this moment on, he would no longer blame his mistakes and misfortunes on anyone or anything outside himself. The recognition that he was the cause, not the effect, gave him a new feeling of power.

He began to “fall” *upward*, as if the force of gravity was reversed, and found himself standing on the mountaintop. His tears of gratitude for life and the lessons he learned brought him to his knees. The tears were extraordinarily hot because they came so fully from his heart. They melted the last of his armor, the breastplate.

The brilliant splendor once lent him by the armor has not been diminished. Now, because he is healed, he shines with an inner radiance more beautiful than reflected glory.

Like the knight, we can all get trapped in our own armor at times. But once we learn to shed society’s expectations and realize the importance of our own expectations, we too can have our place in the sun.

“Brains in Your Head and Feet in Your Shoes”

In Dr. Seuss’s final published work before his death, *Oh, The Places You’ll Go*, he wrote, “You have brains in your head, you have feet in your shoes, you can steer yourself any direction you choose.”

Follow the teachings of Dr. Seuss’s small verse and act on your decisions with honesty, integrity, and selflessness; the world will be your oyster. Every day you’ll witness new pearls. You possess the unique talents and resources that will help you put yourself on the *Staircase of Success*. Of course, it is necessary that you first learn to take full responsibility for the decisions you make. The following list of questions will help you open your eyes to the excuse-making that may exist in your own life today. **HOW GOOD ARE YOU AT MAKING EXCUSES?** *Read these questions out loud so you can hear your own voice.* This will make it easier for you to be truthful with yourself.

- Do I say, “The dog ate it”?
- Do I blame tardiness on “an alarm that didn’t go off”?
- Do I use the words “can’t,” or “couldn’t,” when actually I “won’t” or “wouldn’t” is the truth?
- Do I procrastinate and leave a mountain of work unfinished because “After all, I’m only human”?

- Do I avoid doing new things because I'm "too old," "too young," or "too tired"?
- Do I accept defeat, convinced that "nice guys finish last"?
- Do I excuse myself from blame for a wrongdoing because "I was only following orders"?
- Do I fail to return phone calls or reply to emails because I "forget" to do so or I'm "too busy"?
- Do I overeat because "I simply can't help myself"?
- Do I cheat on exams because "everyone else does"?
- Do I blame my career or business stagnation on my boss or the economy?
- Do I neglect my family because I "can't find the time"?
- Do I say, "I don't have time," to avoid doing the necessary tasks to become more successful in life?
- Do I say, "It's not my cup of tea," when I am objecting to an idea, instead of stating the real reason?
- Do I say, "I don't have the money," when it's not true?
- Do I say, "It's in the mail," when it's not?
- Do I say, "I'd do it, but..." when I'm about to offer an excuse?

If you answered these questions honestly and, like many people, said yes to some of them, you are well on your way to eliminating excuses from your life. You are on the road to living a life of self-responsibility.

What are some of the decisions you are preparing to make this week, month, or year? Which will have the most impact on your personal life and professional career? Are those decisions personal, financial, educational, familial, or spiritual? Are you willing to make the decisions necessary and take action to move forward? Are you willing to accept responsibility for the outcomes of those decisions?

Be courageous. Get a clean sheet of paper and write down a list of the decisions you will soon be making that will impact your life and the lives of people around you. This heightens your awareness of the excuses you may have frequently used to either avoid facing decisions or taking responsibility for the results.

Take a Brave New Look at Your Thinking

Benjamin Franklin said, "He who is good at making excuses is seldom good at anything else." So how do we eliminate excuses? The first step toward becoming good at anything is to realize you may own a

storehouse of self-imposed burdens. They're called excuses!

What if you see the need for self-responsibility one moment, then see yourself slip back into an old excuse the next? It's better to see it all happening than to be blind, or pretend to be blind, to what's going on. Opportunities for courage are everywhere, and your brave moments will accumulate as you practice *No Excuse!* You'll become aware of your own excuse-making. A part of you will start peeking out from under the blindfold you've made for yourself and say, "Uh-oh, I did it again." Every time you say that to yourself, it's a self-responsible moment.

