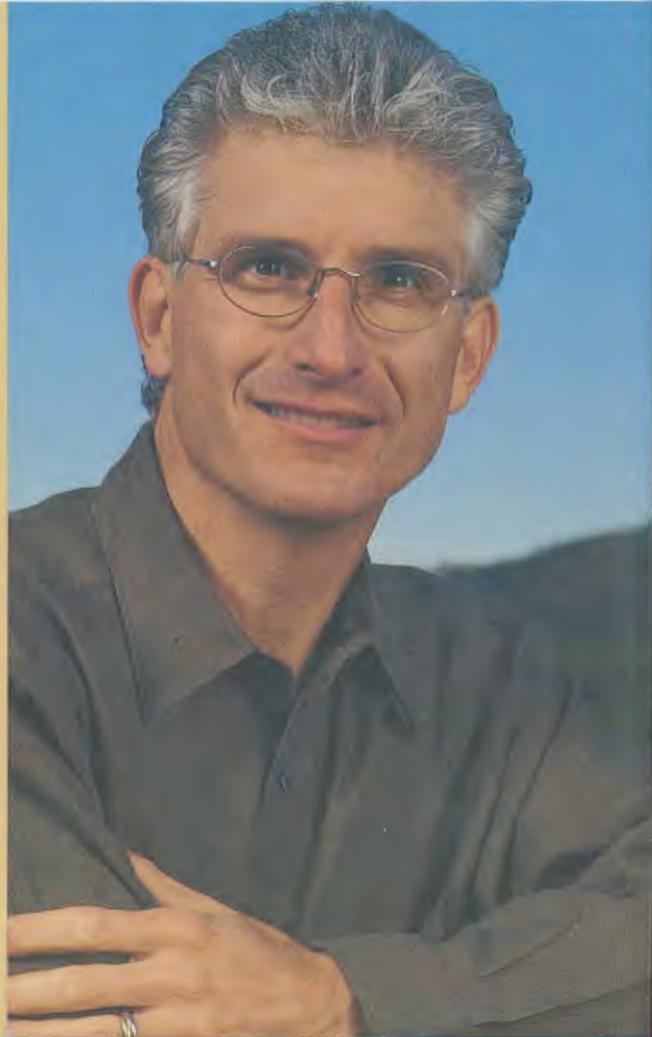


# CREATING YOUR FUTURE

# 5

STEPS  
TO THE  
LIFE OF  
YOUR DREAMS



# DAVE ELLIS

AUTHOR OF THE NATIONAL BESTSELLER *BECOMING A MASTER STUDENT*

*Advance Praise for*  
**Creating Your Future**

“If your life is as touched by *Creating Your Future* as much as my life has been touched by the work of Dave Ellis, then you too will be forever grateful. Read this book and act on it, and you will not only be giving a gift to yourself and those closest to you, but you will also be giving a gift to the entire planet.”

—Sam Daley-Harris, founder of RESULTS  
and director of Microcredit Summit

“These simple, powerful exercises brought forth my creativity and helped me see myself more clearly. They are valuable for everyone.”

—Steven Donovan, past president, Esalen Institute

“*Creating Your Future* outlines a process for increasing how we can bring creativity and natural genius to our day-to-day work. Dave Ellis has convinced me that visioning decades into the future is a practical way to bring excitement and energy to my work.”

—Muhammad Yunus, founder, Grameen Bank

“When the words *create*, *future*, and *dreams* are combined in one book title, we are likely to consign it to the dust heap of wishful self-help. Think again. *Creating Your Future* is an intensely useful means of changing one’s life. There is nothing magical about it; its practicality will send tremors through all your resistance points. Dave Ellis uses and teaches a proven method that will make you laugh, cry, exult, and get to work.”

—Paul Hawken, founder, Smith & Hawken, and  
author of *Next Economy*, *The Ecology of Commerce*,  
and *Growing a Business*

“A clear, concise guide to making the most of your precious life. My experience corroborates the teachings of Dave Ellis. This book is a gift to the reader, and to a brighter future for the human family on planet Earth.”

—Hazel Henderson, founding commissioner,  
the Global Commission to Fund the United Nations,  
and author of *Building a Win-Win World*

"In *Creating Your Future*, Dave Ellis gives readers the fundamentals, the insights and the tools to take complete charge of their luck and their lives. The book itself is as delightfully easy to read as the life it makes accessible to readers will be delightfully easy to lead. Rarely have I encountered wisdom served up in such easy-to-digest, bite-size chunks, and yet it is wisdom that can nourish me for a lifetime. The future is something that you can control, regardless of what you may think at this moment. This book shows you how to make the most of the moment in which you now live and in all those upcoming moments in which you will reside."

—Jay Conrad Levinson, best-selling author of *Guerrilla Marketing*

"Dave Ellis has taken the principles of success, life enhancement, and the enrichment of our soul purpose and organized them so clearly, lovingly and helpfully that once you read this book, you have no excuse for not fulfilling your dreams. I highly recommend it."

—Barbara Marx Hubbard, cofounder of Foundation for  
Conscious Evolution and author of *Conscious Evolution:  
Awakening the Power of Our Social Potential*

"For the first time in human history, the future has become completely open to human imagination. *Creating Your Future* challenges us all to take seriously the fact that our future can be as we imagine it if only we are willing to envision what we wish to become."

—James Garrison, president, State of the World Forum

"Dave Ellis's *Creating Your Future* teaches us to shapeshift our energy into forms that help us soar to new heights of personal achievement. A magical formula for transforming dreams into reality."

