

LISTEN TO YOUR CONSCIENCE

That's Why You Have One

FRANK SONNENBERG

Praise for

LISTEN TO YOUR CONSCIENCE

“Living with honor isn’t a catchphrase. It’s a way of life. *Listen to Your Conscience* provides an insightful and pragmatic path to help you lead a rich and rewarding life. Bravo!”

NADINE HACK, CEO, beCause Global Consulting
Former Board Chair, Desmond Tutu Peace Foundation

“Want to lead a more meaningful, ethical, and enjoyable life? I strongly recommend that you discover the actionable insights in *Listen to Your Conscience* by revered Frank Sonnenberg.”

KARE ANDERSON
Emmy-winning former NBC and Wall Street Journal reporter

“In this delightfully simple and straightforward book, Frank Sonnenberg succeeds in both challenging and compelling us to use our personal power to make the world a happier, healthier place to live, love, work, and play – one conscience choice at a time.”

JOHN E. MICHEL
Brig. General USAF (Ret), TED Speaker, C-Suite Leader

“Frank’s book, *Listen to Your Conscience*, encourages you to look deep inside yourself to develop the self-awareness needed to become a better human being. In the process, you’ll also find a life filled with joy and contentment.”

LARAE QUY, Former FBI counterintelligence agent
Author of *Mental Toughness for Women Leaders* and *Secrets of a Strong Mind*

“Frank Sonnenberg is so much more than an excellent wordsmith. He’s a profound thinker who always brings insightful perspective to life’s most important issues. *Listen to Your Conscience* is another welcome dose of nutrient-rich food for the soul.”

DR. RODGER DEAN DUNCAN
Bestselling author of *CHANGE-friendly LEADERSHIP*

Praise for

LISTEN TO YOUR CONSCIENCE

“Absolutely fantastic! There is so much wisdom in *Listen to Your Conscience* that I promise you will cherish this book as one of the best you have ever read.”

JOHN SPENCE

“Among Top 500 Leadership Development Experts in the World” — HR.com

“*Listen to Your Conscience* is a treasure trove of insights that will help you shape your outlook on living your life with greater purpose and honesty.”

JOHN BALDONI

Globally recognized thought leader, Marshall Goldsmith 100 Coach, and author of more than a dozen books.

“Frank Sonnenberg’s new book, *Listen to Your Conscience*, helps today’s leaders find a place of centeredness and inner peace in a time of trouble and uncertainty. A breath of fresh air!”

STEVE GUTZLER

President of Leadership Quest

“Frank has a unique ability to touch the deepest, truest, hidden parts of our minds and hearts in order to inspire change. There’s nothing truer or deeper than connecting to your conscience.”

SARAH HINER

President and CEO, Bottom Line Inc.

“In *Listen to Your Conscience*, Frank Sonnenberg has once again brought us back to the basics. Frank is not just teaching us how to craft our life stories, but how to earn credibility, respect, and trust.”

MARK S. BABBITT

CEO and Founder, YouTern

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Printed in the United States of America.

ISBN: 9798654191465

Kindle Direct Publishing, Seattle, Washington, United States

Cover and interior design by Carrie Ralston, Simple Girl Design LLC.

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CONSCIENCE.
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WITH YOURSELF
FOR THE REST
OF YOUR LIFE.

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INNER PEACE IS A
BYPRODUCT OF
HOW YOU CHOOSE
TO LIVE YOUR LIFE.

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INNER PEACE IS A CHOICE

What keeps you up at night? Maybe you regret something that you did or feel guilty about something that you failed to do. Perhaps it's because you haven't been honest with others or true to yourself. Or maybe your conscience is just trying to get your attention. In any case, have you ever wondered why some people are up all hours of the night, while others have peace of mind? The fact is, inner peace is a byproduct of how you choose to live your life.

Quite likely, your habits are so ingrained that you never think about your behavior or the many choices that you make. You choose to live in the moment or to dredge up your past, see the glass half-full or see it as half-empty, and live with honor or turn a blind eye to unethical behavior. Those habits have a significant impact on your psyche as well as on your general well-being.

