

"Russell Benaroya's powerful new book, *One Life to Lead*, is a compassionate and thoughtful guide to leadership success. His five steps give leaders a practical map for the journey and inspiration along the way."

—Gay Hendricks, PhD, author of *The Big Leap* and *The Genius Zone*

# ONE LIFE TO LEAD

**BUSINESS SUCCESS  
THROUGH BETTER  
LIFE DESIGN**

**RUSSELL BENAROYA**

*Foreword by Alfred E. Osborne, Jr., PhD, Senior Associate Dean  
UCLA Anderson Graduate School of Management*



## PRAISE FOR *ONE LIFE TO LEAD*

“With the pace of change, societal divisiveness, technological advances, and innumerable daily pulls on our time, it certainly can seem as if our lives are completely out of our control. In Russell Benaroya’s timely book, *One Life to Lead*, he reminds us of the untapped and brilliant potential within each of our lives. Russell challenges us to clarify what matters most, embrace what we can influence, let go of all we can’t, and be far more intentional in designing a life of true success. Read this book. Thank me later!”

—John O’Leary, #1 national bestselling  
author of *On Fire* and *In Awe*

“A successful life and career, I believe, require both an external and internal journey. In this book Russell shares his novel approach to designing both trips. The hard-earned insights captured in his five steps, reflect the humility it took to really get to know himself and the courage it required to translate his potential into action.”

—Harry Strachan, former professor at Harvard Business  
School and director emeritus at Bain & Company

“As an investor in thousands of start-ups through Techstars, I’ve seen time and time again the difference that effective leadership can make in the entrepreneurial journey. *One Life to Lead* perfectly captures the essential but often unspoken

ingredients necessary for great leadership in one's own life as a prerequisite to leading others.”

—David Cohen, cofounder and chairman at Techstars

“Russell Benaroya has done the impossible here. He lays out a specific plan for how to design the life you want to live, the life you deserve to live—covering work, family, and relationships—with a simple-to-understand, comprehensive framework. He doesn't try to convince you by talking from on high, but rather by exposing his deepest vulnerabilities and sharing how not getting it right led to his own understanding and insight. Everyone can learn something important from this book, and I am going to start recommending it to people I care about tomorrow.”

—Greg Gottesman, cofounder and managing director, Pioneer Square Labs

“With *One Life to Lead* Russell Benaroya helps us sidestep the oppressive and useless expectations many of us waste decades trying to exceed and move toward a path of curiosity, joy, humility, and purpose. He guides us to real success that we can feel and emanate. I could have used this book twenty years ago, and I am grateful for it now.”

—Henry Albrecht, CEO, Limeade (a publicly traded global well-being company)

“The introduction of *One Life to Lead* gives us some important clues about what we are about to read. Russell Benaroya's vulnerability about his own life, both personal and professional, draws the reader in to want to learn more about what has worked, (and not worked) for him in his life. A major takeaway

for me was to not compromise our core principles. They carry us to the success we all look for. His step by step approach on how to live a good life is straight forward and applicable for everyone.”

—Greg Campbell author of *The Surprising Power of the Coil* and *The 5-2-1 Principle*, former EVP of Coldwell Banker

“Russell Benaroya is approaching superhuman status. There are few individuals in the world who come even close to combining Russell’s unique mix of ultraendurance athlete, successful entrepreneur and CEO, author, and coach—all of which are integrated with his authentic care and appreciation for others. I try to learn from him as much as I can. In *One Life to Lead*, Russell distills real-world lessons into a plan that any leader can follow to design an ideal life and career. I especially recommend this book to anyone who is navigating a work-life transition. If this is you, read this book first! It will provide the foundation and insight to make your most important decisions with high confidence and wisdom. When you’re at your best, doing what you are truly called to do, then you and your family benefit, your business benefits, and we all benefit. So invest in yourself by reading *One Life to Lead*. It is sure to pay priceless dividends for many years to come.”

—Lex Sisney, author of *Organizational Physics* and *Designed to Scale*

“The pandemic. It conjures up thoughts and observations, insights and emotions. For me, I am increasingly observing how it has prompted many including myself to stop, take stock, and question what’s next? Russell Benaroya has written a timely book that profiles entrepreneurs on their journeys of self-reflection through the lens of his five steps of life design.

Applicable not only to entrepreneurs, this model can be applied to corporate executives, nonprofit volunteers, and anyone who has hit the pause button to reflect on “what next”.

—Deanna Oppenheimer, founder,  
CameoWorks and BoardReady

“Russell has stepped into his genius zone in *One Life to Lead*. He has provided a road map for leaders to navigate their own ups and downs on the journey toward architecting great lives and successful organizations.”

—Chris Winfield, cofounder of Super Connector  
Media, entrepreneur and productivity wizard

“We do indeed only have ONE LIFE! I loved how Russell encapsulated insights from his own experience as well as the experiences of several others into an easy-to-follow framework and highly engaging book. It’s a book that will deliver immense value every time you pick it up to read.”

—Nitya Kirat, founder of YOSD Consulting  
and author of *Winning Virtually*

ONE LIFE  
TO LEAD





# ONE LIFE TO LEAD



**BUSINESS SUCCESS  
THROUGH BETTER  
LIFE DESIGN**

**RUSSELL BENAROYA**

**SHEMOTO  
PRESS**

Copyright © 2021 Russell Benaroya  
All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced, or stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without express written permission of the publisher.