—John Perkins, author of *Shapeshifting  
and The World Is as You Dream It*

"*Creating Your Future* does such a service that it is difficult to find words to express the gift that you are to all your readers. . . . This remarkable process that enables people to look more deeply into who they are and the legacy they will leave on this planet . . . is simply extraordinary. As an executive, as a leader, as a human being committed to making a difference with her life, *Creating Your Future* has impacted me deeply and emboldened and empowered me to go beyond what I thought were my limits. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for the contributions you

have made to me personally, and congratulations on the contribution you are making to the great leaders of our time.”

—Lynne Twist, coauthor of *The Soul of Business* and  
*Money, Money, Money: The Search for Wealth  
and the Pursuit of Happiness*

“*Creating Your Future* shows you how to create your life as opposed to living the life you were dealt. It has profoundly affected my work and has given me a whole new perspective on the possibilities for my life.”

—Lynn McMullen, executive director, RESULTS

“This energizing book will transform your relationship with the future. Dave Ellis’s empowering approach to long-range planning is masterful in its simplicity and clarity.”

—Duane Elgin, author of *Voluntary Simplicity*  
and *Awakening Earth*





Creating  
Your Future

Books by Dave Ellis

*Becoming a Master Student*

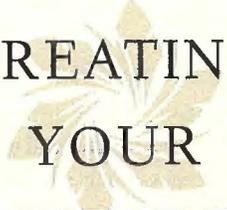
*Career Planning*

*Human Being*

*Learning Power*

*Creating Your Future*

*Life Coaching*



CREATING  
YOUR  
FUTURE

Five steps to the  
life of your dreams

DAVE ELLIS



Houghton Mifflin Company

BOSTON NEW YORK 1998

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The unique symbols (similar to ✨) at the beginning of each chapter and by each main article represent the kind of creation that is recommended throughout this book. Each symbol is a different random, dynamic, unpredictable element (much like the future) designed to inspire, challenge, and remind you that the future can be whatever you create it to be.

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*A note about gender-fair language*

In order to be gender inclusive while avoiding awkward sentence constructions, the author chose to alternate the use of male and female pronouns throughout *Creating Your Future*.

*To Trisha, Snow, Berry, Sara, and Elizabeth,  
who each add to my reasons for looking decades  
into the future when I choose what to do  
with every hour of the present*





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# The Life of Your Dreams

*Look forward. Turn what has been done  
into a better path . . . Think about the impact of  
your decision on seven generations into the future.*

—Wilma Mankiller,  
the first female chief of the Cherokees

*Without vision, the people perish.*

—Proverbs 29:18





My purpose in writing, teaching, and consulting is to help people get more of what they want out of life. I've discovered that one of the most powerful paths to this goal is looking to the long-range future. Throughout this book, I invite you to experiment with this kind of visionary thinking and experience the dramatic difference that it makes.

My work of assisting people to create more wonderful lives began with college students, then continued with college teachers, business leaders, directors of nonprofit organizations, and other individuals. In each of these teaching situations, I saw that when people engaged in conversations about the long-range future, their lives blossomed almost magically.

In a college text that I wrote, I held out this vision to students: "You are on the edge of a universe so miraculous and full of wonder that your imagination at its most creative moments cannot encompass it. Paths are open to lead you to worlds beyond your wildest dreams."

It is with this vision in mind that I ask you: What's next? What future do you want to create? What's your dream for the rest of your life?

These are perhaps unusual questions. For most people,

creating the future is an unusual thing to do. The fact that you're using this book and setting aside hours of your life to create your future puts you in a group of people that's quite small—perhaps less than 0.01 percent of the world's population. Amazingly, most people spend more time planning their next vacation than they do planning the rest of their lives.

Creating the future means *choosing* what you want to have happen for many years to come—not merely *predicting* what you think could happen. This concept might seem a bit strange. When I ask people to set long-term goals, they often say, “What I'd like to do next summer is . . .,” or “For next month, my main objective is . . .” To such answers, I reply, “That's fine. And I'm suggesting that you also plan even further into the future—years, decades, even centuries from now.”

You might wonder how any of us will ever know what's going to happen in a hundred years. We won't. We'll all be long gone by then. The idea is not to know the future by prediction, but to create the future by vision. We can think, write, speak, and dream about what we'd like to have happen, not just on the horizon but beyond it. We can each realize that our dreams for the future and our actions today can affect our grandchildren and their grandchildren's grandchildren.

Creating the future worked wonders for me. A few months after starting my first major business, College Survival, Inc., my coworkers and I created a long-range vision for the company. The plan detailed where we wanted to be in twenty years. Within twelve years we accomplished most of our twenty-year goals—projects that looked completely outrageous when we initiated them. They included giving away millions of dollars, providing employees with benefits and salaries that went beyond the market standard, and directly teaching success strategies to tens of thousands of college teachers and millions of students. We also ac-

completed selling over three million copies of *Becoming a Master Student*, and it became the best-selling college textbook in the United States. Creating a detailed, long-range vision for the future helped us meet these goals.

This long-range vision worked so well in my business that I decided to try it in my personal life as well. I met with two friends, and over the course of a year we spent at least two hundred hours together creating comprehensive visions and plans for the rest of our lives. Though parts of our plans overlapped, they were mostly independent. Our creations represented what each of us wanted to accomplish for the rest of our lives—and what we wanted to see accomplished long after we were dead. We worked as a group to enhance our creativity and then to support each other in fulfilling our plans.

For me, the end result of this envisioning and planning work was a seventy-three-page, single-spaced, typewritten document that contained hundreds of goals—all prioritized and categorized. This document outlined in detail what I wanted for the future. Since then I have been shocked at how much of this dream, that seemed completely unpredictable, has actually come true. Many of my relationships were transformed. I did much of the traveling that I had envisioned. My financial independence has been well secured, and my health practices and physical fitness have improved dramatically.

