

112 LESSONS FOR LIVING AN AWESOME LIFE

THE ART OF  
**AWESOME  
LIVING**

An inspirational guide on how to achieve  
more success, more easily, with less stress

SUNIL BALI

## **The Art of Awesome Living**

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*People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.*

Maya Angelou

# Steve Jobs: How to live before you die

Upon hearing that Steve Jobs had stepped down as CEO of Apple, Stephen Fry commented,

“I don’t think there is a human being on the planet who has been as influential in the last 30 years in the way culture developed and has proved quite so conclusively that passion and taste and belief are more important than a hard business head.”

Whatever your thoughts about Jobs, the facts are unambiguous. Jobs has led the field in three separate industries:

**Music** – the iPod has revolutionized the way music is delivered;

**Movies** – Pixar is one of the world’s most successful animation studios (they made “Toy Story”);

**Computing** – the Mac and the iPad lead the way when it comes to design, functionality and ease of use.

Jobs left his CEO role just as Apple became the most valuable company in the world with a market capitalisation of nearly \$340bn.

I admired Jobs not because of his financial success, but because he lived with passion and this passion is reflected in his products. Jobs never sought to create products which people like. He sought to create products and a support service which people *LOVE* and are passionate about.

When he was asked what made the Mac OS X operating system so good he replied, “When we designed the buttons on the screen, we made them look so delicious that you want to lick them”. Not a word about gigabytes, megahertz or any technical.

When Jobs tried to lure John Sculley from Pepsi he said, “Do you want to sell sugared water for the rest of your life, or do you want to change the world?” Sculley promptly joined Apple and helped to change the world.

Jobs often said that he didn’t seek to compete, because he knows that in an age of excess supply, true competition comes from actually not competing but being different and running your own race. As Jobs said in his famous graduation address at Stanford University, “Our time is limited, so don’t waste it living someone else’s life. Don’t be trapped by dogma - which is living with the results of other people’s thinking. Don’t let the noise of others’ opinions drown out your own inner voice.”

Every time he was faced with a big choice, Jobs asked himself, “*What would I do if this was the last night of my life?*” He met his wife, Laurene like that.

He was giving a university address and Laurene was sitting in the audience. He fell for her and approached her after the event. Laurene gave him her number. He wanted to take Laurene out for dinner that very night but had an important business meeting. On his way back to his car, he asked himself “What would I do if this was the last night of my life?” He ran back to the auditorium, found Laurene and took her out to dinner.

They remained together until he died.

*I don't think much of a man who is not wiser than he was yesterday.*

Abraham Lincoln

# Would you pick more daisies?

I recently met an oncologist who specialises in the provision of palliative care.

I remarked that dealing with dying people must be very draining. To my surprise he replied, “Dealing with the dying is wonderfully life affirming, most of them live life to the absolute maximum and have more fun in their last few months than they have done in all their previous years put together. It constantly reminds me to try new things and take a few more risks.”

In the experience of his team of doctors and nurses the Top 4 regrets of the dying are:

1. I could have achieved more
2. I should have taken more risks
3. I should have spent more time with the people I love
4. I didn't do work that I really wanted to do

My exchange with the oncologist sparked a lively debate later that evening with some friends, when I asked the following question: “If you could go back in time to visit your younger self what advice would you give?”

Here is a list of 11 things that we came up with:

1. Life is so much easier when you stop trying to be cool and impress others and simply do more of who you really are - in my case a Kevin Keegan perm in the 70's and wearing Farah slacks which were so tight that self-castration was a distinct possibility every time I tried to sit down. What? You mean I'm not alone? You've had such wardrobe malfunctions too?

2. Trying to be something you're not is not sexy. Be you.  
That's when you're beautiful.
3. You don't need a certain number of friends just a  
number of friends that you can be certain of.
4. Spend more time with people who increase your energy  
and make you smile and stay away from people that  
drain you of energy and make your heart sink.
5. It doesn't matter how badly your heart has been broken,  
the world will not wait for you to wallow in grief and  
self-pity and the sun will not stop from shining - 15 years  
ago I was dumped 2 weeks before I was due to get married  
and thought I was going to die, only to get married  
4 years later and have 11 great years of marriage - and  
counting - with 2 wonderful kids.
6. One of the best feelings in the world is to make a  
difference by doing the work that you love.
7. If you want something you've never had, you have to  
get out your comfort zones and do something you've  
never done.
8. If you want love, give love. If you want money, give  
value. It's really that simple.
9. Acquiring knowledge doesn't necessarily mean that  
you're growing and developing. Personal growth happens  
when you apply what you know and it changes your life.