Peace of mind begins with the right mindset.

INNER PEACE — BE COOL, CALM, AND COLLECTED

If you're yearning for peace of mind, give these 15 guideposts some serious thought.

Accept responsibility. Be the master of your destiny rather than outsourcing your responsibility to others. Stand tall by accepting accountability for your choices and for the consequences of your actions.

Find your purpose. Make a difference. When you do something for satisfaction rather than reward, the reward is often the satisfaction of doing it.

Live with honor. Do what's right, not out of fear of getting caught, but because your integrity matters.

Be reasonable. Strive for excellence, not perfection. Excellence is more than sufficient.

Develop trusting relationships. Surround yourself with people who bring out the best in you. Gain their trust by proving that you're worthy of it.

Make everyone a winner. Focus on win-win relationships rather than on winner-take-all. Seek areas of common interest, where everyone can benefit, rather than on optimizing your individual situation.

Be thankful. Learn the meaning of *enough*. Find your happiness, not by seeking more, but by appreciating what you already have.

Strive for balance. Enjoy the journey as well as the destination. Happiness is not a matter of intensity but of balance.

Learn to say “no.” Make your priorities a priority. Know what matters most to you and be unwilling to compromise those priorities at any price.

Live in the moment. Leave the past behind. You can't do anything to improve your past, but you can learn from it to improve your future.

Unclutter your world. Take a load off your mind. Don't allow fear, guilt, worry, envy, and anger to weigh you down.

Control what you can. Keep things in perspective. You can't control the uncontrollable, but you can control how you respond to it.

Be true to yourself. Reach for the stars and be proud of your achievements, but also take pride in the way that you achieve them.

Build good karma. Give of yourself, not because you expect something in return, but because witnessing others' happiness is, by itself, a worthy reward.

Hold your head up high. Make yourself proud. If you don't believe in yourself, why should anyone else?

If you believe you can't...you won't.

FIND INNER PEACE

Some folks are wealthy, but their relationships are poor. They have a big title at work but aren't much of a Dad or Mom at home. They're successful, but everyone knows *how* they achieved that success. The truth is, some of those folks are self-centered, ruthless, and unapologetic – and they know it. Maybe that's why they're not sleeping.

Inner peace isn't just the ability to deal with conflict; it's knowing full well that you're a person of honor and integrity. It's knowing that you do the right thing, serve as an exemplary role model, and make a difference in the lives of others. That enables you to hold your head up high and to sleep well at night. Marvin Gaye of Motown fame once said, "If you cannot find peace within yourself, you will never find it anywhere else." What some folks overlook in their quest for power, fame, and fortune is that following your conscience, and having inner peace, clearly outweighs the material rewards received along the way. After all, you have to live with yourself for the rest of your life. :)

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PEOPLE CAN'T MAKE
YOU DO THINGS
WITHOUT YOUR
PERMISSION.

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NEVER LOWER YOUR PERSONAL STANDARDS. NEVER!

When you go into a room, your body adapts to the temperature. The same holds true for your mindset. How much are you influenced by the people you spend time with? Do they bring out the best in you? Or do you find yourself compromising your values, mimicking improper behavior, or lowering your personal standards?

While it may be tempting to take the easy route, to follow the crowd, or to be seduced by riches, *you* are responsible for your conduct – and the consequences of your actions – regardless of how others behave.

People can't make you do things without your permission.

YOUR PERSONAL STANDARDS DEFINE YOU

Never lower your standards, compromise your integrity, or dishonor your name. Here are 10 ways people degrade themselves:

Give in to temptation. Some folks stretch the truth, let their eyes wander, or get seduced by money. I hope you have the willpower and self-respect to say “no.”

Relax their standards. Some people are tempted to lower their standards because others are slacking off. While it may be appealing to take a breather, bad habits are hard to break.

Follow the crowd. Some folks follow the pack because they assume others know better. Even though a group may provide comfort and security, it doesn't guarantee that their motives are pure or that they're thinking rationally or ethically. Know when to say "no."