When I saw the success of this kind of long-range vision in my work and in my life, I started teaching this practice to others. The results have been equally impressive. The people I worked with were amazed by how positively their lives changed when they focused on exactly the kind of future they wanted. This process also worked for organizations at local, state, national, and international levels when I helped them create their visions for the next five, ten, twenty, fifty, one hundred years and more.

Sometimes my request for long-range vision is greeted with skepticism. Recently I spoke to a community service club in my city and told them about my work to help people think fifty years and more into the future. When I said that, most of the members of the audience burst into laughter. Suddenly, I noticed that the group consisted mainly of older people, most of whom knew that they didn't have fifty years to live.

Although that may have been true for some individuals in the group, I think it's important to remember that we all have a future that we care about, including the future that will take place long after we're dead. We have friends, children, and grandchildren who will outlive us. We are involved in organizations and projects that will outlast us. And many of us care about the earth and human civilization as a whole, which we'd like to outlast us all by tens of thousands of years.

I invite you to join me in creating a future that you'd love. Experience for yourself the difference that creating your future can make. You have a lot at stake—the quality of your life between now and the time you die. You can thoughtfully choose what you want to do, have, and be during your life, or you can leave it to chance. The difference between chance and choice lies largely in your level of commitment to creating the future.

I wish you many hours of passionate creation—and a wonderful life.



#### CREATING THE FUTURE LEADS TO THE LIFE OF YOUR DREAMS

*To achieve the life of your dreams, get clear about what you want in all areas of your life for many years to come.*

If the rewards of a long-range vision seem unrealistic to you, stay with me for the next few paragraphs. You don't have to agree

with me. You don't even have to believe what you read. I prefer that you not accept anything on faith that you read in this book.

Instead, I want you to *use* the ideas presented and experience for yourself the difference that creating your future makes. You don't need to approach creating your future as if it's an idea to be proved or disproved. Creating the future is a tool—nothing less, and nothing more. Tools are not right or wrong, true or false, good or bad. They're just more useful or less useful. What we believe about a tool is less important than whether it makes a difference in our lives.

When people bump up against a new idea, they sometimes go out of their way to analyze it or prove it wrong. They feel they have to defend themselves against the idea, almost as if it could lead to physical harm. They measure the new idea against their old ones. If the new idea contradicts an old one in any way, it gets pitched.

I ask you to approach this book with a different attitude. Filter everything you read through one question: How could I use this idea to create the life of my dreams?

#### *Creating your future increases spontaneity*

As I work with individuals from all walks of life as well as with organizations, I hear one main objection to this idea of creating the future: People don't want to give up their spontaneity. They don't want to lose their freedom.

Neither did I. The person who first taught me about long-range vision was a man named Larry David. When Larry encouraged me to develop a twenty-year plan for our business, I told him that I wanted the business to flow freely, and I had no idea what new market trends would emerge over twenty years. Besides, I started the business to gain more freedom in my life. I sure didn't want a plan that would constrain me.

“Planning will actually set you free,” Larry said. “And the more you plan, the more spontaneous you will be.” I thought he was crazy, but he continued to try to convince me.

Mostly to humor Larry, I took the time to develop a long-range, comprehensive business plan for the next twenty years. As I mentioned earlier, the results were phenomenal. I was amazed at how much freedom that planning provided us as an organization and as individuals.

Recently a Native American medicine man took a workshop I gave on creating the future. Months later, at a reunion of workshop participants, he said he was shocked to discover that freedom is possible within structure. “Before I came to this workshop,” he said, “I hated structure and planning because I thought it did not allow spontaneity. But now I see that I can spontaneously step away from my projects at any time and go swimming, or go eat pizza, or go sit under a tree for the rest of the day and not feel guilty about it. I can do that because I’m structured, because I have a plan for getting things done.”

My own experience is that I am much more spontaneous when I have the comfort of knowing where I am headed. I get more value from every activity I choose since I understand how that activity contributes to my overall vision. I know the times when I’m committed to being on task and the times when I can play. I no longer have to worry about or dwell on what’s coming up next. Instead, I can focus more on the moment. And I know that slight deviations from my plan will be fine since I have an overall vision of the life of my dreams, and that vision guides my actions.

*Creating your future makes a difference today*

This entire book is an invitation for you to focus on what you want, invent ways you can accomplish your dreams, increase the

amount of thoughtful time you spend creating your future—and start living it now.

Your long-term vision can change what you do this year and this month. Your dreams can give new meaning and direction to your daily actions. Having a long-term goal to save enough money for your children's college education can affect the way you handle money this week. Setting a goal to spend less time working so that you can spend more time with your family can change the way you schedule activities today.

If you already have long-term goals or a detailed vision for your life, this book is still for you. Use *Creating Your Future* to multiply the benefits you already enjoy. And please keep in mind that the strategies I describe work, with just a little modification, for schools, universities, businesses, nonprofit groups, governments, and other organizations.

### *Creating your future brings new energy*

Creating your future is an act of artistry, much like the work of a composer, painter, designer, or writer. When you do this kind of creating, you are the “author” of your future.

This process makes a difference. When we drift with no clear idea of what we want, we can easily end up with lives that seem unfocused and unfulfilled. Creating the future offers different results. When we determine what we want and discover ways to get it, we tap into new sources of energy. We uncover a reason to get up every day and have a ball. Sometimes all it takes is asking, “What's next in my life?”

