

“The road map behind one of America’s most remarkable rags-to-riches stories.”

Harry Beckwith

New York Times *best selling author*, *Selling the Invisible*



Key Principles
to Create What You Want
in Life and Work

PAULA MELO DOROFF

ONE DECISION AWAY

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TO CREATE WHAT YOU WANT
IN LIFE AND WORK

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ONE DECISION AWAY

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I DEDICATE THIS BOOK TO:

My grandmother, Maria, who taught me how to be tough and have faith in God.

My aunt, Grace, who taught me about generosity and love of great food.

My uncle, Anthony, who taught me about the power of giving someone your undivided attention.

Paul and Esther for their love and support.

Mara and Carmem for their commitment toward my family and me.

Every single employer who gave me an opportunity and saw qualities in me that I did not even see in myself.

My mentors, coaches, and teachers—you know who you are.

My dear friends who make me feel so loved, you are like family to me.

My husband, Randy, who is an example of living a life of integrity and consistency.

My sons, Carlo and Enzo, who allow me to love them the way I always wanted to be loved every day.

The Doroff Family who wholeheartedly welcomed me into their lives.

The United States of America, the country of my dreams.

All who have served this great country in any capacity.

My birth mother, Helena, who birthed me and taught me that being alive was a gift worth having after all.

Above all, I dedicate this book to God. He who never abandoned me and always guided and protected me through it all.

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FOREWORD

“One Decision Away” is about determination, not determinism. Determinism suggests that the individual we are was “caused” by our ancestors, our grandparents, our parents, our environment. Your author disagrees with that. She acknowledges all of those factors “influence” who we are, but they do not “cause” who we are.

“One Decision Away” is about one’s freedom to choose. If my grandparents and parents were child abusers (which they weren’t by the way), that does not mean I must be a child abuser also. I can make a different choice. Being angry with my child doesn’t “cause” me to strike her. Between my anger and my response, I have time to think and to “choose” not to strike. I am just one decision away from not being abusive. I can choose to e-think-motion (a term I made up).

Paula’s own story and the stories of the people you will meet in this book offer proof that every decision matters; that regardless of our past and our current circumstance we can make a decision to change our today and to create our tomorrow.

This book is inspiring, and by that I mean it is in-spirit-a-tional. The principles Paula shares are principles of our spirit. They aren't found outside of ourselves. They are found inside of ourselves. "One Decision Away" will inspire its readers to be proactive; Stephen R Covey's first habit of highly effective people, versus reactive.

Paula's words inspired me to decide what to think about and to think about my thoughts and actions. I have the freedom to choose my thoughts and actions. I have the freedom to choose personal growth, to choose to value people (including myself), to choose to be kind, to choose to be forgiving of others and myself, to choose to be grateful, to choose to heal.

Writing this book took an act of courage on Paula's part. The decisions Paula made to change her life, and the decisions made by the people whose stories you will read in the following pages, required courage. Courage is what is needed to effectively face fear. Most of us admire courageous people, and we even desire to be courageous ourselves. Unfortunately, absent fear there is no courage. Fearless people are not courageous. They are fearless. Paula Doroff is not fearless. She is courageous.

Readers, it's our turn to be courageous. After all, we're just "One Decision Away."

DOUG LENNICK,
CEO AND CO-FOUNDER OF THINK2PERFORM
AND AUTHOR OF *MORAL INTELLIGENCE*
AND *FINANCIAL INTELLIGENCE*

INTRODUCTION

“Go with God,” she said ten years earlier. On that day, I packed my bags and ran away forever.

Was God still with me now? I wondered while I was in the arrival’s bathroom of Logan International Airport.

I was twenty-five years old and utterly overwhelmed; the very instant the plane had landed in America, I started to cry uncontrollably. But now that we had left the plane, I was alone, tears drying, unable to tell if it was relief or sheer exhaustion I was feeling. I stared blankly at my face in the mirror, and it dawned on me just how big a step I had taken.

I had done it.

Yes, just outside the bathroom doors lay one of the scariest frontiers I would ever contend with: immigration. Stern officials would be waiting in booths to look me over, inspect my papers, and ultimately decide whether I was good enough to be let in. They could take one look at me and see how

unworthy I was to pass through the gates, on the other side of which lay all my dreams.

“Paula, you can do this. Just smile. Take deep breaths...”

Although I felt very much alone in that moment, the truth was I wasn't. I *had* gone with God, just like my grandmother had told me to years ago. God was there with me that day, walking me through to the other side of that line, holding my hand with every step I took.

I walked toward immigration, taking yet another terrifying jump from the known into the unknown. I knew then, and know even more deeply now, that when you chase your dreams, every step you take is a giant leap.

Crossing thresholds is something I've been doing my whole life. Between running away from my small hometown in Brazil at fifteen and arriving in the United States at twenty-five, I had already lived in three countries and married three times. I grew up in poverty, my birth parents were never part of my life, and I was raised by an illiterate grandmother who never once showed me an ounce of affection.

I had nothing more than a middle school education, and I know firsthand what it means to never feel good enough, smart enough, or talented enough. I have battled depression and anxiety that strangled my soul like a cancer. I hid my past like a shameful secret, convinced I'd never be seen as good enough if people knew my real story.

Most people believe that where you start out in your journey determines your final destination. They think your success comes down to your family, your lucky breaks, or your wealth, but that's not always true. I am proof of that.

Growing up, I had nothing except a dream. Nobody would have predicted that someone like me would live the life I've lived. But I had seen a handful of hardworking Brazilians escape, and I wanted the same for myself. I broke free from my painful childhood beginnings and found my way to America, the country I had grown up dreaming about.