It can feel as good as the wind parting in front of your face on your first all-by-yourself bicycle ride. Remember, being alone is part of the glory. If it feels a bit lonely, that's okay. It's going to be challenging and rewarding.

So out with the old way of thinking and in with the new. Excuses can have a root in reality, and at one time every excuse may have been a real reason. For example, at one point it was true that you couldn't ride that bicycle because you weren't big enough, old enough, or ready enough. When old reality turns into a permanent excuse, trouble sets in. "I'll never be big enough or old enough"; "I'll never be able to ride a two-wheeler. I'm just one of those people who was born not knowing how." Sure you are...you and everybody else! *Whenever you find yourself looking for an excuse, change your thinking.* That's what this book is all about helping you do.

How to Keep Excuses in Check

We all live largely by behavioral patterns and habits. They are practical solutions to our need to have ready responses to everyday situations. They are necessary and, for the most part, serve us well. In certain circumstances, however, our logic can falter. We may fall back on excuses to explain a failure, justify a fault, or quit on ourselves.

Keep these things in mind:

- Initially, the challenges of living *No Excuse!* are just that...challenges. Relinquishing excuses requires effort.
- What's true for you is true for me. We all face problems that have a certain degree of sameness. We all need reasons to live, people to love, work to do, and joy to share. We all have sorrow and disappointment to bear.
- We're all better off when we're on the path of self-responsibility and

action. Most of us are immobilized by the habits of blaming and excuse-making to one degree or another.

Will you grow rich with *No Excuse!* living? Yes! Rich may or may not include more money. That depends on you. *No Excuse!* living will:

- Enrich your life.
- Enrich the lives of the people you love.
- Enrich the lives of the people you work with.
- Give you the elements to create the success you want for yourself and your family.
- Help yourself begin with a self-responsible act: Accept that time is what you're born with, and life is, for the most part, what you make it.

A Lesson in Human Behavior

How you live your life is largely determined by how much you are willing to accept responsibility for shaping it. For too many people, time is what they are given...period. They never design a life. They look at what they have and what someone else has and make a judgment. Either they say, "I don't have it so bad, I've got more than the other guy." Or they say, "That other guy is so lucky. If I had what he's got, I'd be all set." Whichever determination comes up, their evaluation of their own life is based on another person's acquisitions and accomplishments. With *No Excuse!* living, you are freed from the bind of comparison. All you are concerned with is how to get started and stay on the path to the life *you* want.

Some people tend to get caught in the status quo of their circumstances. But remember, life is meant to be more than the nine-to-five...or whatever routine or rut we may have created. *The challenges and stresses we encounter every day are not normally caused by nature. Most of them are the result of the unmet expectations that arise from our thinking.* Most of them are not original, but are the result of what we've been taught by our elders, observations, or experiences. In most cases, your thinking determines your life. The good news is, *you can change your life by changing your thinking.*

Few young people reach adolescence without discovering that a good excuse will probably help them out of a tough spot. However, we are not born with this thinking. It's learned behavior. Most often it is learned by example and tested by experience. The more tough spots a kid gets into,

the more excuse-making could become a habit.

What happens here? If a child's inappropriate behavior is not corrected, the opportunity for him or her to explore other behaviors may be lost. More importantly, the young person's insights into the part he or she actually plays in creating the tough situation becomes clouded. The truths of self-responsibility actually become hidden or lost to that individual. What kind of energy or motivation would a person have left to correct nonproductive behavior if the constant strain of coming up with a good excuse was always the first priority?

Three Little Words that Changed My Life

I arrived at West Point in July 1976 for seven weeks of Basic Training. We called it "Beast Barracks." By then, I had learned the value of having a good excuse. Whenever circumstances warranted, and I wanted someone or something to blame for an unwanted result, I thought a good excuse would benefit me. I guess I was pretty average in that regard, much like my fellow plebes. Then, too, we were all achievers or we wouldn't even be at West Point. Nevertheless, we were all going to be amazed at how difficult it was to be deprived of the opportunity to excuse our way out of a situation.