Published by Shemoto Press, Seattle, Washington  
[www.russellbenaroya.com](http://www.russellbenaroya.com)



Edited and designed by Girl Friday Productions  
[www.girlfridayproductions.com](http://www.girlfridayproductions.com)

Cover and interior design: Rachel Marek  
Project management: Sara Spees Addicott  
Editorial: Bethany Davis  
Interior images created by Tamta Kondzharia

ISBN (paperback): 978-1-7370739-0-1  
ISBN (ebook): 978-1-7370739-1-8

Library of Congress Control Number: 2021912017

*For my wife and fellow adventurer, Melissa. We built  
a fence around our partnership to “design our life.”*



# CONTENTS

<b>FOREWORD</b> . . . . .	<b>xiv</b>
<b>WHY BUSINESS SUCCESS THROUGH LIFE DESIGN?</b> . . . . .	<b>xv</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> . . . . .	<b>1</b>
Why Me? . . . . .	<b>3</b>
Why Now? . . . . .	<b>5</b>
Why You? . . . . .	<b>6</b>
How to Use This Book . . . . .	<b>9</b>
Anyone Can Design Their Life . . . . .	<b>9</b>
The Privilege of the Work Ahead . . . . .	<b>10</b>
<b>THE FIVE STEPS OF LIFE DESIGN</b> . . . . .	<b>13</b>
<b>MEET THE DESIGNERS</b> . . . . .	<b>18</b>
<b>GET INTO THE DESIGN MIND-SET.</b> . . . . .	<b>25</b>
The One Question to Keep in Mind: Why Do You Want What You Want? . . . . .	<b>26</b>
Futurecasting: A Strategy for Expressing Your Want. . . . .	<b>29</b>
Think in Terms of Experiments . . . . .	<b>31</b>
Grasp the Difference Between Goals and Intentions . . . . .	<b>33</b>
Be a Lucky Person . . . . .	<b>35</b>
Get into the Design Mind-Set—Chapter Summary. . . . .	<b>38</b>

<b>STEP 1: GROUND STORIES WITH FACTS. . . . .</b>	<b>41</b>
What's a Fact? . . . . .	45
The Unarguable Power of Feelings as Facts . . . . .	46
The Power of Belief Bubbles . . . . .	51
Ground Stories with Facts—Chapter Summary . . . . .	56
 <b>STEP 2: ESTABLISH YOUR PRINCIPLES . . . . .</b>	 <b>59</b>
What Are Principles?. . . . .	59
Why Principles Are Part of Life Design . . . . .	64
When You Compromise Your Principles, Things Go Sideways . . . . .	70
Establish Your Principles—Chapter Summary. . . . .	76
 <b>STEP 3: HARNESS ENERGY FROM THE ENVIRONMENT . . . . .</b>	 <b>79</b>
What is Energy, and Where Does It Come From? . . . . .	79
Tap into the Environment. . . . .	81
How to Maximize the Energy You Have . . . . .	85
How to Reduce Your Energy Drains . . . . .	91
How to Welcome New Energy into Your Life . . . . .	93
Harness Energy—Chapter Summary . . . . .	106
 <b>STEP 4: GET IN AND STAY IN YOUR GENIUS ZONE . . . . .</b>	 <b>109</b>
Defining the Genius Zone . . . . .	112
Your Genius Zone and Your Business . . . . .	113
Do the Work to Find Your Genius Zone. . . . .	115
Acknowledge Your Anti-Genius Zone. . . . .	118
Get in and Stay in Your Genius Zone—Chapter Summary. . . . .	126
 <b>STEP 5: TAKE ACTION . . . . .</b>	 <b>129</b>
Action Is Disruptive . . . . .	131
Action Is Accepting Fear . . . . .	134
Action Requires Planning to Act . . . . .	136
Action Is Creating a Win-4-All . . . . .	142

Action Is Focusing on Your Current Game . . . . .	146
And Finally, Action Is Patience . . . . .	149
Take Action—Chapter Summary . . . . .	152
<b>ONE LIFE TO LEAD—INTEGRATING LIFE DESIGN INTO BUSINESS LEADERSHIP . . . . .</b>	<b>155</b>
It's Your Time: Small Changes Create Big Impacts. . .	156
How Facts, Principles, Genius Zone, and Energy Interact .	159
It Took a While to Get Here—Go Easy on Yourself . . .	164
One Life to Lead . . . . .	165
<b>INDEX OF DESIGNER STORIES . . . . .</b>	<b>167</b>
<b>INDEX OF EXERCISES . . . . .</b>	<b>171</b>
<b>DESIGNER PROFESSIONAL BIOS. . . . .</b>	<b>173</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS. . . . .</b>	<b>181</b>
<b>NOTES . . . . .</b>	<b>185</b>
<b>ABOUT THE AUTHOR . . . . .</b>	<b>191</b>





## FOREWORD

There comes a time in the life of individuals when it is appropriate to question—to reflect and search for purpose and meaning in their existence. This is particularly true of those who may have enjoyed some measure of success in their chosen profession or field. There is no end to the supply of books written by business leaders and entrepreneurs about their epiphanies as they try, in retrospect, to better understand their own journey and, of course, to provide prescriptions to others on how to design a more complete and fulfilling life.