Mimic inappropriate behavior. Some people fall into a bad crowd and imitate their behavior. The truth is, "Everybody does it" doesn't mean *you* have to do it.

Look the other way. Some folks turn their backs, fail to speak out, or cover up for unethical behavior because it's convenient. Every time you close your eyes to immorality or injustice, you're condoning it.

Crave acceptance. Some people will do *anything* to win acceptance from the in-crowd. Think long and hard before you pay the price of admission.

Get dragged into a tussle. Some people always seem to be looking for a fight. While you may be provoked to jump in, think twice before you take the plunge. As a famous saying goes, "Never wrestle with pigs. You both get dirty and the pig likes it."

Lose control of their temper. Some folks respond emotionally, which is never a good idea. If you're angry or upset, count to 10 before communicating your feelings. If that doesn't work, try 20.

Compromise their values. Some folks impose their way of thinking on others. You win a debate with a better argument, not by force.

Take shortcuts. Some folks act unethically to look good, cover their behind, or get what they want. The prize for living with honor and integrity is that, even though you won't win all the time, you'll be true to yourself and your values.

RAISE YOUR PERSONAL STANDARDS

Jim Rohn, author and entrepreneur, famously said, “You’re the average of the five people you spend the most time with.” What he’s saying is that people will influence you. It’s only natural. That being said, I hope you spend time with folks who are smart, kind, and honorable – but what if they’re not?

Be aware of the impact that others have on your behavior. Don’t let bad habits, weak character, low standards, or immoral behavior rub off on you. If anything, be a positive influence on others and an inspiration to them.

*Keeping bad company is like being in a germ-infested area.
You never know what you’ll catch.*

Be your own person. Set your bar high and don’t lower your standards for anyone. You’re better than that. Some of the most precious things you possess are your honor, your dignity, and your reputation. Be the person others look up to – whose character is beyond reproach. Be the one who inspires others to achieve excellence. And be the one who lives with honor and dignity. At the end of the day, if you’re not proud of who you are and the way you choose to live your life, little else matters. :)

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ARE YOU HONORABLE
OR AFRAID OF
GETTING CAUGHT?

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WOULD YOU DO SOMETHING UNETHICAL IF YOU COULD GET AWAY WITH IT?

Lying, cheating, stealing. I assume you know the difference between right and wrong. The question is whether you abstain from those acts because you're honorable or because you're afraid of getting caught. Would you do something unethical if you could get away with it?

Nobody, except the perpetrator, really knows why an unscrupulous act was committed. If *you* were the perpetrator, were you taking a shortcut, covering up the truth, scamming the system, giving in to a moment of weakness, or selling your soul to the devil? Regardless of the reason, the result is the same – even though *others may not know* that you committed the act, you'll know for sure. And you have to live with that fact.

How does that make you feel? While some people would feel guilty, dirty, or even worthless, others are oblivious. For them, it's all about the prize.

ARE YOU HONORABLE OR AFRAID OF GETTING CAUGHT?

We are regularly faced with choices that fall in the gray area of moral behavior. Other times, our choices are clear as day. The truth is that

selective morality is sinful. Determine if the following 15 points are clear in your mind.

Is stealing someone else's idea as dishonest as stealing a possession?

If you do something unscrupulous, *to benefit others*, does that make it right?

If your boss tells you to do something unethical, does that excuse immoral behavior?

Is stealing the credit that belongs to someone else really stealing?

Is overlooking dishonest behavior as bad as committing the act?

Are you a winner if you cheat?

Does talking about morality make you a good person?

Is spreading lies as cruel as creating them?

If you fail to report dishonest behavior, are you being dishonest?

Is telling a "white lie" lying?

Is omitting a key fact as bad as telling a blatant lie?

Is breaking a small commitment as bad as breaking a large one?

If several others commit a wrongdoing, is it appropriate to copy them?

Does the size of a reward ever justify shady behavior?

Is stealing a little as bad as stealing a lot?

WHAT IS YOUR DIGNITY WORTH TO YOU?