10. You're never too old to follow your dreams, whatever they may be. I didn't become a professional speaker and writer until the age of 43.
11. There is only one way to learn, and that's through taking action. Trying to learn without doing is like trying to lose weight by watching someone else exercise. It's just not going to work.

*Nadine Stair has beautifully captured her feelings on this subject in a poem:*

## I'd Pick More Daisies

If I had my life to live over,  
I'd try to make more mistakes next time.  
I would relax. I would limber up.  
I would be sillier than I have on this trip.  
I would take fewer things seriously.  
I would take more chances,  
I would climb more mountains, swim more rivers,  
and watch more sunsets.  
I would eat more ice cream and less beans.  
I would have more actual troubles and fewer imaginary ones.  
You see, I'm one of those people who lives  
sensibly and sanely,  
hour after hour, day after day.

Oh, I've have had my moments  
And if I had to do it over again, I'd have more of them.  
In fact, I'd try to have nothing else.  
Just moments, one after another,  
Instead of living so many years ahead of each day.  
I've been one of those people who never goes anywhere  
without a thermometer, a hot water bottle and a raincoat.

If I had my life to live over, I would start barefoot  
earlier in the spring and stay that way later in the fall.  
I would go to more dances.  
I would ride more merry-go-rounds and  
I would pick more daisies.

**Written by Nadine Stair, aged 85**

.....What advice would you give to your younger self?

*We're here to put a dent in the universe. Otherwise why else  
even be here?*

Steve Jobs

# 30 Things you need to remember

....things which we sometimes forget:

1. When in doubt, just take the next small step.
2. Life is too short to waste time hating anyone.
3. You don't have to win every argument. Agree to disagree.
4. Cry with someone. It's more healing than crying alone.
5. Make peace with your past so it won't screw up the present.
6. It's OK to let your children see you cry.
7. Don't compare your life to others. You have no idea what their journey is all about.
8. If a relationship has to be a secret, you shouldn't be in it.
9. Take a deep breath and be still. It calms the mind.
10. Get rid of anything that isn't useful, beautiful or joyful.
11. Whatever doesn't kill you really does make you stronger.
12. It's never too late to have a happy childhood. But the second one is up to you and no one else.
13. When it comes to going after what you love in life, don't take no for an answer.
14. Burn the candles, use the nice sheets, wear the fancy lingerie. Don't save it for a special occasion. Today is special.
15. Over prepare, then go with the flow.

16. Be eccentric now. Don't wait for old age to wear the colours of the rainbow.
17. No one is in charge of your happiness but you.
18. Frame every so-called disaster with these words 'In five years, will this matter?'
19. What other people think of you is none of your business.
20. However good or bad a situation is, it will change. Give it time.
21. Don't take yourself so seriously. No one else does.
22. Believe in miracles.
23. Do what you love and play with whoever turns up.
24. Growing old beats the alternative -- dying young.
25. Your children get only one childhood.
26. All that truly matters in the end is that you loved.
27. Get outside and keep showing up every day. Miracles are waiting everywhere.
28. Envy is a waste of time. You already have all you need.
29. The best is yet to come.
30. Life isn't tied with a bow, but it's still a gift.

*Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbour. Catch the wind in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.*

Mark Twain

# Bleed Passion.....

In 2010 Warren Buffet, the world's third richest man celebrated his 80th birthday.

Buffet was asked to give just one piece of advice to those aspiring to achieve wealth and happiness.

His reply was, "The one piece of advice I can give you is, do what turns you on. Do something that if you had all the money in the world, you'd still be doing it. You've got to have a reason to jump out of bed in the morning."

If you bleed passion and sweat enthusiasm, the only tears you will be crying will be tears of joy.

