

# SUCCESS™

REDEFINED

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## WHEN WANTS BECOME NEEDS

**Sample Chapters**

By Larry Kesslin

with Susan Caba

## Book Introduction

This is not a self-help book.

This is a book about purpose, and how I found mine—which is changing the world through capitalism and technology, and teaching others how to do the same thing more effectively. I have become very clear about my purpose in the past few years and, as I let it guide my actions, my life has grown richer and immeasurably more joy-filled.

I've written this book for two reasons.

First, it's my way of reaching out to people who have gone through a similar journey and who share my purpose. Sharing a common purpose magnifies the impact of individual efforts. More importantly, connecting with people around a shared purpose magnifies the satisfaction—the joy—of working toward your goal.

The more I connect with people who share my purpose, the more effective I am in achieving that purpose. This book is my trail of "bread-crumbs" to let others know I'm out here, ready, willing and able to connect. At the end of the day, I'm looking for people who are in the same place I am—together, we can change the world.

Secondly, I want others to experience passion similar to what I feel, regardless of whether their particular purpose matches mine.

So many people are going through their lives numb, or living in a haze. I was living that way for a long time before I woke up. By telling my story, I might inspire others to wake up and get on the "joy ride" of a meaningful life. In that sense, this book is for anyone who wants to find his or her purpose and lead a life that is immeasurably more rich.

As I said, this isn't a self-help book. I don't have a seven-step formula for discovering purpose. I only know my story. But I've spent a lot of time thinking about the obstacles that keep so many people living in a haze, or feeling disconnected—despite the fact we live in an ever-more technologically connected world. I've spent hundreds of hours talking with friends, family, colleagues and complete strangers about the value of connectedness and purpose.

While I don't have a formula, I hope that my thoughts and my experiences may prompt others to examine their own lives, discover their purpose and share it. I guarantee you—life will be a lot more joyful.

To a life well-lived,

Larry

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

— Mark Twain

## CHAPTER 1: My Story

I was born in Queens, the youngest of three kids in a middle-class Jewish family. From the outside, our family—three kids, Dad working and, eventually, Mom, too—was as “normal” as it gets. But, at least to me, my childhood was anything but placid. How could I have known that “normal” mostly existed on television sitcoms, and that most families have their ups and downs. Mine was no exception.

My father, Howard Kesslin, was the athletic director at Adelphi Academy, a private prep school in New York City, from 1953 until 1969. My dad is insanely competitive, even now; I couldn’t beat him at tennis until he was 69 years old and I’m a pretty good tennis player. His Adelphi basketball teams won three championships.

“Three? Try five,” he reminds me, adding that his teams won a record 50 consecutive games over a three-year period, earning them a certain amount of notoriety and publicity.

My father’s bible was “Think and Grow Rich.” He was an entrepreneur and a risk-taker. He even says, “I was the first motivational speaker in the family.”

Dad was always looking for the opportunity to make a few extra dollars to augment his teacher’s salary. In 1958, he hit on the idea of teaching a Driver’s Education class after school. At the time, only a few of the private schools and none of the public schools in New York City were offering Driver’s Ed. Soon, students from other schools were clamoring to take the class. My father made a deal with Adelphi to accept students from other schools and split the fees with the school. At its peak, the Driver’s Ed program was attracting 2,500 students a year.

“I had found the fountain of dollars,” my father says. The classes were popular with students because they could get their driver’s licenses at age 17, rather than 18. Parents approved because their insurance rates were 15 percent lower if their children passed the course.

Eventually, Adelphi decided the program was too lucrative and took it over completely. They made my father Director of Development, meaning, as he says, “I was in charge of getting money from alumni.”

### *Never stop looking*

Cut off from one revenue stream, Dad looked around for another means of making extra money. One of his former ball players had a friend who was trading penny stocks.

“What does that mean?” Dad asked him. “I don’t know exactly—he buys stock for 1 cent and sells it for 2 cents,” the guy answered.

Not exactly sure what he was getting into, my father met with the guy in his Park Avenue apartment. “I’ll pay you \$100 a week and, if you do good, I’ll let you trade.”

My dad had no idea what he was talking about, but he took the job anyway. As development director at Adelphi, he didn’t have to show up at the school. So he met this guy at his office.