You're going to be tested throughout your life. You may be tempted to cheat to make yourself look good, stretch the truth to cover your behind, or do something unethical to get what you want. The challenge is that the *right choice* might not always be as clear as day. That's when your actions reveal your true character.

It's easy to say what you'll do in theory, but your actions count most when the rubber meets the road. Your choice is clear. Will you live a life that makes you proud or choose a path of dishonor and deceit?

To make matters more complicated, your answer may not always be on full display. In fact, it may be a test in which *you* grade your own exam. No one will know how you performed – but you will.

Is your conscience giving you the silent treatment?

If you choose the path of honor and integrity, there may be some negative consequences. In fact, you may fall short of the prize that you had your heart set on; you may be forced to tell your boss you're not comfortable with his or her request; or, if you did something wrong, you may have some explaining to do.

The prize for being honest is that, even though you may not win all the time, you'll be true to yourself and your values. What's that worth? Everything! John Wooden, the legendary basketball coach, said, "The true test of a man's character is what he does when no one is watching." Would you do something unethical if you could get away with it? Follow your conscience. You have to live with yourself for the rest of your life. :)

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CREDIBILITY SAYS
EVERYTHING
ABOUT YOU.

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HOW CREDIBLE ARE YOU?

What do offering parental advice, applying for a job, or running for President have in common? It doesn't matter whether you're peddling a product, selling an idea, persuading a skeptical group, teaching your kids a life lesson, or leading people in times of uncertainty – you won't be successful if you lack trust and credibility.

Credibility matters. Believe me!

Credibility isn't automatic. You must prove that you're worthy of it. But beware! Once credibility is granted, it's not always permanent. Some folks undermine their efforts by disregarding the connection between their behavior and credibility. Others are so blinded by ambition that they're willing to sacrifice everything to get what they want. While that strategy may work in the short term, the impact on trust and credibility can be lasting.

When you exaggerate a story, you weaken your credibility.

HOW TO EARN CREDIBILITY

Here are 14 factors that contribute to your credibility:

Be genuine. Credible people are comfortable in their own skin. They don't create a false persona to win acceptance, and they don't allow themselves to be manipulated by others.

Be principled. Credible people do what's right rather than what's convenient. They don't twist rules for personal gain.

Be capable. Credible people have a proven track record of success. Plus, they have the knowledge and experience to replicate that success. They don't misrepresent their capabilities to get something they don't deserve.

Be discerning. Credible people surround themselves with folks who uphold high standards of honor and integrity. They don't let toxic people pollute their attitude, dampen their drive, or corrupt their morality.

Be honest and trustworthy. Credible people give explanations in a *clear* and *concise* manner. They tell it *like it is* rather than saying what folks want to hear. They don't spin the truth or exaggerate benefits to make something sound better.

Be straightforward and transparent. Credible people let others know whether they're presenting fact or opinion. They don't abuse people's trust by making a recommendation or offering advice without revealing vested interests.

Be objective. Credible people present both sides of an issue rather than a one-sided view. They disclose all known facts in an unbiased manner and let recipients arrive at their own conclusion. They don't manipulate, suppress, or withhold important information to misrepresent the truth.

Be selfless. Credible people focus on win-win relationships rather than trying to advance their own self-interests. They don't try to win at the expense of the relationship.

Be fair. Credible people make every effort to be open-minded, even-handed, and non-discriminating. They don't show favoritism – rather, they treat superiors and subordinates with the same level of respect.

Be rational and insightful. Credible people examine both sides of an issue before forming an opinion. They make decisions based on hard evidence and reason rather than on emotion.

Be virtuous. Credible people are passionate about their beliefs and values. But they don't force them on others. They recognize that one of the true tests of integrity is your refusal to compromise your honor at any price.

Be decisive and action-oriented. Credible people don't just talk a good game – they make things happen. They jump on good opportunities, knowing full well that if you do nothing, nothing happens.

Be accountable. Credible people take ownership of their life rather than relinquishing that responsibility to others. They don't point a finger or cast blame to evade accountability.