Many of the things we hear people say hint at a quality that's missing from their lives: “I'm low on energy today. . . . I've got a bad attitude. . . . I just don't have the willpower to get it done.” That quality is usually called motivation. The lack of this quality

is often people's reason for not getting things done or for failing to live the life of their dreams.

Maybe our understanding of motivation is a myth. Maybe the motivation that we want to come from outside ourselves does not exist. We don't have to depend on other people or events to motivate us. Instead, we can create a vision for our lives. Painting a compelling picture of our future can raise our energy level and move us into action. The problem of no motivation often dissolves when we have a clear motive—goals that inspire our passionate commitment.

*Creating your future promotes reflection—not reaction*

Throughout this book I invite you not only to think about the life of your dreams, but also to speak and write about it. Most of us find it easier to control our behaviors—including speaking and writing—than to control our stream of thoughts. An advantage to speaking and writing is that they slow down our thinking. Through the spoken and written word, our thinking becomes visible to us. This helps us to be more clear about what we choose.

Every day you make hundreds of choices. When you have a crystal-clear vision of the life you want, you can make those choices based on prior reflection rather than immediate reaction. You don't have to submit to the pushes and pulls of moment-to-moment circumstances. Your day-to-day choices can be rooted in previously created plans rather than fleeting impulses.

The huge number of choices about what to do with our time can be mind-boggling. Each of us has more options than we can possibly act on. There are hundreds of possible friends to make. There are dozens of possible careers that each of us could enjoy. Given an hour of free time, we can choose from thousands of books to read, hundreds of magazines to skim, and dozens of tele-

vision programs to watch. Some refer to this problem as “option stress.”

Clearly defined goals give you a way to sort through all the options and set priorities. Some will be in line with your purposes and values; other options will clearly be off track. With a clear vision of your future, you can often tell the difference in a matter of seconds.

### *Creating your future works*

If you want examples of successful long-range visions, look to history. During the 1960s, President John F. Kennedy called for a landing on the moon within ten years. Lacking that vision, we might still be trying for a successful lunar expedition. The interstate highway system was conceived by President Dwight D. Eisenhower as a fifty-year project, another example of long-range vision. Martin Luther King, Jr., and other leaders of the civil rights movement knew they were not going to make the gains they wanted in five or ten years. They envisioned a sustained effort over decades. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and other feminists at the beginning of the twentieth century knew that the future they envisioned for women was a multidecade, maybe even multicentury, dream. Nelson Mandela and others committed to the end of apartheid had a vision that they were willing to give decades of their lives to achieve.

These examples demonstrate that one of the most powerful ways to get what we want in life is to look forward over many, many years. Just think about what a difference this strategy could make if it was widely applied. Elected officials could consider the impact of their policies over the long-range future instead of merely until the next election. Manufacturers could look ten, twenty, fifty, or more years into the future and find sources of

long-term profits with fewer unintended consequences, such as pollution and resource depletion. We know that if we continue to destroy our environment at our present pace, the human species will end—and that will not be good for business.

### *Creating your future is fun*

Generating goals can be both high adventure and a rollicking good time. Actually meeting those goals and watching the results unfold take the enjoyment to an even higher level.

Many people have so little experience with creating the future that they're surprised at how much fun it can be. Stereotypes about people who set goals still persist—that they're stuffy nerds who wear pocket protectors and carry briefcases everywhere.

Don't believe it. I don't even own a pocket protector. Creating the future is a ball. It's a powerful way to expand your mind with no drugs other than heavy doses of natural adrenaline.

When we learn ways to set goals and act on them, we can consistently experience more of what we truly want from life. We discover that the power to create the life of our dreams is a power we already have, only waiting to be used.



### CREATING YOUR FUTURE SETS YOU FREE

Contrary to what many people believe, my repeated experience is that planning sets us free. In my own life, I experienced far more freedom after I got clear about what I wanted and chose ways to achieve my most important goals.

When people are feeling anxious, hopeless, or even suicidal, they often have no dream or vision to sustain them. One immediate path to feeling more calm, joyful, effective, and free is to create a plan.

When you create your future, you may find that your freedom increases in the following ways.

***You reveal possibilities***

When you mentally step through your future in a detailed way, you can see options that are otherwise easy to miss. This is the same phenomenon that football players experience when they take some time between games to visualize new plays.

Great freedom and creativity arise when we step out of our day-to-day routine and examine new possibilities and paths to our goals. It's a lot easier to see options when we are not on the field in the middle of the game.

***You set the plan***

As you go through life, you are constantly exposed to other people's plans for you. Retailers have a plan for you to buy more. Employers have a plan for you to work more. Fund-raisers have a plan for you to contribute more. When you do the planning, you're free to choose what *you* want, instead of submitting to someone else's agenda. And even when other people set the goals, you can choose whether to accept them or not.

***You can adjust the plan***

An architect who has a detailed plan for a house can easily move a door one foot to the left on a blueprint. A contractor who has already built the wall and installed a door would find that change very inconvenient—and expensive—to make.

When planning a cross-country trip, a truck driver can look at several routes on a map and adjust her itinerary. It's easier to make that change than to turn around after driving a hundred miles out of her way.

These simple examples make a key point: When your goals are written, detailed, and comprehensive, you can easily examine them and make modifications up front. Making those adjustments after you've begun the project—when you've already invested time, money, and effort—is a lot tougher.

***You can change the plan***

If, for whatever reason, you determine that your plan needs more than a minor adjustment, then you're free to change the plan. Any effective plan is flexible. If the goals seem too restrictive, if the time lines are too cumbersome, if the vision has turned into an obligation, or if you simply change your mind—then it's time to change the plan. You can make alterations consciously, with full awareness of your values and your life purpose.