Excuse-making was forbidden! We weren't allowed to give the upperclassmen reasons for our mistake(s) or failure(s), regardless of whether we were involved individually or collectively. Because of this rule, we were frequently going to hear ourselves and other plebes say three little but powerful words—"No excuse, sir!" Here's the full paragraph given to excuses in *Bugle Notes*, the Fourth Class System Handbook:

Cadets cultivate the habit of not offering excuses. There is no place in the military profession for an excuse for failure. Extenuating circumstances may be explained and submitted, but, even if accepted such explanations are never considered excuses.

—BUGLE NOTES, *Cultivating the Soldierly Habit*

The idea of self-responsibility was enforced right from the start of the West Point experience. This excerpt from *Bugle Notes* illustrates its importance:

The first seven weeks of a cadet's life at West Point are devoted to intensive military training. During this period the entering class of ca-

dets are equipped and given the preliminary training necessary before they join the Corps. Here, entering civilians undergo the stressful socialization process which produces a well-disciplined motivated class, prepared for acceptance into the Corps of Cadets as fourth classmen. It consists of training characterized by clear, careful, thorough instruction of individuals; exactness of execution; strict but just discipline; immediate response to correction; development of willing compliance to directives, careful physical hardening, and begins the process of cultivation of the soldierly habit. The new cadet's waking hours are completely controlled. Every activity is carefully supervised. Attention to detail and flawless appearance become second nature to him.

—BUGLE NOTES, 1976-1980, p. 53-54

At the successful conclusion of Cadet Basic Training, I was accepted into the Corps of Cadets as a fourth classman. The Fourth Class System is administered by the upper classes and supervised by the Commandant of Cadets. This system is in place to achieve very specific objectives. One is to teach the customs, traditions, and heritage of the United States Military Academy to new arrivals. The system is also meant to generate a controlled, stressful, military environment. Cadets who cannot function under stress, or who cannot otherwise meet the standards of the military profession, are identified.

Completion of Cadet Basic Training coincides with the return of the three upper classes during the last week in August. For the first time, the upperclassmen have an opportunity to observe the new Fourth Class as they stride confidently to the stirring notes of “The Official West Point March.”

This is a moment of high exhilaration. Inevitably, thoughts turn to the men of honor who passed this way before. Foremost on my mind on the day I joined the ranks of “The Long Grey Line,” was General Douglas MacArthur.

Bugle Notes, the handbook quoted from earlier is the plebe's “bible.” It contains everything he needs to know for survival in the world of West Point. *Bugle Notes* is essential, because survival is truly a plebe's major concern.

Cadets without the capability or desire to perform to the standards of the Academy simply leave. Sometimes, they are there one day and gone the next. So it's only natural to look for inspiration from the remarkable people who persevered and made it.

Words to Live By from a Leader's Leader

General MacArthur was one of West Point's finest sons. The inspirational speech he gave as he accepted the Thayer Award in May 1962 was reprinted in the plebe's handbook. In his speech, he pointed to the motto "Duty, Honor, Country," inscribed on the Military Academy's Crest:

...Those three hallowed words...make you strong enough to know when you are weak; and brave enough to face yourself when you are afraid.... They teach you to be proud and unbending in honest failure, but humble and gentle in success; not to substitute words for actions, nor to seek the path of comfort, but to face the stress and spur of difficulty and challenge; to learn to stand up in the storm but to have compassion on those who fall; to master yourself before you seek to master others.... They create in your heart the sense of wonder, the unfailing hope of what is next, and the joy and inspiration of life. They teach you in this way to be an officer and a gentleman.

—BUGLE NOTES, p. 31-32

In my first days at West Point, I was too frightened and intimidated to understand that "No excuse, sir!" was a response required to encourage plebes to be strong and self-responsible. This fact became clear to me later on.

"No excuse, sir!" I can still hear the trembling quality of those words. It was scary trying them out under the stern and unrelenting, often glaring, gaze of a questioning upperclassman. Gradually, "No excuse, sir!" came out stronger, even assertively. What had seemed a natural inclination to find excuses, gave way to a new pattern of thinking: Cut through to a simple statement of fact and address the situation. Whether or not reasons are given or even known, consequences need to be dealt with when something's done incorrectly or left undone.