“It was myself and him, in an office with desks for about 15 people. He was just starting out. I had a phone with 16 buttons. The guy says, ‘When the phone starts ringing at 9 a.m., you answer and tell me what he says.’ So, at 9 a.m., the phone starts ringing with all 16 buttons lighting up. I answer, the guy on

the other end says, ‘blah, blah, blah’ and I tell that to the guy that hired me.

“At the end of the day, he has this chalkboard that he’s been keeping track on and I see at the end of the day that he’s made \$50,000. We were market makers. I was so exhilarated, it was like a drug high.”

This went on for three months. My father was still employed by Adelphi but he was making as much in a month at the brokerage as he would make in six months in the Driver’s Ed program—and more than his annual salary at the school.

Eventually, Dad thought, the school would catch on to the fact he wasn’t showing up. He decided to quit his position at Adelphi and go full time as a stock trader and market maker. By then, we were living on Long Island. I wasn’t quite six years old. We were, as I said, the quintessential middle-class family. But my father’s fortunes—and therefore our fortunes, too—were about to turn.

### *Learning lessons about loss*

When I was six, Dad agreed to open an office for his firm in Florida. We moved to a small town, Bay Harbor Island, and I was enrolled in first grade. I loved Florida. I got to swim every day. I think that’s where I got my love for the water and sunshine.

But it only lasted a year. “The market turned,” my dad said. It was the beginning of a long stretch of bad timing and financial insecurity for our family. At the end of the school year, we moved back north, to New Jersey.

My father bought a big house in Short Hills. His firm had closed, so he went looking for other opportunities. He invested in real estate development in Orange County, New York. But before any houses could be built and sold, OPEC declared an oil embargo. As a result of the oil shortages, the mayor of New York declared that all city police and firefighters—the target buyers for the real estate deal—had to live in the city. The land deal went sour. Dad took a job as a options trader. He was doing fine—until the market took one of the worst downturns in history. Dad’s savings were gone.

“I was broke, bankrupt,” he remembers. “I had nothing, not a penny in the bank.”

My mother had been a book-keeper before she had kids. She started applying for jobs, but the only thing she could find was a position as a secretary.

The only asset left was the big house in Short Hills. My father had paid cash, so there was no mortgage. When Dad went broke, my parents sold the house and we moved to the other side of town, to a much smaller house.

My mother was mortified. She wouldn’t come out of the house, except to go to work. She wouldn’t even accept dinner invitations. People thought maybe my parents were getting a divorce.

I never saw her in the mornings. My brother and sister persuaded her to stay in bed until they got themselves and me off to school, because she was so unhappy in the morning. By the time school was over, both she and my father were at work.

I was in the sixth grade. We were still in the same school district, but it was like moving from the rich part of town to the poor part. I had the same friends, but they lived five miles away. Life was screwed up.

## *Don't be afraid to ask*

I was lonely and isolated at school and at home. My parents didn't explain anything. I was mentally into sports at school, but not physically fit enough to compete. I played the trumpet in the marching band. Winters were brutal. And for me, the worst was my bar mitzvah.

Bar mitzvahs then weren't as elaborate as they are now. But everyone had some kind of celebration and my mother wanted to keep up appearances. So I was bar mitzvahed at home. All my parents' friends were invited. But I couldn't invite anyone—we couldn't afford it. The next day, my dad left for a job in San Francisco, which didn't pan out.

When my brother was accepted at Stanford University, he scrambled and managed to get grants and loans to pay for school. A year or two later, my sister got into the Fashion Institute of Technology. She qualified for a low-interest federal loan, which she didn't need because she also earned a scholarship. My parents took the loan anyway and used it for living expenses. (My father repaid the loan.)

My father never stopped looking for opportunities. He sold real estate tax shelters, and investments in the oil and gas industry. He went into business with an old partner in a company that sold credit card-fax machines. He took a salaried job at Shearson Brothers, then hustled selling investments in Section 8 housing and started earning commissions.

You have to remember, this was pre-Internet days; my father sent innumerable post-cards and printed newsletters every month to drum up business. He built himself back to the point of buying his own brokerage firm in 1990, and even went back to Adelphi when he was semi-retired and started a kids' summer camp on the Fort Hamilton Army base.

