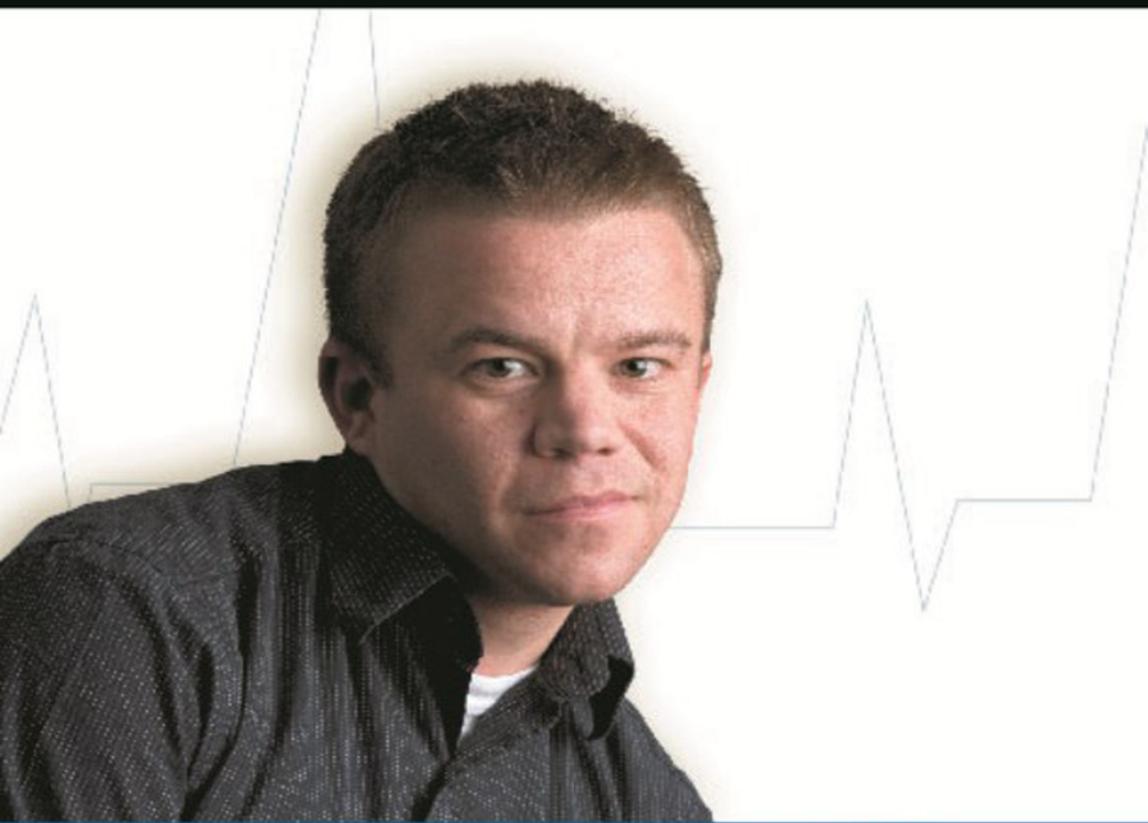


"This warm, wonderful and inspiring book will give you passion and purpose in every area of your life." - Brian Tracey Author - *"The Way to Wealth"*



Live Life *from the* Heart

52 Weeks to a Life of Passion and Purpose

MARK R. W. BLACK

Live Life
FROM THE
Heart

52 Weeks to a Life of Passion and Purpose

 **Strategic Book Publishing**
New York, New York

Live Life from the Heart

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*This book is dedicated to all those who are waiting for a
lifesaving transplant and to the memory of
those who died waiting.*



For information on how you can become an organ donor
go to: www.organ-donation-works.org
Make a decision. Share it with your family.
Someone's life could depend on it!

Acknowledgements

There are so many people to thank for their help in making this book a reality that I know I'll miss someone. To anyone who has touched my life in any way, I thank you for being the person you are.

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Finally, to you who bought this book. Thank you for investing in yourself. I hope this book provides you with insights and ideas that improve your life.