The Story of My Success

With each passing year, I have reaped lessons from my West Point training, and I expect that to continue for the rest of my life. Military training was designed to encourage healthy self-reflection. In fact, the need to examine personal behavior was emphasized. I developed the habit of correcting patterns that were not producing desired results.

The lesson of the "No excuse, sir!" response soon became clear...healthy self-reflection does not lead to excuse-making. To this

day, when I find myself dwelling on past achievements or failures, I think of the words “No excuse, sir!” This snaps me out of self-congratulatory or self-pitying traps.

Saying “No excuse!” will help you to be stronger, particularly when you’ve taken a leap into the unknown, and find your belief in yourself faltering. Critical times are like the moment a trapeze artist hangs in midair. Will his timing be right as he releases his hold on one bar and waits for another to swing into his grip? I’ve felt that way many times: on the edge. How about you?

My arrival at West Point was one of those times of uncertainty. I felt like I was hanging in midair. Every new arrival had overcome some obstacles just to be admitted. We all had other options, yet we chose this one and we were now facing the consequences.

In entirely different circumstances, thirteen years later, I felt equally challenged. By 1989 I had experienced a successful career at West Point, in the military, and in corporate America. Those years had been full of challenges and achievement. Nothing, however, matched the thrill I felt while standing in the office area of my own business for the first time.

I was alone. The grand-opening party was over; the crowd of supporters and well-wishers had departed; my wife had taken the children home. I was enjoying the calm solitude as I walked through the store preparing to lock up and go home. I appraised, with pleasure, the retail operation my desire and efforts had put in place. I had a resource center for personal and professional enrichment. I was elated. And suddenly, I was scared.

“No excuse, sir!” The words were in my mind. I had risked everything in this venture and there would be no excuse if it failed. For the first time it hit me: I wanted my father to be with me so very much.

I had not experienced a feeling this strong since his death. It had so suddenly interrupted the life of this vital, active man, that we didn’t even have a chance to say goodbye. He was an established dentist and an accomplished amateur golfer. We (my father, mother, sister, and I) lived in the small city of Kingston, New York, where he had been born and raised. He was gone in one shocking moment. His heart stopped beating one sunny day on the patio of our home, while he was sitting with my sister and her friend.

The day he was buried was sunny as well. I can still see myself as an 11-year-old boy. There I was, standing by my mother’s side, saying over

and over to myself, “I will survive, I will survive.”

From that moment on, I looked to my father’s memory for strength and encouragement. He had shown me how he felt life was meant to be lived. I wanted to fulfill his expectations for his only son. But they had never been spoken, so they could only be imagined. I developed unrealistic expectations of myself as a substitute for his. I exaggerated the demands he might have placed on me. I tried to live up to my memory of him, which was distorted by my longing.

I wanted to please him and my mother. She has always been an encourager in my life, consistently supporting me and my efforts. Beginning with my six-weeks premature birth with collapsed lungs, and those first days of “hanging on for dear life,” she led me into a strong and healthy manhood. However unrealistic my expectations of myself had been, she spurred me on to achieve some ambitious goals. They might not have been realized without my single-minded determination to keep my father’s death from being an obstacle to my becoming a man of whom he’d be proud.

As I stood in the offices of my new business that night, I continued to reflect on my thoughts and feelings. I had deliberately separated myself from the hierarchical, paternalistic organizations where I had achieved success. I now felt as if I was face to face with my father’s memory in a way I had never experienced before. I had never before acknowledged or sensed so fully, my longing for his presence and approval.

“No excuse, sir!” I was speaking to him, as well as myself. Something profoundly lonely had me in its grip. His death had deprived me of his loving presence, but had also been the catalyst for my will to succeed.

At that moment, I knew I was letting go of the hold I had allowed the past to have on me. I accepted that not even my father’s death could be used as an excuse. It couldn’t keep me from moving on.

I knew I was ready to stand alone. I realized that my expectations, and not his, would be enough to keep me going toward my dreams and goals. I no longer needed to please him or anyone. I also knew I no longer needed his approval; all I needed was my own. In this moment of open longing and new understanding, I accepted that I was alone, and it was okay.

I had the memory of my father’s love for me. I was also aware that we both had met success through honesty, sincerity and commitment.