The best reflections involve serious introspection and sometimes painful effort to confront the reality of one's existence. The quest to dig deeply into the organization of one's life—all of it—both personal and professional, takes lots of courage, humility, and self-confidence. To look inside of a life well lived is complex and not easy to do in a deep and thoughtful way. And then to think that your story, your lessons and insights, should be shared with the world is, well, presumptuous. Who are you anyway?

Meet Russell Benaroya.

Benaroya has undertaken the gruesome task of self-reflection and dared to risk a contribution to the goal of finding the balance between one's leadership in business and one's leadership of oneself. Like a deft sailor, he skillfully navigates the facts and stories that shroud his existence to allow us, as

readers, a glimpse of the fundamental truths and principles that empowered him to design a new trajectory for his life.

The framework for life design is revealed over the ensuing pages in an easily understood and novel sequence of steps. Each step (cleverly laced with commentary from select interviews with influential people in his life called Designers), describes critical activities that anyone committed to getting unstuck should undertake. Step 1: *Ground Stories with Facts* and Step 2: *Establish Your Principles* set forth the initial condition for healthy design. Step 3: *Harness Energy from the Environment* and Step 4: *Get in and Stay in Your Genius Zone* elaborate on the resources and self-knowledge required in preparation for this journey. And Step 5: *Take Action* underscores the simple truth that no design can succeed without the courage to experiment and embrace new possibilities. Benaroya has proven this truth.

While Russell Benaroya is reflective in the way that he is choosing to manage his life, he is highly motivated and inspired to share his adventure with others. Each of us can make the choice to be more intentional in what we want out of our lives. His design framework resonates with concepts and themes I share with current students in my entrepreneurial strategy classes.

As human beings we can choose to take control and navigate our own life adventure. As Montesquieu noted, “It is always the adventurers who do great things.” Benaroya has not disappointed. He has laid out an approach that you or I can follow.

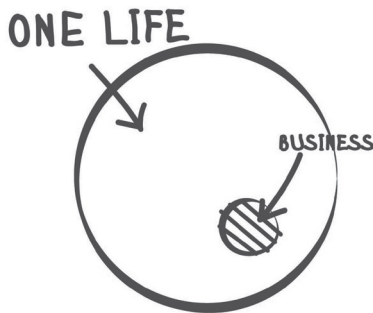
Why do you want what you want? Learn to lead your one life and resolve to examine your own unfolding story with intentionality—now.

Alfred E. Osborne, Jr., PhD, Senior Associate Dean  
Professor of Global Economics, Management, and Entrepreneurship  
Faculty Director, Price Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation  
UCLA Anderson School of Management

# WHY BUSINESS SUCCESS THROUGH LIFE DESIGN?

“Once everything works out for me professionally, *then* I’ll turn my attention to other areas of my life.” Right? Does that sound like something you have said before? Once you close one more deal. Once you raise a little more financing. Once you hire one more person. Once you improve profitability. Once you sell the company.

It sounds logical in some ways, to endure the struggle today for freedom tomorrow. We think, *Once I get there, then I’ll have more time with my family, I’ll strengthen my relationship with my spouse, I’ll spend more time with my kids, I’ll find a hobby. And, yes, I’ll get in shape.* But there is a tragic flaw in that type of apparent logic: the very things you are putting off until you succeed are the ingredients necessary for success. In other words, success in life is not about business metrics. Rather, success in business is driven by your life metrics.



This is a book about driving business success, but it's not what you might think. It isn't about how to execute a business strategy or how to upgrade your team. It isn't about sales or marketing or improving efficiency. It isn't about how much money you might make. It isn't about how to lead others. It's about how to lead yourself.

When you realize that you have everything that you already need and that your business is a vessel for you to be your best self, your chances of success skyrocket. Why? Because you'll be able to see your blind spots without judgment or fear of failure. Your business doesn't predict whether you will be happy or unhappy in life. Whether it is going well or not doesn't reflect on who you are as a human being. Yes, your reasons for getting involved might be personal, and the underlying vision or purpose is sacred. But your role in the business, how the business functions, the risks, and the potentials are simply considerations to address, not existential decisions about who you are or what you will become. And that, my friend, is freedom.

If your business is viewed through the one-dimensional lens of making more and more money as the remedy for an internal struggle about your life, then it will be hard for you to lead others. You will lead out of a place of fear rather than a place of potential. You will feel stuck. I know, because there was a time when I felt stuck in that exact way.

Today, we are seeing an awakening. People are beginning to recognize that at the foundation of business leadership is how effective individuals are at designing their lives, not just their businesses. The idea that we can shut out everything around us and focus solely on the business limits our capacity to lead. If we can't lead in designing our lives, how are we supposed to lead others?

Leading others is not about command and control. It is about guiding and coaching and mentoring. Our authenticity radar is sensitive today in the workplace: we see right through

individuals that lack self-awareness. The concept of work/life balance as some clear, bright line doesn't make sense anymore. In fact, work and life are not even separate. Life is life. Your business is a subset of that design, and your responsibility is to lead individuals on your team to be their best selves, both inside and outside of work.

Of course, there are people out there that seem successful in business but with an apparently unending ability to destroy everything else in their life except their business. But these are aberrations that rarely sustain in the long term. Eventually, these leaders—and typically their businesses and their lives—suffer.

That's not you, and if it were, you wouldn't have picked up this book. I understand the struggle, the tension between who you are, how you want to be, and how others want you to be. It is stressful. I finally changed my trajectory by prioritizing my life design and ultimately becoming a more conscious business leader. So can you!