Be consistent and dependable. Credible people are predictable. You always know where they stand. They don't blow with the wind, even when it's convenient and tempting to do so.

CREDIBILITY SAYS EVERYTHING ABOUT YOU

Credibility is gauged by the level of confidence and trust that people have in you. You don't secure that by sharpening your resume, learning how to play-act, or giving yourself a makeover. You gain people's trust based on your moral character and your competence, and by consistently displaying admirable behavior.

The truth never lies.

Some people have it backward – they focus on how they *appear* to others. The truth is that credibility begins with you! If YOU don't believe in yourself, why should others? When you continually invest in your personal growth, live with honor, and lead by example, everything you say will carry the voice of credibility. Moreover, you'll be proud of who you are. You won't have to shout it from the rooftops; saying nothing will say everything. Are you credible? :)

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FORGET YOUR
TO-DO LIST AND
CREATE A *TO-BE* LIST.

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TO BE OR NOT TO BE

When you get older and reflect on your life, will you value the things that you checked off your to-do list or will you take pride in knowing that you enjoyed a life well lived? In other words, shouldn't *who you want to be* take precedence over *what you want to pursue*? What could be more important?

Do you want to do more or be more?

FORGET YOUR TO-DO LIST AND CREATE A TO-BE LIST

By determining *who you want to be* rather than *what you want to accomplish*, you'll be able to identify your possibilities, weigh your options, define your aspirations, establish your goals, and measure daily progress against your desires. Moreover, it'll help you know if you're proceeding on track or veering off course. Here are 11 aspirations worthy of your consideration.

Do you want to be a:

- Loving spouse
- Dedicated parent
- Trusted friend

- Proud citizen
- Valuable worker
- Selfless leader
- Positive role model
- Thoughtful neighbor
- Caring family member
- Faithful follower of the Almighty
- Happy and fulfilled individual

You may be thinking, “I want to be all these things.” But what happens when you have to choose between them? For example, you may be forced to choose between going home to your family or staying late at work – yet again; defending your principles or following the crowd; doing something for yourself or for your kids; calling out a colleague or looking the other way. The upshot is that your actions say volumes about your priorities, as well as about yourself.

WHO DO YOU WANT TO BE?

While it may not be hard to define who you want to be, that doesn’t guarantee that your wishes will come true. While being a dedicated parent, a trusted friend, and a thoughtful neighbor are all admirable goals, they’re unlikely to occur by magic. Good intentions are not enough. You have to *consciously* make them happen.

When you do nothing, nothing happens.

In addition, we get so caught up in daily activities that it’s easy to lose sight of the big picture. That happens because day-to-day deadlines loom large, whereas nobody’s pressuring you to step back and put things in perspective.

What does it mean to be a trusted friend, to raise good kids, to be a thoughtful neighbor or an exemplary role model? If you don’t take the time to define the personal qualities and actions required to achieve these ends, it’s likely you never will. How can you achieve your aspirations?

BE THE AUTHOR OF YOUR LIFE STORY

As you contemplate who you want to be in life, consider the following:

Make yourself proud. Be a person of strong moral character, set high standards, and remain true to your values.

Earn the respect of others. Live with integrity, let your actions speak louder than words, and refuse to compromise your honor for any price.

Live every day to the max. Reach for the stars, but never lose sight of the garden that you grew in.

Surround yourself with top-notch people. Choose your friends wisely and be aware of the impact they have on your behavior.

Make everyone feel special. Bring out the best in people, treat them with dignity and respect, and make a difference in their lives.

Build bonds of trust. Be humble and kind, act fairly and be dependable, promote openness and honesty, and always do right by others.

Construct valuable relationships. Put others first, make your relationships mutually beneficial, and never win at the expense of a relationship.

Lead by example. Be an exemplary role model, do what's right, and always let your conscience be your guide.

Live with purpose. Believe in a cause greater than yourself. As the saying goes, "The real measure of your wealth is how much you'd be worth if you lost all your money."

When you find yourself, you'll gain a new perspective about who you are, what you stand for, and where you're heading. At the end of the day, your option is simple: Define yourself by accident or define yourself by choice.