You can even change your plans often and preserve the advantages of creating your future. Those advantages come from choosing your direction and taking charge of your life.

***You choose how to achieve the plan***

Without a vision of the future, we might depend on other people for goals and for ways to achieve them. We could rely on others for hour-by-hour direction, something a lot of people are willing to give you—and they'll call it "management." But that kind of direction offers little freedom, little creativity, and little choice.

You can choose your way to achieve any goal. Just as you can choose many ways to travel to any destination, you can create countless ways to meet any goal. You're free to create many different paths to the same result.

***You make choices with more ease***

When you plan, you make the big choices. This in turn can

free up time and lessen internal debate when you make small choices. With a plan in place for this year, you can set clear goals for this month. And with goals for this month, you can choose what you'll do today. You're free from constant indecision about what to do next.

Creating a plan is like holding a magnet underneath a sheet of paper filled with iron filings. As you might remember from your science classes, the magnet pulls on those iron filings and lines them up in neat rows. Like the magnet, a plan "pulls" on our day-to-day choices and aligns them with our vision.

### ***You increase the odds of success***

Few architects propose a building project without a blueprint. Few entrepreneurs get venture capital without a sound business plan. And few film producers begin shooting without a script. Each of these people creates a vision of the future. The rationale for creating this vision is to avoid wasting precious time, money, effort, and talent.

It's amazing that so many people have no vision for something as vital as their own lives and then end up living lives of quiet desperation. Creating your future is a way to avoid that fate.

Planning to meet a goal doesn't ensure accomplishment, but it does boost the odds of achieving success. With clearly defined goals and carefully chosen action plans, you increase the probability that you'll get what you want.

Much of what people do at work and at home is simply "digging in"—frantic action with no real plan. "We'll probably never reach our goals," they might say. "But at least we're keeping busy, and we can always hope for the best." Creating your future frees you from this busywork. With a comprehensive vision for your life, you can weed out the tasks that contribute little to your goals. You can discover actions that produce results.

Writing down what you want exponentially increases your chances of getting it. When you clearly define a goal, your mind and body start to operate more consistently with your dreams.

#### CREATE YOUR FUTURE—NOW

Experience the subject of this book in a direct way. Start creating your future—right now, right off the bat, without further delay.

Keep a visible record of your insights, reflections, dreams, goals, and intended actions. There are many ways to do this. One low-cost, flexible, and practical method is to get lots of 3 × 5 cards. I like to write on 3 × 5 cards so that I can easily generate, sort, eliminate, and store ideas. You could also write on Post-it notes, in a bound journal, or on a computer. The important thing is to consistently keep a written record of the life that you want—a record that you can access any time.

The following is one goal-setting process you might find useful. I suggest that you read the instructions, experiment with the process, and then start writing.

1. *Write a lot.* Just write down anything you want to have, do, or be in the future. Describe any change you'd like to make—any new outcome in your family life, social life, health, career, or other aspect of your life.
2. *Write a lot more.* Brainstorm as many goals for your life as you can. Do this for at least five minutes. As you write, keep these suggestions in mind:
  - \* If you're using 3 × 5 cards, write each goal on a separate card. Write in the middle of the card and orient the card vertically. Later I will suggest that you write something in each corner of the card.

- \* Work quickly. Don't stop to edit or criticize what you write.
  - \* Go for quantity, not quality. If no goal comes to mind right away, just write down something—*anything* you'd like to see happen in the future.
  - \* Don't worry about *how* to accomplish any of these goals. You can create specific action plans later.
  - \* Don't throw away a goal if it sounds silly or unrealistic. The time to revise, scale back, or toss goals out will come later. For now, give your creativity free rein. Consider even the most outrageous possibilities.
3. *When you've written goals for at least five minutes and feel that it's time to stop, take a break.* Breathe deeply and congratulate yourself. These few minutes could be the first step on a path that dramatically alters your life.
  4. *Save the goals you've written and store them in a safe place.* Later I'll suggest many ways to review, edit, and organize these goals. They contain the seeds of your future. Treat your creations with care.

Those are the instructions. Now, please, write.



#### SAMPLE GOALS

The following is a random list of goals written by people who have taken the *Creating Your Future* workshops that I lead. Read through this list to stimulate your imagination. Perhaps you'll see a goal you'd like to make your own. Great! Steal freely. Write down any goal you like. Or take a goal and rewrite it to fit *your* personal vision for the future.

*Be a skilled listener.*

*Travel to India.*

*Start a consulting business.*

*Visit all the hot springs in the world.*

*Learn to play the piano.*

*Own a ranch in a beautiful valley.*

*Be more loving.*

*Be more physically fit.*

*Be funnier.*

*Help create an environment that will sustain life for  
the next five thousand years.*

*Clean out my garage.*

*Clean out my neighbor's garage.*

*Stop at the store to pick up orange juice on my way  
home from work.*

*Eat a cheeseburger with coffee sometime before I die.*

*Build a YMCA on every Indian reservation.*

*Build a state-of-the-art recording studio, and open it to  
thousands of people for free.*

*Establish a foundation to give soccer scholarships to  
poor children.*

*Have a gourmet cook prepare my evening meals.*

*Pay for all my children's and grandchildren's education.*

*Give scholarships to women entering graduate school.*

*Grant money to people who start businesses that provide  
environmental or humanitarian benefits.*