I inherited some of my persistence from him. I learned another lesson, too. My dad never hesitated to ask for what he wanted. When he suggested using the Army base for a summer camp, someone told him, "you can't do that."

"Why not—did you ask somebody?"

"Well, no," said the other person.

"Get me a contact at the base," my father said.

Like I always say, it doesn't hurt to ask.

I'm telling you this because I want you to know two things about me. The first is that I haven't always been able to easily connect with people. I felt isolated, disconnected and "different" from my peers starting even before adolescence. And second, I didn't grow up with wealth—or even, at times, with the assurance that our family had enough money for food.

I know that saying we need to look for purpose—that feeling connected to others in service of something bigger than ourselves—seems easy when my family is well-fed, well-cared for and living in sunshine in California. That's true, it is easier at this stage of my life.

But I've known what it is to feel disconnected, both when I was struggling financially and when I was financially successful. Part of my success is that I did learn to reach out to others and connect. But part

of my emptiness, even when I didn't lack money, was a misdirected focus on material success, on fulfilling "needs" that would define me in the eyes of others as a success.

My father's journey shaped my own. Now, looking back, I can also see how his life foreshadowed some of the lessons I've learned in my life. If we're lucky, we pick up where our parents left off learning and don't have to repeat all their mishaps and mistakes. That's what I want for Drew and Noah, that they start their lives—their emotional lives—ahead of where I was at their age.

## CHAPTER 3:

*"If you live for having it all, what you have is never enough."* Vicki Robin

*The more technologically advanced the human species got, the more isolated they seemed to become, at the same time. It was alarming, how humans could spend entire lifetimes engaged in all kinds of activities, without getting any closer to knowing who they really were, inside."* Jess C. Scott

*"Are these things really better than the things I already have? Or am I just trained to be dissatisfied with what I have now?"* Chuck Palahniuk

### *"Wants" morph into "needs"*

So there I was, ready to make money using my natural skills and eager for the exhilaration I felt while hanging over the cliff. I was done searching for a job. I was searching for freedom!

Oh, if only it were that easy! But some lessons—maybe most—are learned in little increments. I knew I wanted the freedom to be true to myself. I just didn't realize what, exactly, that meant. I had set off on my journey but didn't realize the road would be twisty in some places, muddy in others and that the occasional bridge would be down. I might have picked that up from my father's experience, but there are some lessons we just have to learn for ourselves.

And here's where I think our world makes it difficult: We need too much. Or we think we do. So we—especially those of us in the developed world—set off down the road to get what we "need." It turns out to be the wrong road, but we don't realize that 'til we're pretty far along. Some of us never realize it at all.

### *Losing sight of real need*

I wasn't any different. I wanted to be a successful entrepreneur, with all the markers that proclaim success—the nice home, a decent car, the "toys" that consume our leisure time. I wanted to be able to fulfill my every need and the needs of my family. If I could do that, the emptiness inside me would also be filled. Or so I thought.

But I didn't even know what I needed. And neither do most people. Most of what we think we "need," aren't needs at all. People decide they "need" things when what they're really saying is they "want" that stuff—telephones, cable television, a third car, a second house.

In the meantime, the idea of "being true to myself?" I was too wrapped up in what I needed—I had no idea who "myself" was, and I'm sure the same thing happens to others.

These two threads are wrapped up together. I'm going to separate them and leave the part about being true to myself until a little later.

I want to concentrate on the idea that we've become confused, as a society, about what we truly need. Because I am absolutely convinced this is at the root of so much unhappiness, emptiness and world-

weariness. I believe that the confusion about wants and needs is one of the big four obstacles to finding joy in life.

Until we recognize the difference between what we need and what we want, we can't discover the purpose each of us is uniquely put on this earth to pursue.

### *Needs become a trap*

Most people that I know wake up with a list of things that "need" to happen that day in order for it to be a good day.

When we take things that are truly "wants" and turn them into "needs," our happiness is dependent on obtaining and achieving those things. And the list of our needs goes on and on, depending on our interests.

Think about it. How many times today did you say "I need..."

What? A haircut, a carwash, a new pair of shoes, a better cellphone?