# INTRODUCTION

It was snowing. The kids were asleep in the back of the car. The Dalles is a gateway mountain range to the high desert of Central Oregon, and we were returning from a family trip. It was 2016, and Tony Robbins was schooling me on his podcast about the importance of intention. My wife, Melissa, and I were in a trance, watching as the snow got dismissed by the windshield wipers. We hadn't talked—really, really talked—in a long time. I had been running my start-up, and she had been raising the kids and getting her parent-coaching business going.

My feeling at the time was fear, fear that everything I had was hanging by threads, and at any moment, the bottom might fall out. I was angry, too. It was easier to be angry. My business partner and I were arguing. The business model we had designed wasn't unfolding as we had expected. My wife and I were not connected. I felt pressure to put on a front that everything was "great." I couldn't access my true feelings because they were buried under a mountain of blame. It was easier to look for reasons to rationalize the position I was in than it was to look in the mirror.

That Tony Robbins podcast was published in November of 2016 and titled "The 3 Steps to a Breakthrough." Of course it was. It was so Tony Robbins, the quintessential Tony Robbins, who reminds us that our greatest limitations are the ones we manifest between our own two ears. The message was as

effective then as it is today. There was a place that I wanted to get to in my life, but I couldn't ever seem to make it happen. *OK, I'm interested*, said my inner voice. And there were a lot of reasons for that lack of progress. *Yes, tell me all of them, with answers, preferably, please. And I hope that my wife is picking up on this, too. She needs it.*

What became clear to me during that drive was that I didn't have a life strategy. I was moving, yes. I had action, yes. I had spent a lot of time thinking about and acting on the strategy in my business, but I never really thought about the strategy in my life. Why not? If I were a business, "Russell Benaroya, Inc.," what would my plan be? And yes, I have a business partner: my wife. Where is she in the plan? It annoyed me that I didn't have the answer. No, I was *angry* that I didn't have the answer. I was frustrated with my wife that we didn't have the answer.

I wanted to sound open and curious, but inside preferred to reach for blame. I asked my wife, "What is our strategy? We have never talked about where we want to be in five years." I asked it in a bit of a *Why haven't you ever thought of this?* tone, as if the responsibility for developing that strategy somehow wasn't mine to own. Her response was perfect. Not perfect in the sense that it validated my feelings, but perfect in the sense that it knocked me out of the story that I had been telling myself for years, a story that was not serving me, my family, or my life. She said, "Well, Russell, it has never been about us. It has always been about you and your business, and we've been along for the ride."

Fortunately, there was no ice on the road, because in that specific moment, I felt out of control. I realized how right she was and had been, but I couldn't admit it. I thrashed around in that conversation, trying to avoid taking responsibility for her statement, but it was pointless. She was right.

So, I did exactly what I thought I should do. I went online and found these great worksheets (I know, you have to be



cringing a bit right now—I am, too) that are supposed to guide you through setting your future goals. I thought that what we had been missing was the tactical planning of where we wanted to be in five, ten, fifteen years. Oh boy. Melissa was a good sport about it, but like all the other times we'd tried that stuff, it fell flat. The worksheets never got referenced again, and only offered some short-term pain relief. The result? Failure!

That strategy failed because the problem had nothing to do with writing down goals and working toward them. The problem was so much more foundational for us. It was about breaking the habit of trying to rationalize our “righteousness” and getting real about the facts, our feelings, and how we could realign as partners—to learn if we even could realign as partners.

In that moment in 2016, on a small stretch of highway through the snow-covered pines of the Pacific Northwest, I realized that I was stuck. I had been building a life, but the structure felt shaky. I wanted a new design. I didn't know how to get it.

## WHY ME?

---

For a long time, I thought I didn't deserve to write this book. I grew up in an upper-class household. I went to private schools, attended college, studied abroad, got a job on Wall Street, went to business school, worked in venture capital, got married, had two kids, and on and on. I was the center of my universe, and it was fine. There is nothing to complain about from the outside looking in, right?

I kept sailing, but I had no destination. In 2005 I made a shift to leave the safety of my career and start a company, confident (slightly overconfident) that I wouldn't be a statistic of

start-up failure. It was the first time I ever really broke out of the mold of what I thought was expected of me. What I did not realize and had not planned for was that I was embarking on a fifteen-year odyssey of self-discovery, during which I would find myself swirling in a sea of uncertainty and self-doubt.



The easy thing would have been retreating back to the comfort of what is “expected,” and that crossed my mind many times. The hard thing was looking at myself critically, knowing that I wanted to build a life on my terms but not being sure how to get out of my own way to do it. I constantly measured myself against what other people were doing professionally and where I stood in the pecking order. I had created an opportunity to design my life, but I didn’t know how to walk through the door. My marriage was strained as we were living parallel lives while also raising two young children.

I had unconsciously committed myself to a life designed to look admirable, but it had a weak foundation. I felt held back by a series of blocks that were hard to see from the outside and easy for me not to acknowledge—until I had to. I was exhausted, and so was my family. Eventually, I began to shed

the armor to get to the core of who I really wanted to be after years of justifying a certain way of being.

Eventually, I leapt.