Over the past few decades, I carved out my own unlikely path to success on Wall Street, in arguably one of the most male-dominated industries of all: financial services. I overcame a very difficult past, found my voice, and breathed life into a future that nobody expected of me.

Let me ask, where are *you* right now?

If you're anything like the average American, research is now showing you're probably experiencing depression, anxiety, or an overall feeling of being "stuck."

A 2021 study in *The Lancet* found that global rates of depression are now at an all-time high, with increasing post-COVID-19 anxiety levels impacting millions of people's lives (Santomauro et. al., 2021). The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) claims that one in five American adults experienced mental illness in 2020, which is almost 53 million people.

Similarly, the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) together with the Census Bureau found in 2020 that out of every one hundred US adults, thirty-four have experienced anxiety, depression, or both.

It's not just our personal lives that are suffering. A recent Gallup poll (Gallup, 2022) showed a measly 21 percent of people are engaged with and committed to their work. In 2021, *The Harvard Business Review* talked about the “Great Resignation” and cited a 20 percent increase in resignation rates from 2020 to 2021.

As a nation, we are burnt out at work and unhappy at home. Why?

I felt called to write this book because now, more than ever, people are stuck. They want to make changes because they know something is missing, and they want to find out what it is. Deep down, they know they don't want to “die with their music still in them,” as Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes once said (Brainyquote). So many people are living in pain, in their bodies, minds, and souls, and all they have is what I once had—a dream and the desire for more for themselves.

I know pessimism is fashionable these days, and everyone thinks that if you're dealt a bad hand, that's it for you. I want to assure you: I've walked those roads, and I've been down those paths. I want to share the maps I used to find my way out so that as many people as possible can achieve the same fulfillment and happiness that I now have.

I want to show you that you are just *one decision away* from completely altering the trajectory of your life. To make that step, I believe *courage* is the secret.

Courage is needed for you to take chances and leave your comfort zone. You need courage to drop your façade, release your shame, and speak your truth. You also need courage to face all those limiting stories you tell about who you are and what you're capable of, as well as the courage to rewrite those stories.

This book is for all those men and women who are ready and willing to take that leap and embrace change. Is that you?

No two lives are the same. But even if your story is nothing like mine, I believe that when it comes to major life transitions, people have far more in common than it seems. Whether you're in your twenties and just starting out or you're making big transitions after decades of life, there's something in this book for you.

Whoever you are, whether you're working in the corporate world or unemployed, currently living an abundant life, or just scraping by from paycheck to paycheck, the principles in this book can change the game for you. Whether you're feeling burnt out, uninspired, inauthentic, or just in limbo, I want to show you a new way forward—the same path I took on my long, long journey to get here.

I'm not the only one who has taken that journey. In the chapters that follow, I'll share the stories of seven incredible people who have overcome tremendous challenges of their

own. Through personal one-on-one interviews, I was able to learn firsthand the strategies that worked for them. These very different people share something in common: They all stepped bravely into the unknown in their own unique ways.

You'll meet:

- A man who, against all odds, broke free from his troubled life on the streets of Los Angeles, managed to join the US Marines, graduated from an Ivy League school, and pieced together his dream career as a filmmaker and storyteller.
- A woman who grew up in Detroit in the sixties with drug dealers for parents and a teen pregnancy that threatened to derail her life. She is now a successful life coach inspiring and leading others.
- A brilliant and ultra-ambitious woman in her mid-thirties who battled obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), depression, and a broken engagement. She walked away from what she had always thought was her future. Today, she is the successful owner of several businesses, a social media star, and proud co-producer of her own TV show.
- A fifty-year-old who was abandoned by his mother on the streets of South Korea at just five years old. He lived in an orphanage until he was adopted by an American family, later becoming a US Marine and using those lessons of discipline to drive a successful corporate career.
- A woman in her thirties who grew up on food stamps with an abusive mother who brought a conveyor belt of equally abusive men into the home. Though plagued with health problems and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), she eventually went on to work at Microsoft

and has transitioned to building her dream business as a life coach.

- A young man with an Iraqi-Jewish background who grew up with severe dyslexia but realized he would have to shake off the labels he'd been given and redefine himself. He would ultimately defy the odds and land a job in the world's most successful financial company.
- A brilliant forty-year-old entrepreneur and business coach who started life as a refugee during the Bosnian war. Today, she has built her life around her mission of sharing messages of peace, forgiveness, and the power of service to others.

I will be sharing the principles each of these inspiring individuals used to succeed, as well as the tools I learned from other incredible people who overcame their own adversity, including Nelson Mandela, Oprah Winfrey, and legendary hedge fund investor, Ray Dalio.

I believe that where you are in your life today is a very strong predictor of where you're heading, *unless you do something different*. This book will help you do just that. Together we'll explore:

- How to tap into your dreams and get clear on your goals
- How to create a realistic plan to achieve those goals
- What it really means to commit to a plan
- The single best investment you can make
- Why kindness *does* pay
- Why professional success without healing leads to unfulfillment
- How to identify self-sabotage (and how to change!)
- How to master the twin arts of gratitude and generosity

Real insight comes from lived experience. This book is not just about personal development or professional development, it is about both. Though inspirational, the principles we'll explore here are meant to be *applied*, step by step. It's only with inspired action that we shift from where we are to the possibilities of where we could be.

One decision could change the course of your entire life. If you have a dream, I want this book to give you courage. If you're at a crossroads, I want you to know that right now, you have the power to change everything. Achieving your dreams is within your grasp, and courageously crossing that threshold is only ever *one decision away*.