*Have more toys.*

*Travel for a year throughout Africa.*

*Write full-time.*

*Paint full-time.*

*Work only six months each year.*

*Move to Bali and start a renewal center for social activists.*  
*Sail around the world.*  
*Start a buffalo ranch.*  
*Breathe more deeply and slowly.*  
*Start a revolving loan program for small business owners.*  
*Create an institute for responsible fathering.*  
*Create cars that produce no pollution.*  
*Eliminate barriers to worldwide trade.*  
*Ensure that every child born has or will find loving parents.*  
*Relate to my spouse based on his potential for the future —*  
*not his actions in the past.*  
*Eradicate diabetes.*  
*Fund shelters for the homeless in each major city*  
*in the country.*  
*Buy a small country and turn it into a model for*  
*participatory government.*  
*Build clinics devoted to merging alternative and*  
*mainstream health care.*  
*Create a foundation to help reduce the national debt.*  
*Get a black belt in jujitsu.*  
*Stay calm and centered.*  
*Review my goals weekly.*  
*Build virtual reality simulators for training people*  
*to learn almost any skill — from climbing mountains*  
*to practicing safer sex.*  
*Get a horse.*  
*Pay off my credit card debt.*  
*Spend more time playing with my kids.*  
*Buy a new car.*  
*Be clearly in touch with what's possible for me*  
*in every moment.*

*Have fewer and higher-quality friendships.  
Be able to speak fluently about 100-, 500-, 1,000-,  
and even 10,000-year goals.  
Be financially solvent for the next forty-five years,  
without working.  
Restore the integrity of the ozone layer.  
Eliminate racism through international law.  
Cut my hair short and dye it black.  
Recycle 80 percent of the world's waste.*



#### TOOLS OF THE TRADE

As you read this book, doing the exercises and traveling via your imagination into the future, gather useful supplies for the trip. Some tools include:

- \* Pencils (An advantage of pencils over pens is an amazing piece of technology called the eraser. With a single stroke of this tool, you can clean the slate, rewrite your dreams, and re-shape your vision.)
- \* Lots of 3×5 cards—about twenty packs, or two thousand cards, just for starters
- \* A 3×5 card file box and at least five sets of dividers for sorting cards into categories and subcategories
- \* Large sheets of paper
- \* Felt-tip pens of several colors

I recommend that you write on 3×5 cards—one idea or intended action per card. You may be used to recording goals and to-do lists on notebook paper. Please consider writing them on 3×5 cards instead. Cards can be easily carried, stored, thrown out, sorted into categories, and then re-sorted.

A powerful but expensive alternative to 3 × 5 cards is a computer. Using a word-processing program, you can easily record, store, and search through your goals without fumbling through stacks of paper. With an outlining or database program, you can further edit, review, and reorganize your ideas.

Cards and computers are not your only options in creating the future. You can paint, draw, or use clay sculptures to create vivid images of what you want. Speak into a tape recorder, write songs, sing, dance—do whatever it takes to breathe life into your vision.



#### GETTING THE MOST FROM THIS BOOK

The author of your future is you. Your thinking, choosing, writing, speaking, and acting will determine how much success you enjoy with *Creating Your Future*—and with your life. Use the following suggestions to greatly increase the value you get from this book.

##### *Reflect and act to unlock your dreams*

Getting what you want is not rocket science. To create value from this book, you can start by doing just two things: reflecting and acting.

First, be thoughtful about what you want. Reflect on it. Define it. Write about it. Speak about it. Draw a picture of it. Paint it or sculpt it. Write a poem about it or sing a song about it. Think about the new things you'll see, hear, feel, taste, and smell when you're living the life you desire. Do whatever else it takes to create a detailed vision of the future. All these are ways of getting clear about what you want, and clarity creates a path for fulfillment.

Second, as you gain clarity, align your actions with your

vision. Getting what you want calls for *doing* something. Detailed goals and carefully defined plans are amazing creations, but they are not sufficient. Getting what you want usually means acting on those plans as well. When you move into action, your dreams start moving from concept to reality.

Creating your future involves a continuous cycle of reflection and action. By taking action, you find out which aspects of your vision, goals, and plans are workable and which can be refined. That leads to further reflection, which in turn leads to even more focused and powerful action.

#### *Use words that move you*

As you read and use the ideas in this book, please don't get hooked into one single word to describe the process of creating your future. You can use a variety of words for what you invent: *goals, wishes, dreams, visions, ideas, missions, purposes, plans, designs, or commitments*. Or refer to your collection of goals as a *blueprint* or a *design* for your future. Aim at creating a compelling future that inspires you to get up in the morning and play your life out fully.

#### *Dig down into your deeper knowledge*

Several models of the human mind hold that our knowledge exists in layers. One is our conscious knowing—what we know that we know. Other possible levels of knowing include our subconscious mind, our unconscious mind, our intuition, and our instincts.

Perhaps you and I share an even deeper level of knowing. We might be able to tap into a collective wisdom that goes beyond our central nervous system and allows us to know that which is universal.

Through writing down possible goals, you can discover passions, dreams, and visions that lie below the level of conscious knowing. One path to these deeper levels is quantity. Artists know this. They do hundreds of sketches before painting (and repainting) a given canvas. Novelists fill hundreds of pages, even though only a fraction of them survive to the final draft. Photographers expose roll after roll of film and then print only a handful of negatives. Through producing excess at first—and not worrying about how good it is—these people access creative reserves that lie at levels below the conscious mind. Later they sort out their work, choosing only the best efforts to complete and polish. You can follow their example. That's one reason for my repeated requests that you write many goals.

Another path to deeper levels of knowing is “crazy creation.” This kind of creation occurs when we release judgments and brainstorm freely, allowing our most outlandish imaginings to surface. Throughout this book, I suggest lots of crazy creation.

