

THE GREATNESS GUIDE

One of the World's Top Success Coaches Shares
His Secrets for Personal and Business Mastery

ROBIN SHARMA



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*“Life is pure adventure and the sooner we realize that,
the quicker we will be able to treat life as art.”*

Maya Angelou

*“I used to think that one day I’d be able to resolve the different
drives I have in different directions, the tensions between the
different people I am. Now I realize that is who I am. I do feel I’m
getting closer to the song in my head. I wasn’t looking for grace.
But luckily grace was looking for me.”*

Bono, lead singer of U2, as quoted in *Rolling Stone*

I'm No Guru

The media sometimes calls me a leadership (or self-help) “guru.” I’m not. I’m just an ordinary guy who happens to have learned ideas and tools that have helped many human beings reach their best lives and many organizations get to world class.

But I must be really clear: I’m no different from you. I have my struggles, my frustrations and my own fears—along with my hopes, goals and dreams. I’ve had good seasons and some deeply painful ones. I’ve made some spectacularly good choices and some outrageously bad mistakes. I’m very human—a work in progress. If I have ideas that you find insightful, please know it’s simply because I spend my days focused on the knowledge you are about to experience. Thinking about practical ways to help you play your biggest game as a human being and reach greatness. Dwelling on how I can help companies get to the extraordinary. Do anything long enough and you’ll get some depth of insight and understanding about it. Then they’ll call you a guru.

A man at a signing I did at a bookstore in Bangalore, India, heard me say, “I’m no guru.” He came up to me and said: “Why are you so uncomfortable being called a guru? ‘Gu’ simply means ‘darkness’ in Sanskrit and ‘ru’ simple means ‘dispel.’ So

the word ‘guru’ simply speaks of one who dispels the darkness and brings more understanding and light.” Nice point. Made me think.

I’ve had good seasons and some deeply painful ones.
I’ve made some **spectacularly** good
choices and some outrageously bad mistakes.
I’m **very** human—a work in progress.

I guess my discomfort stems from the fact that if you think I’m different from you, then you might say, “Well, I can’t do the kinds of things Robin talks about because he has talents and abilities I don’t have. All the stuff he talks about is easy for him to do. He’s this guru.” Nope. Sorry to disappoint you. I’m just a guy working hard to make the best of his days, trying to be a great single dad to my two wonderful children and hoping he’s—in some way—making a difference in peoples’ lives. No guru here. But I do like the “dispelling the darkness” point. Need to learn more about that one. Maybe some guru can help me.

Harvey Keitel and Windows of Opportunity

I don't always get it right (I told you I'm no guru). But please know that I try so hard to walk my talk and to ensure my video is in alignment with my audio. Still, I am a human being, and that means sometimes I slip (I've yet to meet a perfect one). Here's what I mean.

I spend a lot of time encouraging the readers of my books and the participants at my workshops on personal and organizational leadership to “run toward your fears” and to seize those “cubic centimeters of chance” (opportunities) when they present themselves. I challenge my clients to dream, to shine and to dare, because to me a life well lived is all about reaching for your highest and your best. And, in my mind, the person who experiences the most wins. Most of the time, I am a poster boy for visiting the places that scare me and doing the things that make me feel uncomfortable. But recently, I didn't. Sorry.

I was downtown at the Four Seasons in Toronto, in the lobby getting ready for a speech I was about to give to a company called Advanced Medical Optics, which is a long-standing

leadership coaching client of ours and an impressive organization. I look up and guess who I see? Harvey Keitel. Yes, the Harvey “*Reservoir Dogs* Big Movie Star” Keitel. And what does the man who wrote *The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari* do? I shrink from greatness.

Each day, life will send you little windows of opportunity. Your **destiny** will ultimately be defined by how you **respond** to these windows of opportunity.

I don’t know why I didn’t stand up and walk over and make a new friend. I’ve done it with baseball legend Pete Rose at the Chicago airport (we ended up sitting next to each other all the way to Phoenix). I did it last summer with Henry Kravis, one of the planet’s top financiers in the lobby of a hotel in Rome (I was with my kids, and Colby, my 11-year-old son, thought he was pretty cool). I did it with Senator Edward Kennedy when I saw him in Boston. I even did it with guitar virtuoso Eddie Van Halen when I was a kid growing up in Halifax, Nova Scotia. But I missed the chance to connect with Harvey Keitel.

Each day, life will send you little windows of opportunity. Your destiny will ultimately be defined by how you respond to these windows of opportunity. Shrink from them and your life will be small. Feel the fear and run to them anyway, and your life will be big. Life’s just too short to play little. Even with your kids, you only have a tiny window to develop them and champion

their highest potential. And to show them what unconditional love looks like. When that window closes, it's hard to reopen it.

If I see Harvey Keitel again, I promise you that I'll sprint toward him. He may think I'm a celebrity stalker until we start to chat. And then he'll discover the truth: I'm simply a man who seizes the gifts that life presents to him.