They Conquer Who Believe They Can

Create your life based on your own expectations and not the expectations of those around you. We all have the ability to accept or not accept who and what we are. Think about it. How often do we try to mold ourselves to someone else's expectations to please them? If we do, we will probably suffer, in silence or denial, the tragedy of not accepting ourselves and what we choose to do. Owning your life means having the courage to face up to such truths. It means risking, and maybe even taking a relationship to the edge in order to assert yourself. You're likely to generate more respect from others as well.

Becoming self-responsible is a process. As you practice *No Excuse!*, your self-responsible experiences accumulate and can then positively contribute to structuring a life that is more reflective of who you are. You can become a whole person incrementally. If you believe you're whole already—balanced and developed in the seven key areas of life (to be explained more later)—you're further along than many. You grow with every mature decision and the understanding that you alone accept responsibility for your actions.

You may have already noticed that your need for recognition from others has been inversely proportional to how much you were at peace with yourself. To a point, it may be appropriate to seek advice from or model your behavior after a few select people whom you respect—people whose lives are worthy of emulating. It's only human nature to desire acceptance from others. However, it is wise to be selective. Focus only on those people who have your best interests at heart, whose value system is admirable to you, and who love and support you. Then there are times when it is important to stand apart from even these people. It's essential to examine your life and discover whether you like where you're headed. Do you need to change your course in some areas of your life? Are you receiving the outcomes you want?

Practicing *No Excuse!* principles can enhance your feelings of self-worth, self-love, and self-esteem. You'll learn to let go of people you may be using as protection from the fear of rejection. You'll learn how to create new relationships and live life on your own terms. *As you let go of beloved people and stop hiding behind them, you and they will experience a freedom to love each other beyond anything you've ever known.*

You will experience life more fully when you realize that *you* determine your future. With *No Excuse!* thinking, you no longer blame events

or other people for your shortcomings, failures, or timidity. You will have the opportunity to lay the foundation for a future of living life to the fullest.

You may want to ask the questions that anyone on a new path might ask: Am I ready for this? Am I self-responsible enough? Am I capable of dealing with success? Am I capable of dealing with failure? Am I prepared to accept the impact my new-found self-responsibility will have on my family and friends? Am I willing to take responsibility for my actions when things don't go my way? Am I willing to stop weaving an intricate tale of so-called inescapable coincidences to tell the world how everything conspired against me? Am I willing to say "No Excuse!"?

Long ago, I knew a man who took responsibility for his actions; he didn't make excuses. For example, if he was late for dinner, he would say to his wife, "My dear, I didn't leave the office on time." Even when I was a youngster, I liked that fellow. I now believe his words had an early influence on the *No Excuse!* approach to life. He accepted full responsibility and wasted no time inventing excuses. Excuses would have been useless and wouldn't have helped the situation.

A Labor of Love

As you accept responsibility for your actions, you will likely live life with a lighter heart. Knowing you have deliberately decided not to blame others for your actions, you will feel stronger, less alone, and less frightened of the consequences. The fear of rejection and failure that once crippled or handicapped your efforts, will diminish. You are taking charge. The likelihood that you'll let fear control or paralyze your actions will be reduced. Your sense of self-responsibility can develop as you grow personally and as your life becomes more expansive.

As my business grew, it became clearer that I was headed toward another career decision. I began to realize what I loved to do most, which you need to do whenever you consider changing careers. Throughout my life I've always been sociable. I'm eager to communicate with others. My enthusiasm often carried me into new situations where I quickly became acquainted with new groups of people. I particularly enjoyed public speaking while I was in school, in the military, and during my years as a businessman. I learned how important it was for organizations to utilize outside resources to help them meet their motivational and training needs.

The information provided by a third party is often considered more credible and is more readily received. I decided my niche was being that third party. I started corporate training, speaking to small groups and large organizations. My objective was to help them better understand the relationship between self-responsibility and personal and professional success, thus increasing their productivity.