We use only a fraction of our brain's potential—some say as little as 10 percent. But by freely using our imagination, we can discover the brilliance that lies within us. Test this idea for yourself, and see what happens. Act as if generating many outlandish ideas could help you tap vast new reserves—hidden layers of insights and intentions that could make a tremendous difference in creating your future.

### *Do the exercises*

In addition to asking you to write, I will suggest other activities throughout the following chapters. These exercises are designed to help you create your future. Completing them boosts the odds that you will get the most from this book.

Your active involvement with this book is what makes it work.

You're far more likely to remember and benefit from ideas if you use them. I recommend that you do each of the exercises as you read them. I realize this may not be your preference. You might want to read the entire text without doing any of the exercises, knowing that on some level your mind is absorbing and applying the ideas. Or you might want to read large portions of the book and then return to do the exercises, which have all been marked by gray rules in the left margins.

### ***Be willing to change***

Creating the future is a process that opens up many options. Think of it as a continual unfolding. Your vision of the future can change yearly, monthly, weekly, or even hourly. At any point, you're free to reword, rearrange, reduce, or expand your original list of goals. You can even wipe the slate clean and begin the whole process again. Let your goals change as your thoughts, feelings, and circumstances change. Your vision of the future can make way for any new development in your life.

Another way to create value from this book is to let my ideas move you. Allow for the possibility that working with this book could totally alter your life. It is not the words on these pages, but what you do after reading them, that can make a difference.

Perhaps few of the ideas in this book are new to you. Using the book can still be worthwhile. Often people *know*, but don't *do*. They stockpile ideas without putting them into practice. Use this book to remind yourself of what you already know, and then move into action.

### ***Be candid***

Tell the truth about what you want in life and what you're willing to do to get it. Being candid releases the energy that's bound up in hiding the truth from others and ourselves. Once we

Speak openly about what works and doesn't work in our lives, we can create new options. You'll find that you get the most from this book when you practice constant truth-telling.

### ***Be prepared for criticism***

Some of your friends may look at this book and think you're strange for reading it. They might roll their eyes, grin, chuckle, or even laugh out loud if you talk about hundred-year goals. Or they might resent you for thinking that you could actually create the life of your dreams. Don't let these people stop you. Just keep creating the future and savoring the results in your own life. While you're at it, invite the skeptics to join you for the ride.

### ***Push past limits***

Be willing to take the lid off your dreams and live up to your potential. If a goal comes to mind during the fire of creation that seems too wild or wonderful for you to ever meet—write it down. Be willing to put any idea on the table. You can always edit goals later in a cooler, calmer state of mind. For now, don't place any upper limit on your ecstasy.

If you do feel discomfort, keep creating goals anyway. Use discomfort as a signal to continue creating your future, not to stop. Stay with the process. Accept any feelings of resistance. Keep thinking, writing, speaking, inventing, and dreaming. You will be rewarded.

### ***Take responsibility***

One way to get little or nothing from any book you read is to find fault with its content or criticize the author's style quickly. An alternative is to lower your expectations of the book and raise your expectations of yourself. Instead of sitting back and waiting to see what you "get" from this book, become active. Choose up

front what results you want to gain from *Creating Your Future*. Also choose what you're willing to do to get those results. In this sense, the book is your creation even more than mine.

### ***Create your future again and again***

To get the most from this book, read it and do the exercises more than once. Return to this book every decade or every year. The future that you create might look very different each time. That's great. The benefit is that you stay in constant contact with the life of your dreams and your means to achieve it. With each reading, take time to dive into the process and play full out.

### ***Create the future with others***

One way to create a future that's worthy of your genius is to share this activity with people you care about. Ask friends and family members to read this book and do the exercises with you. Compare ideas. Teach the book to each other. Listen to your own and others' speaking with the idea of unleashing your full potential. One of the most loving things we can do for others is to hold their vision of the future as a sacred creation.

### ***Be detail-oriented***

You can emerge from this book with a vivid and dynamic picture of the rest of your life. That picture can be sharply focused, complete with hundreds of details about what you want to have, do, and be for years into the future.

Many people have a vague, hazy picture of their future, or none at all. Ask most people about their plans for the next ten or twenty years. You'll probably hear answers like these: "Gosh, I have no idea." "No one's ever asked me that before." "I guess I'll just wait and see what happens." "I'd like a better job." "I want to

retire early.” “More money would be nice.” “Happy kids is what I want.”

These answers are great starting points. Without more detail, though, they leave the future largely to chance.

Compare the following two answers to the question *What do you want?*

*Well, I sure don't want to keep doing what I'm doing right now. I'm really ready for something different.*

*I want to work at my current job for another three and a half years. After that, I'll have enough saved to take six months off and travel throughout Mexico. Then I plan to return home, get a degree in education, and start a new career as a Spanish teacher.*

The second statement provides a vision of the future with key details included. This statement contains a firm basis for action.

Fundraisers know about the power of details. Today there are thousands of foundations willing to give away millions of dollars to people with projects that contribute to society. The foundations want details about those projects: goals, tasks, time lines, budgets, personnel, and more. Money flows to people who know *in detail* how they'll spend it.

Business people also know the power of details. When they have a clear picture of a future business, they can raise money through banks and investors. Before parting with money, banks and investors want specifics.

There's power in detail. When your destination is clear, you're more likely to arrive there. When your goals are loaded with specifics, you're more likely to know when you've met them. That's a key premise of this book.

You don't have to agree with this idea, by the way. Just be

willing to test it for yourself. If you want to bring vision to your life, then bring life to your vision. Be willing to add the details.