Nothing Fails like Success

Richard Carrion, the CEO of Puerto Rico's top bank, once shared a line with me that I'll never forget: "Robin, nothing fails like success." Powerful thought. You, as well as your organization, are most vulnerable when you are most successful. Success actually breeds complacency, inefficiency and—worst of all—arrogance. When people and businesses get really successful, they often fall in love with themselves. They stop innovating, working hard, taking risks and begin to rest on their laurels. They go on the defensive, spending their energy protecting their success rather than staying true to the very things that got them to the top. Whenever I share this point with a roomful of CEOs, every single one of them nods in agreement. Please let me give you a real-world example from my own life.

This past weekend, I took my kids to our favorite Italian restaurant. The food is incredible there. The best bresaola outside of Italy. Heavenly pasta. Super foamy lattes that make me want to give up my job and become a barista. But the service at this place is bad. Bad, bad, bad (like it is at most places). Why? Because the place is always full. And because they are doing so well, they've taken the lines out front for granted. And guess what? It's the beginning of their end.

I love taking pictures. My dad taught me to record the journey of my life with photos. So I generally carry a little camera around with me. I asked our server if she would snap a picture of my children and me as we dug into our spaghetti. “I don’t have time” was the curt reply. Unbelievable. Too busy to take five seconds to keep a customer happy. Too busy to help out a little. Too busy to show some humanity.

The more **successful** you and your organization become, the more **humble** and devoted to your customers you need to be.

“Nothing fails like success.” Richard Carrion gets it. So does David Neeleman, the CEO of JetBlue, who observed: “When you’re making money and good margins, you tend to get sloppy.” Many CEOs don’t. The more successful you and your organization become, the more humble and devoted to your customers you need to be. The more committed to efficiency and relentless improvement you need to be. The faster you need to play. The more value you need to add. Because the moment you stop doing the very things that got you to the top of the mountain is the very moment you begin the slide down to the valley.

Be a Rock Star at Work

Just finished reading an article in *Fortune* on the Google guys and all their economic success. It inspired a torrent of ideas (reading's like that, isn't it?). It got me thinking about the importance of showing up fully at work—giving the fullness of your brilliance and playing full out. Being wildly passionate about your To Do's. Being breathtakingly committed to your big projects and best opportunities. Being a rock star in whatever you do each day to put bread on your table.

Work gives meaning to our lives. It influences our self-worth and the way we perceive our place under the sun. Being great at what you do isn't just something you do for the organization you work for—it's a gift you give yourself. Being spectacularly great at your work promotes personal respect, excitement and just makes your life a lot more interesting. Good things happen to people who do good things. And when you bring your highest talents and deepest devotion to the work you do, what you are really doing is setting yourself up for a richer, happier and more fulfilling experience of living.

How do you feel after an ultra-productive day? How do you feel when you've given your best, had fun with your teammates and gone the extra mile for customers? How do you feel when

you've brought more heart to what you do for a living? How do you feel when you reached for your greatest goals and grabbed them? It feels pretty good, doesn't it? And you don't need to have the biggest title to do the best job. This point makes me think of the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.—one of my heroes—who once observed: “If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted, or as Beethoven composed music or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, ‘here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.’”

And you don't need to have the **biggest** title
to do the **best** job.

So be a rock star at work today. Walk onto the stage of this day and play your heart out. Give the performance of your life. Wow your audience and get them cheering for you. Be the Bono of selling staplers. Be the Keith Richards of accounting. Be the Jimi Hendrix of human resources. And when you get famous and people from all over ask you for your autograph, make sure you drop me a line. I'd love to hear from you.

5

Your Days Define Your Life

Big idea: Your days are your life in miniature. As you live your hours, so you create your years. As you live your days, so you craft your life. What you do today is actually creating your future. The words you speak, the thoughts you think, the food you eat and the actions you take are defining your destiny—shaping who you are becoming and what your life will stand for. Small choices lead to giant consequences—over time. There’s no such thing as an unimportant day.

As you **live** your days, so you **craft** your life.

Each one of us is called to greatness. Each one of us has an exquisite power within us. Each one of us can have a significant impact on the world around us—if we so choose. But for this power that resides internally to grow, we need to use it. And the more you exercise it, the stronger it gets. The more this power gets tapped, the more confident you become. Henry David Thoreau related to this point well when he wrote: “I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of a human being to elevate their life by conscious endeavor.” And

advertising guru Donny Deutsch added a more current spin on the idea when he wrote in his book *Often Wrong, Never in Doubt*: “For every person with the stuff, the one out of a hundred who goes to a rarefied place is the one who says, ‘why not me?’ and goes for it.”

The best among us are not more gifted than the rest. They just take little steps each day as they march toward their biggest life. And the days slip into weeks, the weeks into months and before they know it, they arrive at a place called Extraordinary.