

**Be Where Your Feet Are**

# **What's in it for me? Learn to live with passion and authenticity.**

Life involves trade-offs. Every minute we spend at work is one minute less with our family. Every day we spend doing what we do best, is one day less to spend learning something new. That's just the way things are. But life's limitations don't have to hold us back. These blinks lay out the advice of a highly successful businessman, a loving father, and a devoted husband, and delve into the principles that make for a passionate, authentic, and flourishing life. Instead of seeing work and life as antagonistic, these blinks show that the same principles can bring us success in both realms. In these blinks, you'll learn

why a Tongan family sold the sides of their house; how a partnership with the boy band NSYNC taught the author a life lesson; and what you can learn from water buffalo.

## **Be completely present, whatever you're doing.**

Back in 2012, when the author lost his job as president of Madison Square Garden Sports, he was crushed. That position, running one of the world's most famous arenas, had been the crowning achievement of his career. With his dismissal, it seemed he'd hit the lowest ebb. So what was the author's solution? Did he go straight back into work, to show the world that a very public firing wasn't keeping him down? Well, he did consider this, but resisted the temptation. Instead of carrying on with the hectic life of an industry leader, he chose to relax, unwind, and spend some quality time with his family. He now had the luxury of being much more present in the world. The key message here is: Be completely present, whatever you're doing. One of the great things about modern technology is that it allows us to do everything at once. Our phones empower us to order food, attend meetings, draft emails, and watch TV – wherever and whenever we want. The upshot of this is convenience. We no longer have to drive to a video rental store and pick up a film on a Saturday evening: we can stream it online, straight away. The downside, however, is that we often forget to focus on what's right in front of us. Our life becomes frenetic, unhealthy. Too many of us live in a constant haze of notifications, duties, and distractions these days. We pay partial attention to everything, and we focus completely on just about nothing. Without the constraints of urgent emails and important calls, the author became a lot more aware of everything around him – and much more engaged in, well, living. After he lost his high-profile job, O'Neil took a two-and-a-half-week holiday with his wife and daughters. They traveled to Europe, visited London and Paris – and, for the first time in years, the author found himself giving his family undivided attention. This made him feel better than ever before. After that well-deserved break, O'Neil did start a new job. But he made sure he'd never lose sight of the value of being fully present; of committing to the matter at hand, 100 percent.

## **Focus on what's most important to you, and forget the rest.**

Vai Sikahema, a former football player, now a news anchor with NBC, grew up on the small island of Tonga. For a while there, he lived in a house that was missing two side walls. Now, it wasn't that the house was designed that way - and the house hadn't been damaged in any kind of storm or flood. No, Sikahema's home was missing two sides because his parents removed the clapboard bit by bit and sold the pieces to their neighbors. Why? Not in order to feed the family, or to pay an overdue electricity bill. Sikahema's parents sold the sides of their house because they'd identified What's Most Important, or WMI, as the author calls it. The key message here is: Focus on what's most important to you and forget the rest. Vai Sikahema's parents sold the sides of their clapboard home in order to fund a religious journey - a trip to get sealed in New Zealand. In the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, sometimes called the Mormon Church, getting sealed means having your wedding vows made eternal. For most people, relationships end at death. But Mormons believe that sealing allows a couple and their children to remain united in the afterlife - in other words, for all eternity. In order to be sealed, believers need to travel to their local temple. But for Sikahema's parents, that meant a journey to New Zealand, 1,500 miles away. That distance and the cost of the journey would have discouraged many. But not this pair: the strength of their beliefs trumped the value of worldly things - even their home. Vai Sikahema's parents provide a clear example of lives lived in accordance with WMI - What's Most Important. But you don't need religious faith to live with passion and integrity. What's most important to you might be your family, or helping others, or a lifelong goal. Once you know what your WMI is, live a life aimed squarely at it - and don't deviate, whatever people around you say.

## **Failure's guaranteed, so fail productively.**

Failure is part of life. It's not pleasant and it's not desirable, but it is inevitable. We will all encounter it - perhaps a number of times. Because we can't always succeed, failing occasionally is just the natural result of having ambitions and setting goals. But if we can't avoid failure, how should we respond to it? Well, we can treat each disappointment, mistake, and setback as a learning opportunity, drawing lessons from the present and the past to help guide our actions in the future. In the author's words, instead of failing backward, we can fail forward. The key message here is: Failure's guaranteed, so fail productively. Failing forward, or failing productively, doesn't mean that you need to relish disappointment and pray for bad luck. Of course your aim should be to succeed. What failing forward does mean is that you should learn from each setback. A short-term failure now can offer you advantages in the long run, but only if you commit to identifying and learning from your mistakes. So what does that look like in practice? Well, for the author, an important lesson came in the form of a marketing campaign gone awry. In an effort to attract teenage girls to the struggling Women's National Basketball Association, O'Neil signed an expensive partnership with the ultra-famous boy band NSYNC. Unfortunately, it was a complete flop, and ticket sales didn't budge an inch. In short, O'Neil had failed. It was at this juncture that O'Neil turned to a friend for help. Together, they identified the mistakes the author had made. O'Neil realized why he was finding it hard to succeed at work. His problem was that he'd never gained the support of his colleagues - in fact, he'd never really taken the time to get to know them at all. So O'Neil decided to correct this. He made an effort to establish meaningful relationships in the workplace. In the long run, that changed everything. Instead of failing backwards, O'Neil failed forward.