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*“And in the end, it’s not the years in your life that count.
It’s the life in your years.” – Abraham Lincoln*

Introduction

I want to start by thanking you for taking the time to read this book. I firmly believe that you’ve just made a great investment in your future and the quality of your life. I hope you enjoy reading this as much as I enjoyed writing it.

This book is a collection of lessons I learned over a period of twenty-two years battling a fatal illness and the six months that followed spent lying in a hospital bed praying for a miracle to save my life.

Those days were incredibly trying but they were also a great gift. During those six months, as I struggled to live, I learned valuable lessons about myself and my life. Those are the lessons that you will read in this book.

Since those days, I’ve been blessed with great health and have made a full recovery. I’ve spent the last five years living each day to the fullest and reflecting on my journey. My goal is to learn what I could and share the things I learned with you. I hope that in the following pages you will find messages that speak to your heart and that will be of practical value to you in your life.

Before I go further, I need to write a few words about why I wrote this book. How do I feel qualified to give advice on life at such a young age? After all, I’m not a spiritual guru. I haven’t started a successful corporation and I don’t have a doctorate in psychology. However, I do have valuable information to share with you.

I consider the wisdom in this book to be incredibly valuable. This type of wisdom only comes from experiencing an incredible, life-altering, journey like the one that nearly took my life. That journey that taught me lessons about life that changed who I am. Here is the short version...

The Mark Black Story

In May 2001, after battling congenital heart disease since birth and at just twenty-three years of age, my doctor sat me down and broke the news that would change my life forever.

He explained that there was a potentially fatal complication to my already dangerous heart condition and unless I received a dangerous and rare heart and double-lung transplant, I wouldn't live to see my twenty-fifth birthday.

It was surreal sitting across from this man who had cared for me for years as he told me in no uncertain terms that my life was in danger. He explained that the surgery was incredibly risky. The five-year survival rate was only 50%. But without a new heart and new lungs, my chances of surviving for more than a year or two were slim. After consulting with my parents and other people I cared for and trusted I decided to take the risk.

The delicate procedure is performed in only three medical centers in Canada. Because donated lungs survive about six hours outside the body of a donor, I had to move within a two hour drive of the hospital where the surgery would take place.

My parents and I examined the available locations and decided on Toronto. We decided on Toronto for two reasons. First, we had family there. Knowing that I could wait two years or longer

for a suitable donor, I wanted to be in a place where I had as much support as possible.

The second reason, and maybe the most important one, was that the transplant team at Toronto General Hospital had been doing lung transplants longer than any centre in the world. Heart and double-lung transplants are extremely rare. There hadn't been a single one done in the country in 2001. It was important to me to find the most experienced people.

In October, after being accepted on the transplant waiting list, my father and I left my Mom and three younger brothers at home in New Brunswick and moved the twelve hundred kilometers from home to start waiting.

When we arrived, the transplant coordinator gave me a pager. She told me to go to where I'd be staying in Toronto and wait for the pager to go off. When it rang, it would be the sign that a suitable donor had been found and I would come in to the hospital and have my transplant. It sounded so easy.

For four months I waited anxiously for the pager to go off. Every time the microwave beeped or the phone rang I jumped wondering if it was "the call." But months passed and the call didn't come.

We spent Christmas in Toronto, away from family and friends, because I couldn't leave and risk the possibility of missing my only chance at finding a suitable donor.

In April, after waiting for almost five months, I was admitted to the hospital for what was supposed to be "a few days" for some

testing. Those “few days” became a week and then two, then a month. Finally I asked my doctor what was happening. She told me that my heart was getting worse.

I'd developed a condition called ventricular tachycardia. This meant that the bottom chambers of my heart, the ventricles, were spontaneously racing out of control. Every so often I would feel a pounding in my chest without warning. I knew that wasn't normal and that something was wrong. But there was nothing I could do to stop it.

My doctor explained that this new development meant I was at high risk for sudden cardiac arrest. At any moment, my heart could suddenly start racing and then stop without warning. If that happened and I didn't get immediate medical attention immediately I would die.