## WHY NOW?

---

In 2018, my family and I made a reasonably bold move and lived abroad for a year in San Jose, Costa Rica. We stepped out of the machine of what we “should” be doing and packed our bags to reboot our lives as a family, as professionals, and as a couple. And one day, sitting at a small table at a bakery called Picnic in Santa Ana, a little suburb of San Jose, I began to write. I came back the next day and wrote more, and before I knew it, I had found a groove and a path to expressing ideas and fears and frameworks that had been circling inside of me for years. It was like a dam of expression finally broke, where every keystroke poured out energy I had kept wrapped up for so long.

There were days I would write without a destination, but I had a lot bottled up that I wanted to express. It was emotional for me as I reflected on my decisions and the impact that those decisions had on people around me. I would end those days by looking up, slowly closing my computer, smiling, and feeling deeply grateful for the opportunity to be living in another country on this adventure with my family. I always felt a little lighter on those days, more confident in how I wanted to show up and move out into the world (well, in San Jose it was mostly into traffic) with ease.

It wasn't just my writing, either—everything changed. Melissa and I had summoned the courage to realize a dream we had since getting married: the desire to create an experience abroad as a family. We leapt and the world embraced us, opening our eyes to the possibility of possibility. Everything

changed in that year abroad, personally and professionally. I started a new business that would give me the flexibility to work from anywhere in the world. I learned a new language. I made new friends. I reconnected with my family. I strengthened my partnership with my wife. And, yes, I wrote.

Finally, I was unblocking the obstacles that had been mounting for years. I was shedding the armor that was originally built to protect me but that was actually keeping out the positive energy I needed. I was able to see that my life was not so intimately tied to the business I was associated with; rather, my business could be tied to the life that I wanted to design. I saw that when I moved intentionally to make it happen in a way that worked for me, the universe would find ways to help me succeed. And it's why you can, too.

That's why I wrote this book, because the impediments to progress are self-constructed. When I finally realized that the things that I thought were happening *to* me were actually happening *by* me, I could take control and affect change.

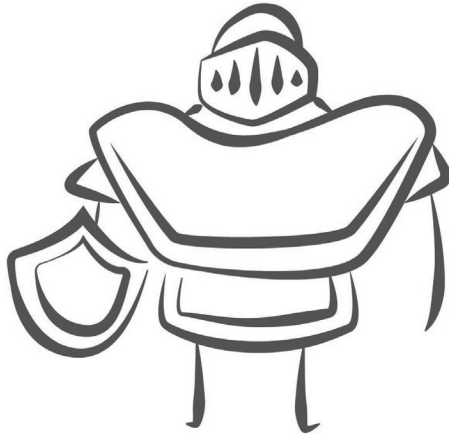
## WHY YOU?

---

Well, only you can answer that question, but I have spent time with hundreds of entrepreneurs and senior executives, listening to the circumstances they were letting drive their lives. The content keeps coming out faster and faster. These are “successful” people who spend time lamenting about their colleagues, their jobs, their spouses, their lack of finances, their health, the weather, their investors, their challenging customers, and their failed business deals.

Below the surface are the feelings that drive everything. Those feelings are anger, and frustration, and fear, and insecurity, and hope, and desire. Those feelings are hidden because

most of us can't see (or don't want to see) that far underneath the surface to the root cause. But something doesn't feel right, something we can't articulate. We have covered ourselves in that protective armor. Now you are ready to shed it.



I want you to read this book because you have already read so many books on business leadership before, but you haven't seemed to crack the code. You know the frameworks. You know the case studies. You know the stories of those you admire. You know what you "should" be doing, but there is something inside of you that keeps wanting to convince you it's OK that you're stuck.

While you believe deeply in your potential, you have finally realized that you might be the greatest obstacle to unlocking it. You may read that sentence and find it makes no sense. No problem. You're not ready to read this book, and that's fine. Heck, it took me until I was in my thirties to start unpacking the feelings, thoughts, and behaviors that were influencing my career, my relationships, my unique gifts, and my limitations. And even then, it unfolded in pieces as new circumstances emerged that cast a harsh light on my greatest vulnerabilities.

This book is for the person who realizes that while we are the most liberated we have ever been, we create limitations to our freedom because we subscribe to society's desire for stability, things like a good job, a mortgage, good credit, flashy cars, and stuff. As we keep piling those things on, we slowly build a structure around ourselves that gives the illusion of stability but provides very little flexibility. The prospect of breaking out, taking a leap into the unknown, feels too risky. So we stay put. We end up trapped by a restrictive design of our own creation and by the expectations of others.

If that resonates, you're ready to read this book. You know that the path to success is yours to dictate, but you might not yet be sure how to build your life in a way to make it so. You are ready to let go of trying to control everything yourself, ready to begin listening and wondering and considering that what you don't know you don't know is exactly where you want to lean in. I want you to sit in that place, as uncomfortable as it is, and know that therein lies the learning that will help you unblock your potential. If you are ready to tap into the authentic you and to design your life, read this book. If you are ready to embrace that you have one life to lead, and you want to apply that learning to drive business success, read this book. If you are ready to make this a year of change you never thought possible, read this book.

This book is for the person who's tired of saying *I can't*, or *I never could imagine*, or *I wouldn't be able to*, and realizes that those are negative, self-spiraling narratives. We are all given the gift to reason and to make choices for ourselves. We are all given the ability to build and to create. But we have isolated ourselves into minuscule bubbles of self-importance, and then we blame the circumstances of life when we don't break out of them. No more.