*The real trouble with the world is that too many people grow up. They forget. They don't remember what it's like to be twelve years old.*

Walt Disney

# Wabi-sabi

After delivering a talk, I sometimes get asked to give advice on how to improve public speaking skills.

On such occasions I refer to the Japanese concept of *wabi-sabi*.

The principle of *wabi-sabi* values uniqueness over attempts at perfection.

It teaches that when something becomes too polished it loses its soul and comes across as artificial and not genuine.

That's why we prefer real flowers which wilt and die, to plastic flowers which never fade.

Too often, we worry about how we're supposed to sound or how we're supposed to act.

Don't worry about how you're supposed to sound or how you're supposed to act, show the world what you're really like, warts and all.

You may not come across as perfect but you will come across as authentic.

*Remember that you are unique, and if that is not fulfilled, then something has been lost.*

Martha Graham

# 17 Things to make you happier

Whatever goals and outcomes you want to achieve, every human is ultimately striving for the same thing: to be happy.

Here are 17 things you can do to make you smile, more often and for longer:

1. Have one hour of totally uninterrupted conversation with your partner or a friend every week. Give yourself permission to be warmer – people love it and no one will think you're weird or intense.
2. Spend some time every week doing a hobby or activity which completely absorbs you and time seems to stand still.
3. Don't be a party wallflower. Self-absorption undermines happiness because it stops you from being brilliant at developing close relationships.
4. Have a good laugh at least once a day. On a bad day, give yourself a break. Listen to a comedy station, CD of stand-up comedy or read the humour section of my blog.
5. Take half an hour of exercise three times a week and your general feeling of happiness will improve by 10-20 per cent. It doesn't need to be anything too masochistic: anything that gets you moving. A walk will do.
6. Smile. People think you look more sincere, sociable – and attractive. And, yes, faking it can work as smiling actually releases feel-good chemicals (endorphins).
7. Be your own best friend. Check your internal dialogue. The way we talk to ourselves is often worse than the way we talk to those we dislike.

8. Do a good turn for someone. It may sound worthy, but scientists have proved that altruism gives longer-lasting pleasure than a bar of chocolate or buying a new outfit.
9. Don't live in the past - unless you like guilt
10. Don't live in the future - unless you like fear
11. Live in the present and have happiness in the palm of your hand
12. Don't look up role models - look into them
13. Don't get even - get better
14. Don't take no for an answer - accept it as a situation
15. Don't learn the tricks of the trade - learn the trade
16. Don't wait for your boat to come in - swim out to it
17. Don't live your life - live your dreams

*Most people are as happy as they make their minds up to be.*

Abraham Lincoln

# Even Superman takes his cape to the cleaners

I was at a dinner party with some medics when the conversation turned to stress in the work place.

It transpires that the waiting rooms of doctor's surgeries are overflowing with stressed out managers and executives who complain of too much work and too little time.

Whether you're Superman or Wonder Woman, there comes a time when you have to take your cape to the cleaners and slow down before putting it back on.

*An idle mind is a questioning, sceptical mind. Hence it is a mind not too bound up with ephemeral things, as the minds of workers are. The idler, then, is somebody who separates himself from his occupation: there are many people scarcely conscious of living except in the exercise of some conventional occupation.*

Robert Louis Stevenson

# In Tibetan, there is no word for “Guilty”

The phrase “love thy neighbour, as thy self” is flawed given how badly most of us talk to ourselves and give ourselves a hard time.

It’s one of the greatest weaknesses of humans, that we allow ourselves to be so negatively influenced by others and then feel guilty that we haven’t lived up to these misplaced expectations.

There is no word in Tibetan for “guilty”. The closest translation is “intelligent regret that decides to do things differently”.

The Dalai Lama said that the busier his day is going to be, the more time he sets aside to meditate in order to make sure he is in the right frame of mind.

So how about cutting yourself a little slack?

*The one thing you need to know about sustained individual success: Discover what you don’t like doing and stop doing it.*

Marcus Buckingham

# What the Hell Happened?

At the end of each year, when we look back, it's always the same.