***Release regret and start anew***

As they look back over their past, some people feel sadness and regret. Perhaps their dreams still elude them. Maybe they're still waiting for the passionate, loving partner they were sure they'd have by now. Perhaps they set other goals and missed them by a mile. Or maybe they had a vision of their future and just forgot about it. They might conclude that creating the future is wishful thinking and a waste of time.

Please don't treat yourself this way. To get the most from this book, be gentle with yourself. Forgive yourself for mistakes. Hanging on to anger, sorrow, or resentment can stop you in your tracks.

Missing a goal does not mean that you have to abandon it forever. You always have the option to draw a new lesson from your experience, create new ways to overcome obstacles, recapture your vision, and reclaim your future.

***Be fulfilled, then set goals***

Many people believe that you need to achieve goals before you can be happy. Their logic goes like this: Right now, you are incomplete. You're not as healthy as you'd like to be. You don't have enough money or love in your life. But if you set and achieve goals, you'll supply what's missing. Then you'll be happy. Well, that's just one point of view; consider another.

Perhaps the notion that happiness is realized only through accomplishing goals is a myth. Perhaps you can be happy *before* you set goals. Maybe the more satisfied and happy you are in the present, the more likely you are to get what you want in the future. I've written *Creating Your Future* for people who are already

well-adjusted. This is not a “get well” book. It’s for people without major problems—and even for people with a great life who know that life can get even greater.

I am suggesting that you create the future of your dreams while being happy—while celebrating. Right now, there is much about your life to celebrate. You have the courage to experiment with your life. You’re inquisitive, willing to take risks, and self-aware. You already possess everything you need to create a wonderful life.

When I assist people in creating their future, I assume that they are already brilliant, effective, loving, wise, and compassionate. I hold each person I meet to be a genius. That’s also how I see you. My task is not to supply you with something you’re missing. Instead, my mission is to unleash what already exists in you, to unlock the potential you already have. By creating your future, you remove something that puts a lid on that potential—lack of clarity about what you want and how you intend to get it.

If you are not convinced and still believe that happiness depends on reaching certain goals, no problem. In the following pages you’ll find hundreds of ideas about setting and achieving goals. Please discover what works for you and then use it.

#### CREATE YOUR FUTURE—NOW—AGAIN

Now grant yourself the gift of even more goals. Gather a stack of blank 3×5 cards or other materials for recording your goals, your dreams, and your visions. This time, give the exercise some new twists. Experiment with the ideas listed below:

- \* *Extend the time for your goal-setting sessions.* Start with five minutes. Then repeat this exercise several times over the next

few days and increase the time to ten, fifteen, or even twenty minutes.

- \* *Go beyond yourself.* Write goals for your neighborhood, city, state, or country as well as for your personal life. You might even want to write goals for the entire planet or human race.
- \* *Think about the long-range future.* Write goals to be accomplished in ten, twenty, fifty, or even a hundred years from now. Be willing to create goals that extend beyond your lifetime. Think about projects that others can take on when your life is over. Yes, the further out in time you go, the less likely it is that you'll live to see the goals accomplished. That's fine. Go ahead and write down the goals anyway.
- \* *If you're not sure what to write, just jot down a general category.* Examples are *relationships, career, money, education, and health*. Then write goals for that category. Writing down a category creates a space for you to change some aspect of your life. Perhaps you can't think of a goal for that area yet. That's okay. Just note the category for now and write specific goals later.
- \* *Do this exercise with a group of people.* People in the group can read some of their goals out loud. Ask group members to accept all the goals without criticism and to use what they hear to inspire some new goals for themselves. Creating with a group can boost your energy and increase the fun.

After you've generated goals, take a moment to reflect on the experience. Notice how easy or hard goal-setting was for you. If you had trouble writing even one or two goals, don't worry. You're flexing a new mental muscle called "creating your future." Few of us in any age group or occupation have much experience setting long-range goals. Give yourself time to get into shape and look forward to the rewards.

Keep your future safe for posterity. Store the goals you've just created in a 3 × 5 card box, folder, container, leather-bound journal, computer file, or another special location. If possible, label it with your name, using your best handwriting. Add a fancy design, picture, or photograph of yourself. Do whatever it takes to make a sacred space for your goals. After all, it *is* sacred: It contains your future.



#### FIVE STEPS TO CREATING YOUR FUTURE

The next five chapters outline a process for creating your future:

*Step 1: Commit to creating your future.*

*Step 2: Create a vision of your future.*

*Step 3: Construct a plan to fulfill your vision.*

*Step 4: Carry out your plan.*

*Step 5: Celebrate what you've done—and continue creating your future.*

While I recommend that you do these steps in this order, you might want to invent your own style of creating the future and take these steps in a different order.

If you feel overwhelmed at the prospect of doing all this, then take that feeling as a kind of self-compliment. It means that you've put a lot at stake in using this book—nothing less than your future.

At the same time, it pays to lighten up. Creating your future is not something you *have* to do. While this book describes a pow-

erful tool, it is not a panacea. There are many happy and effective people who are not skilled at creating the future.

For now, just experiment with the process. Play with it. See if creating your future has a positive impact. If it does, great. If not, leave this tool on the shelf for now and come back to it later. And as you choose, remember that creating your future can be fulfilling and fun.

My work, my intention, and my hope is to speak and write in a way that moves you to create the life of your dreams. I claim that your life can be phenomenal. You can have what you want. You can experience as much happiness, health, love, and wealth as you could ever imagine—and more. You can have a life filled with deep intimacy, vibrant health, full celebration, and daily ecstasy. One of the most powerful paths to these results is determining what you want now and well into the future, all in rich detail.