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

---

This book is a guide, broken down into steps that build on each other, called design steps. You may find that you're drawn to one area in particular because that is the part of your life that you want to architect, and that's great. There are many short stories in this book, written by a diverse group of business leaders that I have called Designers, who have shared part of their lives with you to amplify a principle. The book also has a series of exercises designed to help you unlock your own life design and look critically at the barriers that are holding you back.

## ANYONE CAN DESIGN THEIR LIFE

---

Your life design is only limited by your imagination, and it requires that you take the first step, that you pose a fundamental question: Why do I want what I want?



It's a simple question, but don't intellectualize an answer. You answer it by how you choose to live your life. The goal of this book is not to script the answer to this question. This is a lighthouse question that will help keep you on course as you take the first steps in your intentional life design. Use this question as a reference point when you make decisions and take actions. *Why* you do something reveals a lot more than *what* you do.

I didn't start asking myself this question until I was firmly established in my career and had a family but still wasn't feeling successful. Why? Because life happens. We get stuck. I let it happen to me.

Designing your life requires a willingness to ask yourself questions about where you want to be and why, and then building a plan to get there. Without that road map, something is still going to happen. You may end up accidentally landing somewhere close to your idea of success, but it won't be intentional. It will be random, and the odds are not in your favor. Let's not leave it to chance.

## THE PRIVILEGE OF THE WORK AHEAD

---

There is a great gift to be found in stepping back and observing how we have or have not designed our lives. Life design is an area of personal development that might seem overly theoretical, and in an environment where many of us are just trying to keep it together and meet our deadlines, it can seem like a luxury. The privilege is not lost on me, and the fact that you are reading this book imbues you with that same privilege.

Yet for a long time, I felt like I didn't deserve to do this work. My life was too busy, I told myself. I wasn't successful enough yet. This kind of work is reserved for people who have



already achieved great things, I mistakenly thought. When you feel like you are in the theater of battle in your business, it feels ill timed to step back and assess the bigger strategy, lest you be taken out by the enemy. It's time to do battle, right?

I felt like that for a long time. Once I achieved a certain success (which I measured in dollars and accolades), I thought, then I would be able to get everything worked out. Do you understand the error of this? Once I achieve some desired outcome, only *then* will I start working on the ingredients to achieve a desired outcome? That is ridiculous thinking, and it's part of what kept me stuck for so long.

But let's go back to the question I posed earlier. We are all free to ask ourselves, "What do I want, and why do I want it?" While our means for action may feel limited, it is also worth noting that those feelings of constraint are often self-imposed, designed to keep us safe in what we know versus facing the uncertainty of the unknown. However, if you wait until you have achieved success to ask yourself this fundamental question of life design, then you've gotten it backward. Yes, timing matters, and we all traverse our own journeys with our own events and circumstances. But don't wait. Your trajectory will benefit from a well-designed foundation. So let's get to it.



# THE FIVE STEPS OF LIFE DESIGN

---

*"Freedom in this life is not money, and it's not success. The freedom of this life for me is having the ability to redesign it."*

*—Madeline Haydon, founder and CEO, nutpods*

---

With all the thrashing that we do to figure out how we're going to make it in this world, the fundamentals of life design come down to five basic steps. These aren't prescriptions of what you will or will not accumulate in material possessions. Designing your life isn't so much about the car you want to drive, where you want to live, or how much money you want to make. Those are outcomes, and maybe they will unfold for you and maybe they won't. Life design is the framework for how you will lead.

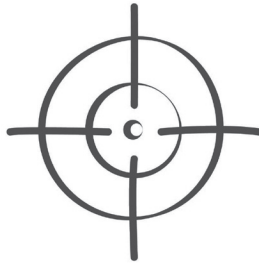
**The five steps of life design are:**

1. Ground stories with **FACTS**.



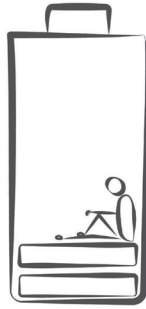
We have a tendency to tell ourselves stories that have very little to do with facts. As a result, we create a lot of drama and wind up feeling anxious, frustrated, and angry. Start with the facts first. We will discuss how to tell stories rooted in facts and how to harness stories that serve your life design.

2. Establish your **PRINCIPLES**.



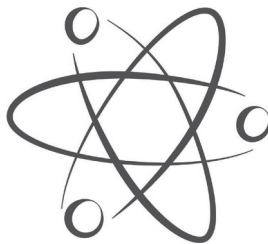
Your principles represent a foundational code for how you want to conduct yourself in the world. They are the filters through which you make decisions, from day-to-day choices to your biggest, longest-term objectives. We will discuss how to identify and apply your own principles.

3. Harness **ENERGY** from the environment.



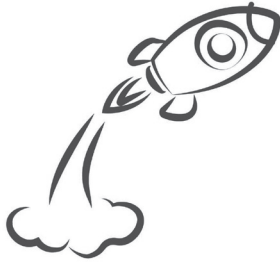
Energy is about putting yourself in an environment where you feel *energized*. The environment could be geographic. It could be an environment of people and relationships. You know where your energy is drained and where your energy is gained. Let's define it. Tap into it. And pursue it.