- some people will have made things happen and got the results they wanted
- some people will have watched things happen and
- some people will ask, "What the hell happened?"

Which camp will you be in?

The choice is yours. It always has been.

*This is a world of action, and not for moping or groaning in.*

Charles Dickens

# Workafrolics vs. Workaholics

After having delivered a seminar, I enjoyed a couple of beers with my client and caught the 8:30pm train back home from London.

Within 5 minutes of the train setting off, over a third of the almost full carriage had their eyes closed and were asleep.

Although I've never heard of a person on their death bed wishing that they had spent more time at work, many people still see it as a badge of honour to work late every night.

Workaholism is unnecessary, short-sighted and creates more problems than it solves, specifically:

1. It's not sustainable over time and is extremely detrimental to physical health.
2. Throwing hours at a problem rarely solves the problem and is intellectually lazy.
3. Working more and more hours is rarely productive.
4. No one makes great decisions when they're tired.
5. Workaholics encourage a culture of "presenteeism" where people feel guilty and obliged to stay late, even if they aren't going to be productive.

As Fried and Hansson say in their excellent book “Rework”,

“Workaholics aren’t heroes. They don’t save the day, they just use it up. The real hero is already home because she figured a faster way to get things done.”

Over the longer term, it’s the Workafrolics – the people who work hard and play hard – who are truly successful.

*How many cares one loses when one decides not to be something, but instead, someone.*

Coco Chanel

# Size really does matter

If you've got a big problem in your life at the moment, it probably means that you're acting small.

Let me explain.

If you've got a problem that's a 5 out of 10 problem and your ability to deal with it is 5 out of 10, then sure, it's a pretty big problem.

If however you're an 8 out of 10 character, then the 5 out of 10 problem doesn't seem so big does it?

What if you worked on yourself and developed a 10 out of 10 character?

Then it becomes a case of, "What problem?"

As you grow your problems will get smaller. It really is that simple.

So you see, size really does matter.

*To live is the rarest thing in the world. Most people exist.*

Oscar Wilde

# Velcro vs. Teflon

The psychologist Dr. Rick Hanson has extensively researched how people deal with negative experiences.

He found that the happiest and most successful people are like Teflon. Negative experiences tend not to stick to them.

However, when it comes to positive experiences they are like Velcro and the positive energy not only sticks to them, but they harness it to take action which perpetuates their happiness.

Unhappy people, on the other hand, behave like Velcro when confronted with negative experiences and like Teflon when faced with positive experiences.

What sticks to you?

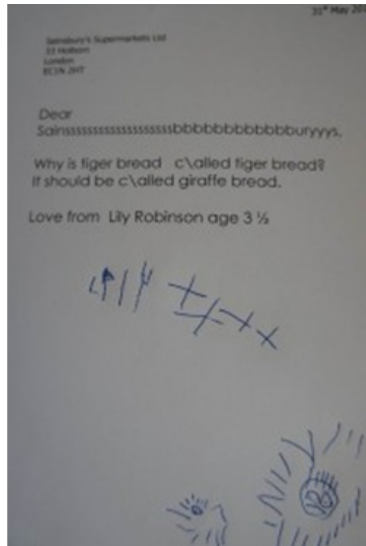
*Your thoughts are a preview of life's forthcoming attractions.*

Einstein

# Giraffe bread

This story popped up on Twitter and went viral on the internet. It's an endearing example of how a company as big as Sainsbury's can still be personal with their customer service.

By going that extra mile for a customer Chris King from Sainsbury's has become a bit of a legend, generated thousands of pounds worth of PR for Sainsbury's and most importantly made one little girl very happy.....



*“Dear Saaiiiiiinnnnssssbbburryys. Why is tiger bread c/alled tiger bread? It should be c/alled giraffe bread.*

**Love from Lily Robinson age 3 & 1/2”**

and gets this response...



“Thank you so much for your letter. I think renaming the tiger bread giraffe bread is a brilliant idea – it looks much more like the blotches on a giraffe than the stripes on a tiger, doesn't it?”

It is called tiger bread because the first baker who made it a looong time ago thought it looked stripey like a tiger. Maybe they were a bit silly.