To be or not to be? Now you know the answer. :)

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EXEMPLARY ROLE
MODELS BELIEVE
IN THE POWER OF
GOOD — NOT WHAT'S
GOOD FOR THEM
BUT RATHER, WHAT'S
GOOD FOR OTHERS.

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WHO'S YOUR ROLE MODEL?

Everybody has a hero. Who's yours? I'm not talking about Superman, who can leap tall buildings in a single bound, or even Mother Teresa, who is larger than life. I'm talking about folks, like you and me, that you look up to. What makes them so special? And how do these role models influence how you live your life?

Some people draw an artificial distinction between heroes and role models. They say we idolize heroes, while role models are "ordinary" folks who cross our path every day. The truth is, that distinction is irrelevant if both of them influence our behavior every day. When was the last time you thought about who your role models are, what makes them special, and how you can benefit most from them?

People need role models. Are you up to the job?

WHAT MAKES YOUR ROLE MODEL SPECIAL?

Why is your role model so rare, and why do you look up to that individual? Is it their moral character, the way they treat others, their overall perspective, or something entirely different?

Consider the following:

- Do you know the individual personally or is this individual a public figure?
- Do you admire this individual for their outer beauty or inner soul?
- Do you look up to your role model because of what they have, what they did, or who they are?
- Do you admire this person for their achievements or for what they've done for others?
- Is your role model young or old, a man or a woman, from a background similar to yours or entirely different? (Does that even matter?)
- Does the individual maintain a high profile or remain out of the spotlight?
- Is the person admired by *many* or only by a *few*?
- Has this person impacted just *your* life or the lives of *many*?
- Can anyone replicate your role model's deed(s) or is a special talent or expertise required?
- Does this person possess a specific character trait or is their entire disposition special?

WANTED: MORE HEROES

When some folks envision a hero, they think *idol* – someone larger than life, someone who broke a world record, put their life on the line for a comrade, or who is continually in the spotlight – watched by millions of folks every day. That may be true. But there are also people that folks look up to who are *not* famous and don't even view themselves as special.

But they are.

Heroes and role models don't have to be rich, powerful, or famous. They don't have to look the most attractive, wear the fanciest clothes, or drive the most expensive cars. They are as commonplace as a family member, business colleague, or even the person next door. But they represent someone very special in your life and in the lives of others.

It may be a teacher who changed a kid's life, a coach who helped her players achieve greatness, or even a stranger who went out of his way for a person he didn't know. You, yourself, may be a hero or role model to someone and not even be aware of it.

*People who look up to you watch every move that you make –
so don't let them down.*

I have my heroes and you probably do, too. They're always busy, but they always find time to make a difference. They don't think they're special, but they sure make you feel that way. They're quiet and unassuming, but they can light up a room when they enter it. They don't flaunt their success because their achievements speak for themselves.

*Exemplary role models believe in the power of good –
not what's good for them but rather, what's good for others.*

People don't "sign up" to be role models; others naturally gravitate toward them and look up to them. Role models continually cast an aura of goodness that's terribly hard to ignore. They don't do things to seek the limelight or win kudos. They aren't perfect. And they'll be the first to admit that to you. They do things quietly and are often the only ones who know the good they're doing. But that's enough for them because they don't want, or expect, fame and fortune. They take great pride in knowing they're making a difference – and they are! 😊)

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IF YOU CAN'T
HEAR YOUR
CONSCIENCE,
TURN UP THE
VOLUME.

”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Frank Sonnenberg is an award-winning author and a well-known advocate for moral character, personal values, and personal responsibility. He has written eight books and was recently named one of “America’s Top 100 Thought Leaders” and one of “America’s Most Influential Small Business Experts.” Frank has served on several boards and has consulted to some of the largest and most respected companies in the world.

Additionally, his blog – FrankSonnenbergOnline – has attracted millions of readers on the Internet. It was named among the “Best 21st Century Leadership Blogs”; among the “Top 100 Socially-Shared Leadership Blogs”; and one of the “Best Inspirational Blogs On the Planet.”