I was told that the only way to ensure my safety and prolong my life was to keep me in the hospital under 24-hour surveillance on a heart monitor. That way, if my heart rhythm didn't regulate on its own, they could intervene, administer a shock using a defibrillator and hopefully my heart would right itself.

I asked my doctor how long I would have to stay in the hospital. “Until you get a transplant”, she answered. What she didn't say, but we both knew, was that with my heart deteriorating as badly as it was, the odds were good that I would be dead before that day came. So I made myself at home on the ninth floor of the Toronto General Hospital. I brought in my bedspread, clothes, posters and cards and turned that hospital room into home.

Those difficult days would prove to be one of my life's greatest blessings. With the realization that my life might end at any

moment, I began to see my life in a new way. Suddenly, much of what I used to think was so important didn't matter.

Six months in hospital gave me the opportunity to spend time thinking about the things I'd always planned to do that I hadn't gotten around to yet. The things that I'd put off to do "someday". Now I realized that "someday" may never come.

During that time I promised myself that if I ever left the hospital, I wouldn't waste another day not pursuing my passions. I wouldn't let another day go by without living every moment to the fullest. I was going to start living life focused on the things that really mattered.

Finally, after ten months on the waiting list, one evening my nurse appeared at my door and said, "There is a call for you at the nurse's station". This was exciting news because I never got calls at the nurse's station.

As I walked down the hall, I wondered if perhaps this was the phone call I'd been waiting to get for almost a year. I picked up the phone and said, "Hello". The nurse on the other end of the line said the words that changed my life forever, "Mr. Black, I think we have a set of heart and lungs for you."

After a long pause while I tried to muster the appropriate words. I finally managed a "Thank You". The nurse on the phone explained that she would call again in a few hours to confirm that everything was a go.

I went back to my room feeling excited and nervous. I called my mom where she was staying in Toronto to let her know that she would have to come to the hospital. Then I called my family and

friends back home in New Brunswick to tell them what was happening. While talking to them, I realized that they all sounded more nervous than I felt. Dorothy Bernard once said, "Courage is fear that has said its prayers." I was ready.

Finally, at about five in the morning, the surgeons came to get me for the surgery. There wasn't time for my mom and me to say everything we wanted to say to each other. I looked at my mom and she looked at me. Both of us were searching for the right words to say knowing that we might never see each other again. All I could think to say was, "Mom, I'll see you soon." I knew I had to be confident that everything would be okay.

I was in surgery for six or seven hours. Afterward the surgeons explained to my parents that things had gone as well as could be expected, but that I still had a long road of recovery ahead of me. I stayed in the intensive cardiac care unit for five days. Then I was transferred to the step-down unit and finally to the post-transplant floor.

I was fortunate to recover very quickly. Sixteen days after the surgery, I was discharged from the hospital. After living inside the same four walls for six months I was finally free! There was still a lot of work to do, but I'd been given a second chance. My life has just been changed in a significant and positive way.

The transformation continued after my transplant. I found myself looking at things differently. I had an increased sense of gratitude and a new appreciation for friends, family and time. I began to make decisions based on how much time I had to trade and if that sacrifice of time was worth it.

The experience totally changed my perspective on life. I became more focused on value rather than commodity; more concerned with quality than quantity; more focused on living in the moment than living for someday. It is from that new found perspective, that I've written this book.

This Book is For You

In the following pages you will find several ideas; some of them new, some not so new. Some you will agree with, some you won't. That's okay. Take what you can use and discard the rest. This book will speak in a different way to each person who reads. That's fine. In fact, that's my intention. There's something for everyone.

This book is intentionally divided into fifty-two chapters, one for each week of the year. I don't expect you to take a year to go through it although that would be great. I'm a realist. I realize that if you are attracted to a book like this one, you are likely already a driven and motivated person. You want to take action and you aren't going to take a year to read a book. That's okay.

Go ahead. Read the book cover to cover in one day if you like. In fact read it a few times and you'll see new things each time. But I also encourage you to keep it close and read one chapter a week. At the end of each chapter you'll find a section titled "In Black and White". You'll find a suggested action for you to take based on the concept discussed in that chapter. I encourage you to spend a week on each chapter. Complete as many of the suggested actions and incorporate as many of the concepts into your life as possible.