I really liked reading your letter so I thought I would send you a little present. I've put a £3 gift card in with this letter, if you ask your mum or dad to take you to Sainsbury's you could use it to buy some of your own tiger bread...

... (and maybe if mum and dad say it's OK you can get some sweeties too!) Please tell an adult to wait 48 hours before using this card.

I'm glad you wrote in to us and hope you like spending your gift card. See you in store soon!

Yours sincerely

**Chris King (age 27 & 1/3)  
Customer Manager"**

*Customer service is the new PR*

Julien Smith

# Have you got any stretch marks?

Research by the Harvard psychologist Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar shows that we enjoy activities the most when we're stretched a little.

If you're playing tennis or a computer game against someone who is much better than you, then you'll feel frustrated and become disillusioned.

If you're playing against someone who is much worse than you, it will be too easy and you'll get bored.

Or to put it another way:

Too much stress = Panic Zone

Too little stress = Comfort Zone

Just the right amount of stress = Stretch Zone

So, if you haven't got any stretch marks, then maybe it's time to get some?

*To know, but not to do, is not yet to know.*

Eastern Proverb

# Once upon a time

I spoke at an Entrepreneurs Conference where there was no shortage of energy, enthusiasm and good intentions, but most of the sales pitches I heard from the budding entrepreneurs were rather disappointing.

Any sense of intrigue was quickly lost after being subjected to a bland monologue of facts, figures and soporific data.

Research clearly shows that people love buying but they hate being sold to.

We want to be captivated by compelling stories and salient facts that help us to make a good decision, quickly. This is what the best advertisers do.

Take the following examples:

**Toyota:** “This Toyota will last for many years”

Vs.

“My father drove this Toyota for 100,000 miles without any problems”

**iPod:** “It has 16Mb of storage capacity”

Vs.

“It can store over 3000 songs”

**UNICEF:** “£10 will make a real difference”

Vs.

“£10 will feed a family for 10 days”

As the man who brought us the Post-it Note, 3M's Art Fry says, "It's one thing to have an idea, but if you can't communicate it to others, you're dead in the water."

The best communication is short, emotional and adds value.

By crafting your own personal experiences into stories and revealing that which is common to us all: our humanity, you enable people to connect with you.

In a world of excess information, overflowing with choices, the great communicators inspire, motivate and influence others by infusing a human element into their communication through the simple telling of stories.

So if you want your colleagues, friends and family to buy into you and what you say, it's time to become your own **CSO: Chief Storytelling Officer.**

Everyone has some great stories to tell. What are yours?

*Tell me a fact and I'll learn.*

*Tell me the truth and I'll believe.*

*But tell me a story and it will live in my heart forever.*

Indian Proverb

# A lesson from Hugh Laurie

In the medical drama “House” – the world’s most watched TV show in 2008 and now in its 8th season – Dr. House treats only those who come to him as a last resort. These are the patients with seemingly unsolvable illnesses.

Invariably, House quickly assimilates the information available, makes a diagnosis and prescribes treatment. Often he’s wrong, but the patient’s response to the treatment gives him more information into what’s wrong.

Or, to put it another way, his **action enhances clarity**.

Planning, planning and more planning doesn’t always make for the best decisions.

Research increasingly shows that we think better on our feet when we make a quick, but not necessarily exhaustive review of the information available and go with our gut. This is well documented in psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s classic book “Flow” and more recently in Malcolm Gladwell’s excellent book “Blink: The Power of Thinking without Thinking.”

When Meg Whitman, the former CEO of eBay, bought Skype for \$2.6Bn, she was asked what her future plans were for eBay. Her reply was, “Forget about 5 year plans, we’re working on 5 day plans here.”

I’m sure Whitman had looked 5 years into the future, but given that product and business life cycles are so short, Whitman and her team had to work out much of the plan as they went.

Based on a large body of evidence, Gladwell argues that “decisions made very quickly can be every bit as good as decisions made cautiously and deliberately.”

He quotes a study undertaken in 2006 which showed that people can accurately predict the result of political elections after seeing just 10 seconds of footage of the candidates.

At some point you have to stop thinking, stop planning, stop procrastinating and do something.....anything!