Cable television? Can you imagine life without it, without the dozens of sports channels and game shows and talk shows and movies and dramas? And of course, multiple TVs because no family wants to sit together in the living room and watch the same thing on television. Too many fights, too much compromising over what gets watched. Besides, maybe you don't want to watch a show when it's on, which is another reason you need cable—on-demand programming.

The kids need private music lessons, specialty camps, sophisticated equipment that our parents didn't have until they were adults, if then. Adults need spa vacations and gym memberships to vanquish stress, not to mention a wardrobe that allows us to dress for success.

We need art and furniture for the house and power tools to take care of the yard. We need symphony tickets to impress one set of friends and box seats at the ballgame for real fun with another set.

Dad's earning his MBA at a weekend program offered by the university. Homework is hard once you've been away from it a few years, but he needs the MBA for his next promotion.

Mom is putting in overtime at the law office, where the work load is unending. Thank goodness, 'cuz we need the money to pay for the boat we'll need next year at the lake.

The kids each have their activities, and need to be schlepped around—at least until one of them is old enough to drive. And then we'll need another car, for the kids.

Suzy wants to take horseback riding lessons (next thing you know, she'll want a horse—she'll need a horse!) Tommy is excelling at ice hockey, which will look great when he applies to college. Geez, though, the equipment he needs is expensive.

Keeping up with our needs requires a lot of effort. We can't afford to be patient, we've got a lot to do to maintain our stuff and get more. Because acquiring all that we now need makes so many of us Very Busy, Very Important People. We are also often tired, very tired.

### *What do we really need?*

So, what is the difference between a want and a need?

A “want” is something that we can live without, something that will enhance our lives. Don’t get me wrong, I like a number of modern conveniences, but I clearly understand that they are wants not needs. “Needs” are those things that if we don’t have them life would not be sustainable.

I’m not saying we have to get rid of every convenience in our lives, or give up all the extra stuff and activities that are so demanding of our time. I’m just saying we should recognize them for what they are—they are “extras.”

If we get to the core of who we are as creatures on this planet, what is it that we as humans really need? What is it that we need to survive and, if we can identify that list of needs, what is everything else?

### *Another step towards clarity*

I’ve been thinking about this concept of “wants” versus “needs” for several years—maybe it’s a natural function of having kids! At any rate, it’s been one of my goals to teach Drew and Noah the difference between what they need and what they want. I knew I was on the path to success one recent winter when we were visiting friends in the Catskill Mountains.

The conversation turned a little philosophical. I mentioned that I thought most people confuse the difference between wants and needs. I turned to Noah, who was then 8 years old.

“Noah, what do you need?”

“Food, water and shelter,” he said.

“What is everything else,” I asked.

“They’re ‘wants,’” he replied.

“My job as a parent is done,” I told my friend. “My son understands the difference between a want and a need and he can live a happy life.”

“You also need love,” my friend reminded me.

I had to agree. Love and deep connections with others are every bit as important as food, shelter and safety.

We will starve without food and water, a lack of shelter will expose us to the elements. Personal safety and air are pretty obvious and what would life be without love?

We may have become accustomed to having more, or to having only the best possible versions of those things—a bigger house, gourmet meals. But if you get down to it, all we need to survive are comfortable-enough, or suitable-enough, or good-enough versions of those things, with enough connections to make life meaningful.

### *Rethinking Maslow’s Hierarchy*

When I recognized the difference between wants and needs, when I began defining a list of what we truly need—that’s when I began to “get” that I was looking for something bigger in life. I wasn’t quite on target, my thoughts were still somewhat cloudy, but I was beginning to understand that something vital was missing. I needed to know what it was.

I'm sure most, if not all, of you will be reminded here of the psychologist Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of human needs, first published in 1943 and expanded in his 1954 book, *Motivation and Personality*. Maslow identified the same basic needs—esteem, friendship and love, security and physical needs—as essential to survival. Unless those needs are met, Maslow said, a person won't strive for what he called the secondary needs: self-actualization and transcendence. I call those "purpose," a unique reason for being on this earth.

Until very recently, I accepted Maslow's theory. Then I went to Africa and continued my conversations with others along these lines. And now my thinking has changed.

I think Maslow may have missed something.