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ISBN-10: 1518659012

ISBN-13: 978-1518659010

**Lighten Your
Backpack**

**How to Simplify Life
In a Complex World**

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This book is dedicated to my grandfather, Ken Landers. You lived a simple and enjoyable life that was true to the Canadian dream. Thanks for your great example and all the great things that you brought to this world.

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Introduction

Do you feel like you're walking around with a giant backpack weighing you down all the time? How heavy is it—and does it seem like it's getting heavier as you go through life and become more burdened with complications?

My metaphorical backpack has been very heavy at different points in my life. My 20's were a period when I experienced a great deal of growth in my life. Between my desire to start a business, be a good husband, have a successful financial future, fulfill my parents' dreams for me, and keep my health in check, my backpack was super heavy!

The crazy thing was, I did not even realize how much weight I had on my shoulders. I just thought this was normal for life as an adult. Things were complicated, I had very little time, and I was rarely enjoying the things I really valued. Instead, I spent a great deal of time doing the things I thought I should be doing. And so I was constantly feeling frustrated, unaccomplished, and trapped in a life that was too complex and gave me little time to focus on what was really important to me. This is something I now call The Complex Life Trap™.

From the outside, things looked great. I was newly married, had a beautiful home, a growing business, lots of hobbies, and many caring friends and family. I even had a cute little red sports car to enjoy on the weekends. People who knew me would comment on how I was doing all the right things and that I was going to be really successful. Some even wondered why I was in such a hurry to get so much done. One of my early mentors once said that I was 26 years old going on 40.

I tried to enjoy the great compliments and all my accomplishments. But despite all the positive feedback about my current and future success, nothing ever seemed to be enough. I continued to strive for more accomplishments, more possessions, more recognition, and all the other markers of success I felt I should have.

A turning point

Then on December 9, 2010, my life took a significant turn. Only a month after moving into a big, beautiful new home (another one of my visions in pursuit of success), my wife and I had an extremely intense conversation. We talked about our feelings, goals, and future. It seemed that our paths had gone in different directions. And it felt like these paths were now too far apart. I believe my wife still wanted what we had planned out in our early 20's, but I had lost that picture. I was so focused on my pursuit of success and money, I had neglected to focus on our relationship. We decided it would be best if we separated.

I remember this day in December very vividly. I packed up my car with my essential belongings and moved out of the house, driving over to my “new” home. It was a terrible drive with lots of emotion. I had many thoughts about whether I was doing the right thing. After about an hour in the car, I arrived at an old faithful spot to rest my head, my childhood home in Mississauga, Ontario. Yes, I was going to stay at my parent’s place. I brought my things in, and I shared my emotions with my Mom and Dad. They were in shock about the whole situation, but assured me that all would be OK. And there I was, lodged in my old bedroom in the basement! I recall going to sleep that night thinking...I just left a 3,000 sq. ft. detached home for an 8 x 11 room in my parents’ basement - what have I done?

Still, despite the immense emotions connected to the end of a marriage, I did feel a sense of excitement, as there was a whole new world of possibilities opening up to me.

Simplify and live better

I think many people face the same challenges I did. There is so much complexity in today’s society. Things seem to change at a rate no one can keep up with. We seem to work longer hours than ever before, our smartphones never stop ringing and pinging, and there seems to be so little time to focus on our health. We have even less time for our families and less money to save for the future.

To help people like you focus on what's important and simplify your life, we have developed a series of basic tips that we enjoy sharing. So far, we have had great success helping people apply the tips in their lives and progress through our program. It is very rewarding to see people take steps to focus on what is important in their lives.

This book gives you a high-level summary of the 10 steps so you can get started thinking about how you might apply them. For a deeper understanding, please visit this book's website:
www.LightenYourBackpack.com

Chapter 1

Success in Life is about Progress, Not Perfection

Like me, you've no doubt noticed that life seems to be getting more complicated. Between work, kids, trying to stay fit, looking after aging parents, taking care of the house, and trying to save a bit of money, it's not an easy battle! Many people have dreams of creating a "simpler life," but most are not even sure where to begin.

I feel very fortunate to have participated in Dan Sullivan's amazing *Strategic Coach Program*. He developed this program to assist entrepreneurs in building self-managing companies. Through participating in these sessions, I have experienced a number of breakthroughs - one occurred after I read Dan's book, *Learning How to Avoid the Gap*. This book explains the underlying strategy for building lifetime happiness by using a unique way to measure progress through life.

As we go through life, we're constantly measuring and assessing ourselves on a variety of factors: physical appearance, wealth, intelligence, relationships, and possessions. We have a vision or an ideal about what life would

be like if we could improve in any of these areas. Personally, I have fought with my weight for a number of years and often think about how I would feel at the perfect weight. These visions of the ideal are often the inspiration for goals. In my case, the goal is to eat healthier and exercise more. The excitement then begins!

Action plan

Significant goals take time to achieve. When setting them, most of us start with a review of our current situation. We then figure out what our target is and what success looks like. We begin moving forward with an action plan and start making progress. But we typically hit a few road blocks, and our progress slows down.

This is often the point where we review how we've done, comparing our progress to the goals we've set. In my personal example, let's say my goal is to drop from 220 to 200 pounds. I'm one month into my new, healthier regime and I've lost four pounds. Only 16 more to go! I then begin thinking about how tough it was to lose the first four pounds. How am I going to be able to go through this ordeal for another six months? What about my upcoming vacation? How am I going to stay on track at an all-inclusive resort?

The inner dialogue goes on and on. This often leads to unhappiness and a lack of confidence, and may result in abandonment of the goal itself. Dan Sullivan calls this type of thinking "getting stuck in the gap."

A different approach

If we take a different approach to measurement, we can often change the way we feel about progress, and build more self-confidence.

Let's say I focus all my progress measurement against my starting point. I know that getting to 200 pounds (loss of 20) is my end goal, but I'm going to try to forget about that for a moment. My starting point was 220 and now I'm at 216. This is something to be celebrated! I'm going to think about all the eating habits I changed to get there, and how many times I exercised in the last month.

This method of measurement is much more fulfilling. It helps build more confidence and is much more likely to keep you focused on the eventual achievement of your end goal.

Measure from your starting point

Throughout life we will set thousands of goals, some as small as getting to work on time, and others as significant as paying off our mortgage or having enough money to retire comfortably.

The sooner you begin measuring progress from your starting point versus the end result, the sooner you will begin building confidence and feel happier about your life.

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