

Living An Extraordinary Life by Robert White

Book Review by Herb Rubenstein, President, Sustainable Business Group

Introduction

Robert White's book, *Living An Extraordinary Life* is not about extraordinary people at all. The book is about you and me, your brothers, your sisters, you children, your parents, and basically, every one of us. If you have read twenty personal development books and taken a dozen or so personal development courses, you will find some familiar material. The book describes the strategies that most of us deploy most of the time in our lives, and why they don't work. The book shows the obvious shortfalls of these strategies. However, the shortfalls of many of these strategies that we use that don't work too well, are not obvious until Mr. White explains why and how they don't work. This review will not steal the thunder of the book. It is a book worth reading a few chapters at a time and the chapters are mercifully short.

The most important aspect of the book is that it is a great first step for anyone who wants to improve their lives and the lives around them. That just can't be said for many other books.

The Basic Premise of the Book

Every personal development book must start with the premise that you can be more in control of your life. You can make it better. You can learn to accept or take responsibility for what occurs in your life and you can spend your life making it better and assisting others in making their lives better. This book makes those points repeatedly.

What this book does that other books do not do is actually give you a few good handles to help you pull yourself up in life and bring others with you. That does not mean necessarily that if you read this book you will earn more money, but it might give you the ability at least to look introspectively about why you have not made more money in your life, if that has been one of your goals.

Mr. White often writes things in the book to provoke, because the purpose of his book is to provoke, just like an alarm clock in the morning, or a coach that yells in your ear. The stories of the book give examples of how people have discovered how to transform their lives in a manner that leads to greater personal satisfaction, more effective behavior, and less suffering. Distinctions are everything in this book, and one can learn from one simple quote the true difference between pain and suffering.

Manage Your Expectations When You Read This Book

Each person who reads this book will get something different out of it because each person is different going into it. Some chapters of the book will simply not apply to your life. Other chapters may change your life for the better. For example, if you want to be able to become

more aware of things as they occur in your life, you can achieve this by reading this book. If you want to stop feeling sorry for yourself, you might, probably with some great resistance, make some headway on this front as well. If you really want to be President of the United States, this book won't help much, but it won't hurt either.

The section of the book on expectations is especially useful. Just think how often you went to a play or restaurant or talked with someone and when you thought about the experience and judged it, you said, "It was not as good as I expected it to be." Mr. White shows you how making expectations sets up people later to make judgments not based on what they actually experienced, but how they thought it should have been. How many divorces in our lives are caused by the fact that the marriage or the other person just did not live up to our expectations? Probably most of them.

The best example in the book of sheer insight is the section "givers" and "takers." Many examples in the book show clearly that those who are willing to give, share, and contribute to others are far happier, more "self" fulfilled, and more appreciative of life than those who are "takers." This lesson is useful.

Another great example in the book is the section on "commitment." Commitment to something does not have to mean that you are committed to it forever. Some commitments lead us in the wrong direction and should be abandoned. What is clear from the book is that people are often not aware of their unspoken commitments and beliefs and these unspoken commitments and beliefs often get in our way of having the life we want to have.

One section of the book, the section on perfection, is useful in two ways. First, it shows the great fallacy of creating a definition of perfection that is impossible to reach, and then each of us turning ourselves into a pretzel in order to try to meet this definition of perfection. Second, Mr. White makes the great case for accepting yourself as you are and others as they are, rather than comparing them to some standard of perfection that makes one incapable of appreciating or loving fully one's self or another person.

I once wanted to teach my then five year old daughter the definition of perfection. I told our eight year old son I would teach her this word at dinner. At dinner I asked her what would a good word be to describe an evening where the food was outstanding, the conversation with the guests was great, the weather was nice, and everyone had a really good time. My daughter said, "That would be perfect." Then, I asked her, what if everything the next night at dinner was even better, what word would you use to describe that. She said, "More perfect." I immediately responded, "No, Kathleen, perfect is an absolute. Perfect is as good as it gets."

My son, Jason, immediately said, "No Dad, perfect is as good as your measure of perfect gets." At eight years old, Jason, had discovered a key secret of the universe. Each person, for himself, or herself, has the power to define the word perfect for every situation. Jason had been amazed that no one in gymnastics had ever scored a "10" in the Olympics until Nadia Komenici. Perfect was surely not as good as it gets, he understood. Perfect was merely an "opinion." And he understood the truth that each human being has the power, and I would argue the duty, to create his or her opinion as to what perfection is. Freedom is developing your own definitions of perfection and living consistent with them as a goal. For starters, Mr. White, makes the cogent point that each of us is a perfect "us," unique and much of the effort

we spend trying to change ourselves toward to standard of perfection created by others, or society, or our culture, gets in our way toward living an extraordinary life rather than helping us achieve it.

Conclusion

Many believe that the personal development surge of the 1970's and 1980's is over. In some ways it is. But there are important lessons to learn from one of the masters of that time and a person who has continued to seek in his professional career an ever deepening understanding of how humans work and don't work. This book is only worth the time reading if you want to improve your life. A diet is only potentially successful if you are truly committed to losing weight and maintaining a life style and diet that will keep you at the desired weight once you achieve it.

So, if you are ready to tackle some of your challenges, or are ready to take on bigger challenges because you have been playing small and just trying to survive, or be safe in this world, then this book is for you and for your friends. Even if you think, after reading this book, "Hey, I knew that stuff already," you might find that the day after reading this book your perspective on some things has changed and changed for the better. You might also find that you are better at observing others who are doing very well or employing strategies that keep them from doing very well.

You might not have an extraordinary life just because you read this book. In fact, I can assure you that you won't have an extraordinary life just because you read this book. But if you are committed to having an extraordinary life, if you are committed to being stronger in your ability to make crisp decisions that will guide your life, if you want to be more of the architect of your life, and if you want to be more effective in your life, this book is a good first step to rekindling your commitment to yourself, your life and the lives you can positively impact during your time on this earth.

About the Author

Herb Rubenstein is the President of Sustainable Business Group a consulting firm to businesses. The headquarters of the Sustainable Business Group is Denver, Colorado. He is co-author of Breakthrough, Inc. – High Growth Strategies for Entrepreneurial Organizations (Prentice Hall/Financial Times, 1999). He also served as an Adjunct Professor of Strategic Planning George Washington University, and has been an Adjunct Professor of Entrepreneurism at George Mason University and Colorado State University. He has his law degree from Georgetown University, his Master of Public Affairs from the LBJ School of Public Affairs, a graduate degree in sociology from the University of Bristol in Bristol, England and was a Phi Beta Kappa/Omicron Delta Kappa graduate from Washington and Lee University in 1974. His email address is herb@sbizgroup.com and he can be reached at 303 910-7961. For more information on the Sustainable Business Group, see www.sbizgroup.com .