4. Get in and stay in your **GENIUS ZONE**.



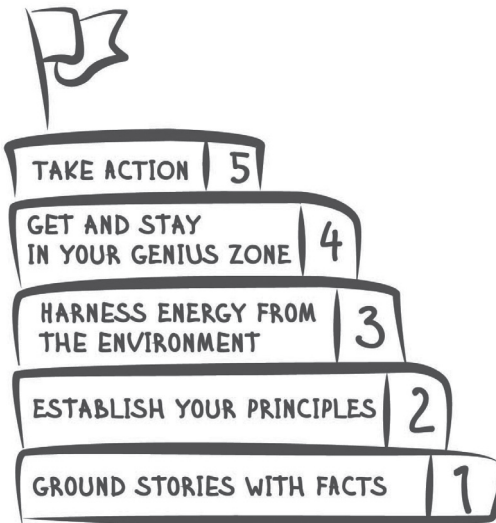
Your genius zone is made up of the things you are uniquely qualified to do and how doing them causes you to lose track of time, to get into your flow state. You want to spend 80 percent of your time in your genius zone. We will discuss how to find your genius zone and how to live in it—as well as how to identify your anti-genius zone.

## 5. Take ACTION.



Action is courage. Action is making a move toward your life design. It may be uncomfortable, but nothing was ever built by people standing around. We will talk about how to think about action and how to develop the courage you need to make things happen.

The steps here are intentionally simple, and they work in a sequence.



At the base, we uncover the barriers you have created through stories that have not served you (Step 1). We then move to setting your principles, which will give you more agency over your behavior (Step 2). Next, we create the environment where you feel your principles can best be lived (Step 3). Then, we focus on applying your time to those areas where you have a unique superpower (Step 4). Finally, we move to actualizing your design through discerning action (Step 5).

The work ahead is embedding these steps into the fabric of how you live your life, and how you lead. Once you grasp how these design principles apply to you, you will start to observe them in all kinds of different situations in your life and business. We can't predict the circumstances that will arise, but these design principles enable us to be grounded in how we approach them.

Once you ground your life design with these principles, how you apply them and what you do become less important. Why? Because you will be liberated to live a life of experimentation. Some things will work. Some things won't. Oh well. You will be able to apply the design to different scenarios without fear and see what happens. You'll be curious about it instead of fearful. In other words, your identity will no longer be cemented to what people see you do on the outside. Your identity (and your worth) will be driven by your own creation on the inside. Remember, it is your design, by design.

# MEET THE DESIGNERS



I have the privilege of sharing firsthand stories to amplify the “one life to lead” design steps from some amazing individuals throughout this book. You will hear from people that are seemingly pretty successful, associated as they are with notable companies, strong businesses, and, in some cases, impressive educational pedigrees. Why did they choose to contribute, and why do I want you to know them?

I want you to know them not solely because of what they have built but because of their willingness to:

- Share their thirst for learning and self-discovery on their business leadership journey.
- Make business decisions grounded in principles of their life design.
- Demonstrate vulnerability in acknowledging their own limitations.



- Be seen as regular people leading with a purpose that isn't about material success.
- Take courageous action, even when the outcome is less than clear.

These individuals are just as prone to getting stuck as anyone. They face the same insecurities that many of us do around failure, fears that we aren't smart enough or that we aren't liked, uncertainty around our decisions, and feelings of being more lucky than skilled and of being abandoned or taken advantage of. But these are also individuals who aren't letting their fear hold them back.

Here is a brief introduction to the Designers, featuring the one piece of advice they would give their younger selves. You can read more about them in the Designer Professional Bios. While these individuals have all accomplished great things with their businesses, where they really shine is in sharing the aspects of life design that have contributed to and influenced their effectiveness in business leadership.

## **SARAH DUSEK**

COFOUNDER AND FORMER CEO, UNDER CANVAS  
[www.undercanvas.com](http://www.undercanvas.com)

---

“Asking yourself what it will take to achieve your goals opens the pathway of it happening.”

Sarah is the cofounder of Under Canvas, a national glamping company committed to providing access to the outdoors. Sarah sold Under Canvas in 2018 for over \$100 million and today is the founder of Enygma Ventures, a venture capital firm funding female entrepreneurs in Africa.

**FRAN DUNAWAY**

COFOUNDER AND CEO, TOMBOYX

[www.tomboyx.com](http://www.tomboyx.com)

---

“Don’t rely on the perceptions of others to define who you are.”

Fran cofounded a company to solve her fashion challenge and today has built a gender-neutral undergarments and apparel company that is empowering millions of people to be who they were born to be.

**NICK SOMAN**

FOUNDER AND CEO, DECENT

[www.decent.com](http://www.decent.com)

---

“Earn your problems.”

Nick cofounded Decent, an affordable and comprehensive insurance solution for small businesses to get health-care coverage.

**MAX NELSON**

FOUNDER AND CEO, HOOD

[www.hoodhat.com](http://www.hoodhat.com)

---

“All days are great. None are easy.”

Max is the founder of an iconic apparel company that personalizes high-quality merino ball caps that represent the neighborhoods and communities that people identify with.

## **MATT OPPENHEIMER**

COFOUNDER AND CEO, REMITLY

[www.remitly.com](http://www.remitly.com)

---

“Get people around you that will ask you the right questions that will help you know yourself better.”

Matt cofounded Remitly, an international mobile payments platform that was recently valued in excess of \$1 billion.

## **MADLINE HAYDON**

FOUNDER AND CEO, NUTPODS

[www.nutpods.com](http://www.nutpods.com)

---

“All the adversity, obstacles, disappointments, and, yes, pain that you will encounter will have a purpose. They will shape you.”