So what decision have you been putting off? Trust your instincts, make a decision (TODAY!) and run with it.

*All life is an experiment. The more experiments you make, the better.*

Ralph Waldo Emerson

# The Postman knocks 50 times

There's a wonderful story about a man who travels from London to a business conference in California.

On the last day of the conference, in the last seminar, the man sits next to a woman who has come from New York. The pair of them get on fabulously well. It transpires that they are both freelance journalists, authors and single.

They share a cab back to the airport, exchange contact details and agree to keep in contact.

The man walks away completely besotted.

Every week for the next 50 weeks the man writes a letter to the woman in New York.

The week before the first anniversary of their meeting, the woman writes to the man and tells him that she's married the postman.

Please don't confuse efforts with results.

Are you focussed on doing the right things?

It doesn't matter how you start a project, what matters is how you finish.....

.....Are you going to finish strong?

*People don't want more information. They are up to their eyeballs in information. They want faith – faith in you, your goals, your success, in the story you tell. The missing ingredient in most failed communication is humanity.*

Annette Simmons, author of "Whoever tells the best Story wins"

# Has it gone off?

What do you do when inspiration strikes?

Do you write your idea on a piece of paper, keep a mental note in your head, or seize the inspiration and take action?

Just like a bottle of milk or a piece of fruit, inspiration has an expiry date.

With the passage of time, your inspiration will diminish and eventually fade away.

Inspiration is the flame which helps to bring our ideas to life.

So when inspiration strikes, grab it with both hands, take action and enjoy the ride.

*Try and fail, but don't fail to try.*

Stephen Kaggwa

# The Monkey Bar Kid lets go

Do you remember swinging on the monkey bars in the playground when you were a kid?

In order to move forward and reach the other end you have to let go of the bar.

Sometimes in life we have to let go of something that has served us well in the past and this can be really tough.

We're conditioned by our physical environment, by what our parents and others tell us, by events that impact us emotionally, and by the social structures that surround us. As adults we quickly become comfortable inside our individual box and continue to live on 'autopilot'.

Many of us who are in large corporations know first hand, that the hardest task is often to get the corporate mind to start to unlearn some of the gospels that have made them successful in the past and that will no longer work in the future.

Just as we can't plant new crops without first uprooting the old roots and giving the new seeds a chance, **we need to unlearn before we can learn anew.**

In 2011, Novak Djokovic the World No. 1, beat Rafael Nadal to win the US Open. His record in 2011 was outstanding: Played 66, Won 64, with 10 tournament titles, including 3 Grand Slams.

But it wasn't always so. After winning the Australian Open in 2008, Djokovic got "stuck" at World No. 3. Many of us would be happy with World No. 3, but Djokovic's childhood dream was to win Wimbledon and be World No. 1.

So in 2010 Djokovic decided to go back to the drawing board and analyse every aspect of his game. His key findings were that he needed to hit his ground strokes both deeper and harder. This was easier said than done as he had essentially been playing the same way, day in day out, since he turned professional eight years ago.

The result of Djokovic unlearning and then learning a new style of play was that this year he fulfilled his childhood ambition of being World No. 1 and winning Wimbledon.

So don't just learn to learn..... **learn to unlearn** and ask yourself:

"What is not serving me that I need to unlearn?"

*In a time of drastic change, it is the unlearners who inherit the future. The learned find themselves equipped to live in a world that no longer exists.*

Eric Hoffer

# Instant Zen

Take any item that you can catch, be it a bunch of keys, a piece of fruit, a coin, or anything small.

Now relax, throw the item in the air to at least your eye line or higher, and catch it. Do this now before you read the rest of this page. It will only take a few seconds.

After you've caught the item, ask yourself what you were thinking when the item was in the air.

It wasn't anything to do with work was it?

It wasn't worrying about money?

It wasn't worrying about what you should have eaten?

It wasn't worrying about what you need to do?

At the moment the object was in the air you were in a state of pure awareness, in the present moment, focussed on the object.....*Instant Zen*.

May your life be filled with such moments.

*Instead of seeking new landscapes, develop new eyes.*

Thomas Kempis