

12 Minutes On A Good Life



*“If you are familiar with a general principle,
you don’t need to see every one of its illustrations.”*

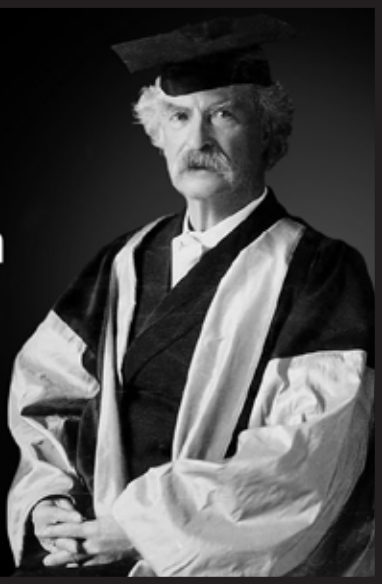
—Henry David Thoreau

“Red Talk”

University Of Redlands

Peter D. Kaufman

February 23, 2022



The two most important days
in your life are the **day you are born**
and the **day you find out why.**

– Mark Twain

AZ QUOTES

I've been given 12 minutes to try to share something of significance.

How about we try, in 12 minutes, to define a good, successful life?

**I think we can do it, and perhaps 12 minutes from now, we'll all have
a better idea "why we were born".**

**THERE IS A WONDERFUL MYTHICAL LAW OF
NATURE THAT THE THREE THINGS WE CRAVE
MOST IN LIFE—HAPPINESS, FREEDOM, AND
PEACE OF MIND—ARE ALWAYS ATTAINED BY
GIVING THEM TO SOMEONE ELSE.**

- PEYTON C. MARCH -

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12 Minutes On A Good Life

“If you want to go quickly go alone, if you want to go far go together.”

—African Proverb

Statisticians know that a large relevant sample size is their best friend. Why? Because, from a mathematical standpoint, a properly drawn conclusion from a large, relevant sample size, *cannot be wrong*.

We are here today on a university campus. What could be more relevant in terms of a sample size than annual commencement addresses? And large? There have been literally hundreds of thousands of commencement addresses delivered over hundreds of years, at campuses just like this one.

And what is the purpose of a commencement address? What is it supposed to do for the young people “commencing” their life journey on that special day?

Why, It's Supposed To Tell Them How To Live A Good, Successful Life. A Commencement Address Is, Literally, The Attempt To Define “A Good, Successful Life”!

Pretending to be a statistician, I took a look at a broad range of commencement addresses. “A large, relevant sample size”. All the way from Steve Jobs to Mother Theresa.

And what did I find? Every single commencement address essentially defines “a good, successful life” in exactly the same way: *five basic ingredients, always the same five!*

Now I know you're thinking, this can't possibly be the case. But I'm telling you, *it's always the same five basic ingredients, no matter who gives the speech!*

So, for my twelve minutes with you, I'm going to share the five. And perhaps, if you are ever asked to give a commencement address, you will know the quick and easy answer.

*Be “Additive Sum”:
Create Whole New Apple Groves!*



“Anyone can count the seeds in an apple.

Few can count the apples in a seed”.

—Zen saying

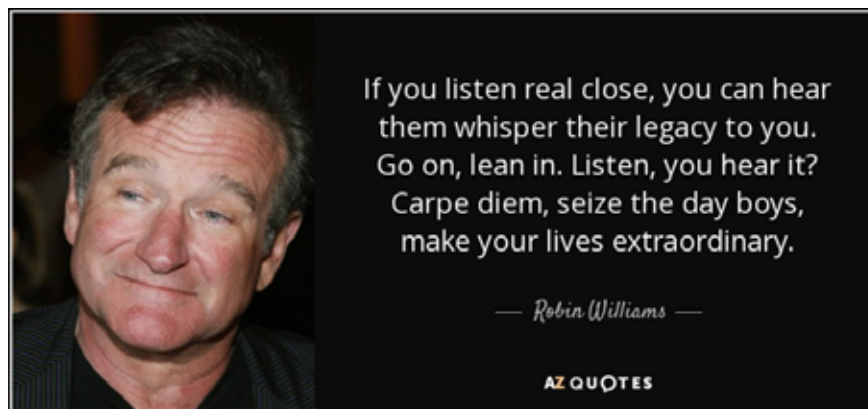
Here we go...

1) *“Dream big”. “Carpe Diem”. “Seize the day”.*

Have a huge aspiration. Don't settle for second best. Be bold.

You have only one life, don't be “zero sum - counting a finite number of apple seeds.
Be “additive sum” - be exceptional, *create whole new apple groves.*

Let's stop for a moment and I'll ask you, have you ever heard a commencement address that did not include *“Dream big”. “Carpe Diem”. “Seize the day”?*





*“Withhold no sacrifice, grudge
no toil, seek no sordid gain,
fear no foe ... All will be well.”*

—Winston Churchill

Ok, number two.

2) *“Take a risk”. “Go For It”. “Go All In”.*

“The cave you fear to enter holds the treasure you seek” -- Joseph Campbell.