# Be a team player.

On his second day as president of Madison Square Garden Sports, the author called 500 of his employees together and showed them all a video. It was called “Battle at Kruger,” and it depicted the efforts of a water buffalo calf to elude its hunters: first a pride of lions, and then a crocodile, too. The video’s thrilling. Just as it seems that the lions are about to devour the calf, other members of the calf’s herd approach. Timid at first and then more daring, they eventually scare off the predators – and the calf quickly runs to safety. It might seem like a strange video for O’Neil to show hundreds of employees on the second day in his new job. But the author drove the point home. Don’t be a predatory lion or a selfish crocodile. And don’t be the passive tourist behind the camera. Be like the water buffalo – help others out. The key message here is: Be a team player. Being a team player doesn’t just mean standing up for those who are unable to defend themselves. It also means helping out in seemingly mundane ways. In the words of the author, “If there’s a piece of paper on the ground, bend over and pick it up.” In other words, if you notice a problem, don’t pass on by without addressing it: either fix it yourself or ask someone else to see to it. If the printer’s out of ink, replace the cartridge – or ask the maintenance team to do it. If the water cooler’s empty, get it refilled. And if your colleague’s forgotten a deadline, remind her as kindly as possible. This isn’t just a principle for the boardroom or the office, by the way. It applies at home, among friends, and even in your wider community. If there’s a problem that needs addressing, don’t assume that someone else will take charge. Be like a water buffalo – a team player who steps up and looks out for others.

# Assume everyone has good intentions.

Imagine how different your life would be if you always assumed that people had good intentions. That driver who just cut you off in traffic? Maybe she’s on the way to the hospital, or late to her son’s birthday party. No big deal. That friend who didn’t invite you to his barbecue on the weekend? He probably just made an honest mistake. Living with this attitude is good for everyone. It’s good for you because it helps hold anger and resentment at bay. It’s good for other people, too, because when you assume they’re trying to be nice to you, you treat them with greater kindness, patience, and respect. The key message here is: Assume everyone has good intentions. Admittedly, it can be hard to believe that others mean well. Sometimes we feel so hurt and angry that extending our own goodwill and generosity seems impossible. That was the case when Jill Snodgrass, a young colleague of the author’s, came across her adoption papers as a 13-year-old. Written next to “status of child” was a word that Snodgrass recoiled at: “abandoned.” Immediately, she pictured herself as a baby left at the side of the road, helpless and unwanted. It was an image she found impossible to shake – an image so powerful that years later it was still making it hard for her to open up and trust people. And then, one day, Snodgrass returned to her family home as a young woman and sought out the folder that had so upset her as a child. She saw the word “abandoned” once again – but this time she read on. She learned that her biological mother, a woman who had only a second-grade education and cleaned houses to make ends meet, had given her up not long after Snodgrass’s father left them. Instead of seeing herself as unwanted and abandoned, Snodgrass saw the situation in an entirely new light. Her mother hadn’t willfully parted with her: she was probably struggling, scared and alone, and saw adoption as the best way forward for the child. As a girl, Jill Snodgrass had interpreted the term “abandoned” in the worst possible light. Now, a little older, better

informed, and more mature, she was ready to assume that her mother was a struggling and distressed woman, who did the best she could for her. In short, she assumed her mother meant well.

## **Be patient, and trust the process.**

Back in January 2015, the Philadelphia 76ers point guard Tony Wroten was interviewed before a game against the Cleveland Cavaliers. In that conversation, he uttered a few memorable words. Wroten said, “They tell us every game, every day, ‘Trust the Process.’ Just continue to build.” At the time, Wroten probably gave his words little thought – but they set 76ers fans on fire. The three words “trust the process” became a kind of anthem for the team, and Wroten himself even got “The Process” as a nickname. But what was it about those words that so captured fans’ imaginations? Well, the 76ers weren’t at their best at the time: serial losses and drawn-out attempts to rebuild the team seemed to be going nowhere. Even long-term fans were losing faith in the team. “Trust the process” was exactly what supporters needed to hear: “We have a plan”, the phrase suggested. “Just stick it out, and things will get better.” The key message here is: Be patient and trust the process. The implications of the phrase “trust the process” extend beyond the world of basketball and competitive sport: the words are an invitation to believe in the power of grit, hard work, and slow, incremental progress. The “process” refers to both your plan and your follow-through. To trust the process means to go against the values of instant gratification. In a world that wants easy solutions, it means thinking long-term and acting in a way that fits an abiding plan rather than the whim of a moment. In the words of the author, “there are no shortcuts to the top.” A truly ambitious plan is always going to involve long days, late nights, and hard work. You’ll need to pay the price of success, day in and day out, if you ever want to reach your goals. That’s exactly what the 76ers did, and it paid off. Their slow-and-steady approach paid dividends – so much so that the team is now one of the strongest in the NBA.

## **Final summary**

The key message in these blinks: A few key principles underlie success at work, at home, and in the wider community. First of all, be present, no matter what you’re doing – give the matter at hand your complete attention. Secondly, live in accordance with your core values, and forget everything else. When you encounter failure, which is inevitable, learn from your mistakes. It’s not all about yourself, though: treat others well too – be a team player, and assume everyone you meet means well. Finally, trust the process: success comes gradually, and it requires a long-term plan and lots of patience. Actionable advice: Write down what your errors have taught you. Learning from your mistakes can be hard. Often we get so wrapped up in our own regret and disappointment that we struggle to distill any lessons from what we’ve been through. To make it a bit easier for yourself, try getting everything down on paper. Simply list three mistakes that are on your mind right now, and what each one has taught you. Writing down the lessons you’ve drawn from your errors will make them far easier to remember and follow.