Don't just *read* this book but study it. Highlight it, underline it and write notes in the margins. Try the ideas suggested in the "In Black & White" section. My hope is that you will find ideas that you can implement immediately to improve your life in the fifty two chapters. They aren't deeply philosophical. In fact, I tried to make them exactly the opposite. They are intended to be very practical and easily applied. I want you to be able to put these things to use right away.

I believe that if you take just a handful of these ideas and put them into practice they will change your life. I wish you all the best in your journey and encourage you to always Live Life from the Heart!

Yours in the journey called life,

Mark Black

USE YOUR LIFE

“The whole life of man is but a point of time; let us enjoy it”
– Plutarch

CHAPTER 1

What If You Only Had A Year to Live?

I start many of my presentations with this question. I think it has powerful implications. Take a moment right now and seriously consider your answer to this question.

The simple act of asking yourself this question every so often can have a powerful focusing effect on your life. When we consciously think about how short life is we get serious about using the time that we have. At least that's what happened to me.

Five years ago I was a twenty-three year old kid going to university with my whole life in front of me. My focus was mostly on myself and having fun. I wasn't concerned with spending time with my family or being right with myself and with my God. There would be time for that later I thought. I was wrong.

In the span of a few months during the summer of 2001, my life was turned upside down. I landed a great summer job as a tour guide on Parliament Hill in Ottawa and I had three days between the end of exams at university and the first day of training in Ottawa.

I came home to pack my bags, say goodbye to my family and head off for a great summer adventure. Instead, that day began a two-year saga that would change my life forever.

When I got home to pack my bags, my mom answered the door. She took one look at me and the colour left her face.

She immediately saw what I was denying. I'd lost more than thirty pounds. I was frail and sick. We would soon find out why. And we'd find that weight loss was the least of my problems.

My parents wasted no time taking me to see our doctor. Our family doctor immediately recognized that my condition was serious. He put me in hospital for monitoring while making arrangements to get me into a Halifax hospital to see the heart transplant team.

The cardiologist examined me that day and found I was in right and left-sided heart failure. My heart muscle was becoming thick, stiff and increasingly unable to fill with blood.

As the condition worsened my failing heart would cause my body to hold excess fluid and the fluid would accumulate throughout my body. First my hands and feet would swell painfully. Then in my lungs would fill making it very difficult to breathe.

When my condition grew severe, I struggled to climb a single flight of stairs without getting out of breathe. I would come home at the end of a morning of class and be totally exhausted. I needed a few hours on the couch just to find the energy to make supper.



**DON'T LIVE EVERY DAY
LIKE IT'S YOUR LAST DAY
JUST LIVE EVERY DAY**

When I saw my doctor that day, it didn't take him long to decide what had to happen. He reviewed some test results, looked at me and said the words that changed my life, "You need a heart and double lung transplant and you need it now."

Now it's five years later and odds are good that I will live much longer than a year. But I still ask myself often, "What if you only had a year to live?" Asking this question forces me to evaluate my priorities, remember that life is short and that I don't want to waste a single minute. I work hard to make sure that I am fully aware, alert and alive every minute of every day.

Many of us walk around 'existing' without really being alive. If you think about living like you only have a year to live, you'll gain sense of urgency about reaching your goals without a sense of panic.

Many people who have faced death will tell you that you to "Live every day like it's your last day!" I don't want you to do that. Imagine how exhausting it would be to try cramming a lifetime into twenty-hour hours.

Don't live every day like it's your last day. Just be ALIVE every day.

In Black & White

Spend this week thinking about what you really want to accomplish in your life. To help you along, answer these questions:

What would you do if you had a year to live?

What would be important? What wouldn't matter?

Do you want to DO more?

What would you do more?

What would you do less?

How would you use your time?

Once you have answers to these questions, write them down and put them where you will look at them every day. They'll help you to stay on track and remember what really matters.

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