“A ship is perfectly safe in the harbor, but that is not what a ship is designed for.” -- John Shedd

Commencement addresses always tell us to be bold; to conquer our fears; to lean into discomfort; to go for it; *to be “All-In”.*

Why? Because you can't have a good, successful life unless you take risks, unless you do go “All-In”. Fear is an unremovable part of life. But fear can be stimulating or it can be paralyzing. Gandhi correctly said that *stimulating* fear has its use, while *paralyzing* fear has no use at all; it's completely worthless; no use at all.

I think Denzel Washington, in the movie *Equalizer 2*, had the best advice of all with respect to accepting the pain of fear, using it to stimulate, not paralyze:

“There Are Two Kinds Of Pain In Life:

The Pain That Hurts,

And The Pain That Alters.”

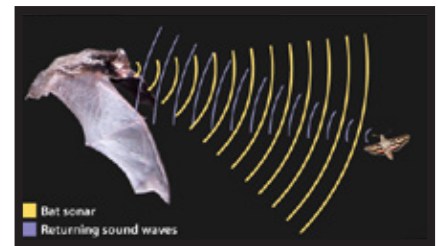
I only have twelve minutes, but let me quickly tell the story of Daniel Kish. A story of the importance, *indeed the magic*, of facing our fears, *of going “All-In”*.

At age two, Daniel Kish was diagnosed with cancer of the eyes and had his eyes removed. *Yes, removed. He can't see anything, he's totally blind.* Yet, if you go onto Google Images and type in Daniel Kish, you'll see an image of an adult man safely riding a bicycle in traffic! Yes, that's Kish!



Now, how can a blind man - a really, really blind man - possibly ride a bike in traffic? *Doesn't this rise to the level of an “impossible thing”?*

The answer is that Kish has taught himself to use “echolocation”, the method used by bats, in order to “see” even though he is blind. By emitting clicking sounds with his mouth, Kish senses the shape and distance of objects by how their echoes return to him. He can even safely ride a bike!



Kish has taught this skill to other blind people. He was once asked whether he thought a sighted person could learn it. No, he replied, *to learn this, you have to be “All-In”*, in this case blind. *Things change when someone is All-In*, a blind person finds their other senses become remarkably sharp and acute, at levels way above the normal human spectrum. Remember this, it is key - *“Things change when you truly go All-In.”*

And herein lies a great, simple insight; one everybody already knows, but “magic” almost completely ignored in their daily lives:

“Impossible Can Become Possible” Under Just The Right Conditions.

What Are Those Special Conditions?

When You Truly Go “All-In”



3) *“Real wealth is not found in bank accounts, but in warm, treasured relationships.”*

You can eat celery all day and at the end of the day still be hungry. *Empty calories: no matter how much you eat, you don't get filled up.*

Similarly, you can eat fame, riches and power all day long and at the end of the day “still be hungry”.

*For human history clearly shows that fame, riches and power represent “empty calories”.
They can't fill what we really need inside.*

It is entirely possible to succeed in a career or in business, yet still fail at life. Indeed, it happens all the time. Don't let it happen to you. Realize that to be rich is to have a big bank account, *but to be wealthy is to be continuously surrounded by good company.*

“No road is long with good company”. -- Turkish Proverb



4) Number 4 is quick and easy, a perennial favorite in EVERY commencement address:

“If you fall down, get up! If you fall down again, get up again! If you fall down yet again, get up yet again!”

Learn from your mistakes, be tough, be resilient. Everyone makes mistakes, that's how we learn.



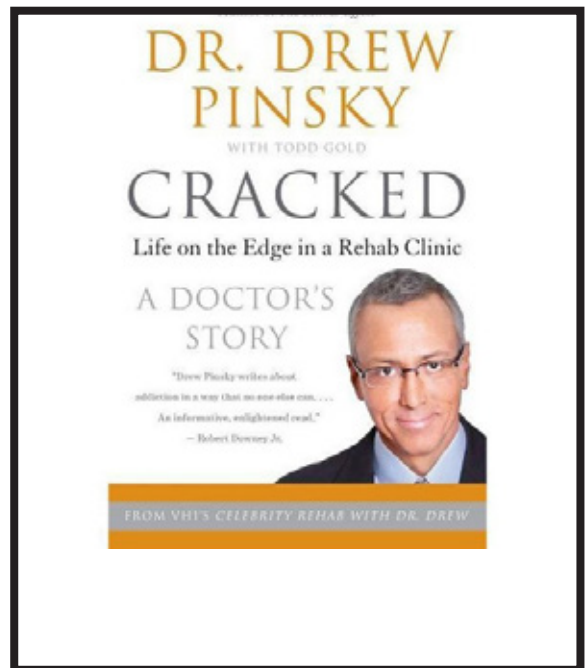
5) I consider our last factor, number five, to be the most important ingredient of all.

“Clean up your own messes!”

I was once at a charity benefit and they were auctioning off dinner with Doctor Drew Pinsky, the king of celebrity rehab. Pinsky began as a general practitioner MD in Pasadena, where I live. And over the years, he became so good at counseling people through extreme life difficulties that he wound up with a radio show and then a “Celebrity Rehab” television show.