Madeline Haydon founded the nondairy creamer company nutpods to solve her own problem. Today, as one of the most successful consumer product food companies on Amazon, nutpods has become an entrepreneurial success story (#13 in the Inc. 5000 fastest-growing companies in 2019) by an accidental entrepreneur.

**KIRBY WINFIELD**  
GENERAL PARTNER, ASCEND VC  
[www.ascend.vc](http://www.ascend.vc)

---

“Run every day.”

Kirby founded Ascend VC, a seed-stage venture fund in Seattle, after multiple public company exits. He invests in entrepreneurs at the beginning stages of their journey, when they are tackling their passions against all odds.

**LORI TORRES**  
FOUNDER AND CEO, PARCEL PENDING  
[www.parcelpending.com](http://www.parcelpending.com)

---

“Don’t wait.”

Lori built a smartlocker company for apartment buildings to better manage e-commerce shipments to residents. The company was sold in 2019 for over \$100 million.

**DAVID NILSSEN**  
COFOUNDER AND CEO, GUIDANT FINANCIAL  
[www.guidantfinancial.com](http://www.guidantfinancial.com)

---

“If you’re the smartest guy in the room and have all the answers, that’s a big problem.”

David's company unlocks retirement savings for thousands of small business owners to help them finance and grow their businesses. He has helped over twenty thousand entrepreneurs invest and manage over \$4.5 billion to help them achieve their dreams.

## **SHARELLE KLAUS**

FOUNDER AND CEO, DRY SODA COMPANY  
[www.drysoda.com](http://www.drysoda.com)

---

“Don't be afraid to ask for help.”

Sharelle founded DRY Soda Company, a national beverage company that has revolutionized the dry cocktail movement.

## **JAMES MAYO**

COFOUNDER AND CEO, SOS HYDRATE  
[www.soshydrate.com](http://www.soshydrate.com)

---

“Run your own race.”

James founded SOS Hydrate, a sports performance and beverage company. His inspiration came from his time in the military and his experience as a national running champion in the United Kingdom.

**CASEY ROLOFF**  
FOUNDER AND CEO, SEABROOK  
[www.seabrookwa.com](http://www.seabrookwa.com)

---

“Travel to expand your mind.”

Casey is the founder of Seabrook, a seaside town in Washington State that turned raw coastal land into a premier beach destination. He has built over seven hundred homes designed to create connections among individuals and the environment they inhabit.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



© Devon Benaroya

**Russell Benaroya** is an author, entrepreneur, and speaker focused on helping people achieve their highest and best use by staying in their genius zones.

Russell has spent the last twenty years in investment banking, private equity, and entrepreneurship and today is the cofounder of Stride Services, an outsourced accounting and strategic finance firm that helps business owners use their data for better decision making.

Russell speaks on topics designed to help business leaders build more successful businesses through a combination of self-discovery and tactical financial tools. Russell also coaches business owners around the themes of one life to lead.

Russell is an avid ultramarathoner and has completed numerous hundred-mile races and self-supported expeditions.

His writing has appeared in *Forbes*, and he is a recipient of the 40 Under 40 recognition from the *Puget Sound Business Journal* in Seattle. He is also the author of *Free Yourself to Work on Your Business*.

Russell is a business school graduate of the Anderson School at UCLA and a longtime member of the Entrepreneurs' Organization. He lives in Seattle with his wife, Melissa, and their two children, Devon and Shane.

# THIS IS A BUSINESS LEADERSHIP BOOK, BUT IT'S NOT ABOUT HOW TO LEAD OTHERS. IT'S ABOUT HOW TO LEAD **YOURSELF**.

Behind every business there are leaders doing their best to navigate work alongside the universal challenges we all share—health, relationships, finances, and self-doubt. Facing these daily challenges, all while trying to manage the uncertainties of building a business, can get exhausting. How do we take control of our lives to better lead ourselves in order to more effectively lead others?

Author, entrepreneur, and speaker Russell Benaroya reveals a formula for business success that begins with an intentional approach to design your life. After selling his business and making the bold choice to move his family from Seattle to Costa Rica to nourish relationships and refresh his business outlook, Benaroya designed a new path for himself, one that not only better aligned to the person he wanted to become but embraced the person he is.

In *One Life to Lead*, Benaroya imparts his five basic design steps to help you, and those you lead, create a foundation for sustainable life and business success. You will learn how to distinguish stories from facts, establish your core principles, harness energy from your environment, and get and stay in your “genius zone” to successfully redesign your life.

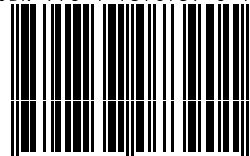
Within each design step, Benaroya shares the honest stories of notable business leaders who faced difficult decisions in the face of uncertainty, so that we may learn from their experiences. You'll see how they redesigned their own paths, took risks, and maintained a high level of curiosity as they sought to better understand themselves and their role as a leader. Complete with exercises, strategies, and first-hand experiences, *One Life to Lead* will give you the tools you need to clearly and confidently design your life.

*“One Life to Lead will help you smooth out the ups and downs of life and business . . . Read this book first before getting involved in your next leadership role—or just read it now!”*

*—Cameron Herold, founder of COO Alliance and Second-in-Command podcast, author of Vivid Vision, and former COO of 1-800-GOT-JUNK?*

**SHEMOTO**  
PRESS

ISBN 978-1-7370739-0-1



9 781737 073901 >