My retail store was full of inspirational and motivational materials. I read all of it voraciously and gained new insights into their valuable messages. I devoured the works of Dale Carnegie, Norman Vincent Peale, Napoleon Hill, W. Clement Stone, and Earl Nightingale, to name a few giants of the past. I also studied the books of such modern day authors as Harvey Mackay, Dr. Susan Jeffers, Stephen Covey, Dr. Robert Schuller, Larry Wilson, Tom Peters, M. Scott Peck, and more.

Self-responsibility is a critical part of all their messages. Nonetheless, many individuals have difficulty putting it into practice. Developing self-responsibility, to the degree necessary to attain notable personal and professional success, requires great courage, maturity, and the support of like-minded people.

I felt confident I could structure an approach to *No Excuse!* that would give people practical guidelines to living self-responsibly. I knew this approach could help people counteract personal and professional stagnation and mediocrity. It dawned on me I was the person to do it because my life had been lived the *No Excuse!* way. My objective is for these insights to benefit you. That would be very rewarding for me.

Nothing has given me more pleasure and satisfaction than bringing *No Excuse!* into reality. It's for groups of three or four in boardrooms. It's for large corporations and small. It's for traditional sales and marketing organizations and network marketing groups. It's for government employees. It's for you and your family, friends, co-workers, business associates, and acquaintances. And finally, it's for anyone who will read this book.

I have the hard evidence that proves people have made their lives easier and more productive by using these principles. People with unsuspected potential have discovered themselves through *No Excuse!* They harnessed their emotion, ambition, and talents to benefit others, their organization, and, of course, themselves.

It's up to you to change your life. Through *No Excuse!*, you will have resources and mechanisms to help you make positive changes. You'll

have a chance to relate differently to the people around you and be a positive influence on their lives. It can spark in you a new zest for living, a new zest for accomplishing dreams you once thought were impossible.

Good Work—*Congratulations!*

You're not at the mercy of circumstances. You're the master of your own destiny, if you choose to be. Congratulations! *You've been empowered to take greater charge of your life!*

At this point it is likely that you have one foot firmly planted in the *No Excuse!* grounds of success. Step by step, you'll learn how to be committed to yourself and your personal action plan, which will lead you to accomplishing your life's goals. You'll discover that, as you gain a clearer sense of purpose, you'll be better able to direct your energies precisely where they belong. With your new focus, you'll be able to achieve your success with an ease and swiftness you've never dreamed possible.

Now that you have had an opportunity to equip yourself with a new sense of self-responsibility, are you ready for the next part of your success training? You'll discover why you might want to channel your newfound energies in a certain direction and how to do so. The time is ripe for you to arrive at your own resolve.

No Excuse! Action Plan for Self-Responsibility

1. Do whatever it takes to live your dreams. Accept no excuses from yourself or anybody else.
2. If you want your life to change, change your thinking and actions toward what you want. Think something and do something that you haven't thought or done before, and you'll get something you never got before.
3. Watch for signs of the strength, courage, wisdom, and inner beauty you already possess. Recognize your excellent qualities and improve on the others.
4. Watch for the fears of failure and rejection. They indicate when you're near your heart's desire. They are signs that an opportunity to grow is near.
5. Be the hero in your own life. Let go of the perception that life is a struggle and you'll start achieving more. Let go of the excess baggage you may have been carrying around.
6. Write a list of excuses you have used in the past. Vow to never use them again, then throw the list away.
7. Write a list of the decisions you will soon be making that will impact your life and the lives of people around you. This heightens your awareness of excuses you may have used to either avoid facing decisions, or to avoid taking responsibility for the results.
8. Recognize you may have outgrown some honest reasons for not doing something. If you use them now, they're just excuses. When an old reality turns into a permanent excuse, trouble sets in. Whenever you find yourself looking for an excuse, change your thinking.
9. Create your life based on your own expectations and not those of others. Own your life by having the courage to accept yourself and what you want to do. This may take risking a relationship, but you're likely to generate more respect from others.
10. Let go of people you may be using as protection from the fear of rejection; stop hiding behind them. You and they will then experience

a freedom to love each other beyond anything you've ever known.

11. Accept full responsibility for your actions, and it's likely you'll find your heart will be lighter. Decide not to blame anyone for your actions, and you'll feel stronger, less alone, and less afraid of the consequences.