He justifiably developed a reputation as an expert on human nature. Especially when human beings were in serious trouble.

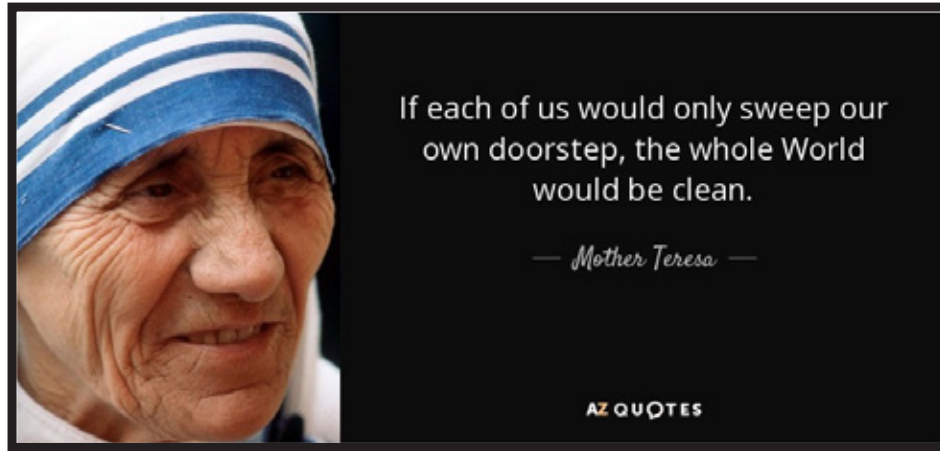
So I bought dinner with Drew Pinsky and did my best to absorb his wisdom for several hours.



Drew Pinsky shared with me one of the most profound things I have ever heard and darned if it isn't number 5 on our list of ingredients for a good, successful life: “Clean up your own messes”.

Pinsky told me that he had overseen so many cycles of rehab he had gotten to the point where he could tell, with pretty much 100% accuracy, which clients were in their last cycle of rehab, and sadly, which clients would inevitably be coming back for more cycles. Some pop singers went through 24 cycles of rehab!

“We'll be sitting around a table in a group therapy session and Peter will get up to get himself a soda and then he comes back to the table. When we finish our group therapy session, Peter leaves his empty soda can for the housekeeper to clean up. *Peter is coming back for more rehab cycles. Peter's not finished. He's not well.*”



“Or, when Peter gets up to get himself a soda, he stops and asks if anyone else at the table needs anything while he’s up? And when we finish our group session. Peter not only cleans up his empty soda can, he cleans up anything else that anyone else has left behind. *This is Peter’s last rehab cycle. He’s not coming back again. Peter is now well.*”

“Because the definition of being well, of having good mental health, is to be aware of the people around you - all of them - and to be keenly aware of the impact your behavior, your actions are having upon them.”

Drew Pinsky’s definition of good mental health is a fabulous diagnostic and prescriptive tool. *And because it’s self administered, no one ever need know the results of our diagnosis.* All any of us have to do is ask ourselves this simple question: *do I clean up my own messes?* Am I keenly aware of the impact I am having on all the people around me? Do I continuously seek to have nothing but universally positive impacts on the people around me?

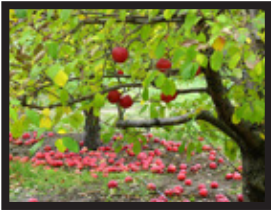
God forbid that the answer to the self-administered diagnostic question is “No”, that “we don’t clean up our own messes”, *because it plainly infers that we are not well, that “we do not have good mental health”.*

What’s the prescription, the solution? *Start cleaning up your own messes.* Form the habit of continuously being aware of the impacts of your behavior on all the people around you, and endeavor to make such impacts *universally positive.* And remember what Pinsky said about the mentally healthy Peter? How he also cleaned up the messes others were leaving behind? This is a critical point: when you become better aware of negative impacts, *you begin to seek to mitigate negative impacts, whether you caused them or not. You become a better person, as an individual, and as a member of the group.*

Can you imagine if everyone in the world did this?
What societal problems would we be left with? Zero is the clear answer.

And Wouldn’t That Result In Good, Successful Lives For All Of Us?

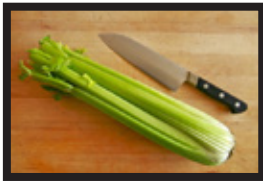
Recap: A Commencement Address Is, Literally, The Attempt To Define “A Good, Successful Life”



1) Dream Big!



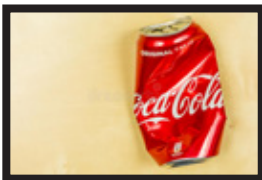
2) Take A Risk!



3) The Real Wealth Is Relationships!



4) If You Fall Down, Get Up!



5) Clean Up Your Own Messes!

Write Your Best Story

“The life of every man is a diary in which he means to write one story, and writes another, and his humblest hour is when he compares the volume as it is with what he vowed to make it”.

—James M. Barrie

