

OUT OF THIN AIR



**LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP
FROM DAVE ALEXANDER**



BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA®

OUT OF
THIN
AIR



LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP

From

Dave Alexander





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Out of Thin Air

Lessons in Leadership From Dave Alexander

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“If I can dream it, I can do it.”

—*Dave Alexander*



Foreword

What do you suppose would happen if 100 of the finest leaders the world has ever known came together to answer a single question: “What is leadership?” More than likely, the discussion would become animated fairly quickly. Can’t you just picture Aristotle leaning across the table, shaking his fist at a calm and gentle Nelson Mandela? At the conclusion, when the 100 had exhausted themselves of bantering pros and cons, there would be no fewer than 100 unique answers to the question—each one relevant and each one correct.

Every leader has his or her own definition of leadership. Experts have long defined it as the people who lead a group or an organization, or the activity of doing so. Individuals who have been identified as leaders, on the other hand, often describe leadership with a bit more enthusiasm and more carefully selected vocabulary.

- Ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) said leaders are *followers*: “He who cannot be a good follower cannot be a good leader.”

- Businessman Steve Jobs (1955–2011) said leaders are *innovative*: “Innovation distinguishes between a leader and a follower.”

- John Quincy Adams (1767–1848), the sixth president of the United States, said leaders are *inspirational*: “If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more, and become more, you are a leader.”

- Businessman Harvey S. Firestone (1868–1938) said leaders are *teachers*: The growth and development of people is the highest calling of leadership.”

- And Robert K. Greenleaf (1904–1990), the founder of the modern servant leadership movement and the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, said: “Good leaders must first become good servants.”

An individual forms his or her personal definition of leadership throughout a lifetime of broad, diverse experiences and challenges. But whatever the definition, leadership is necessary to move the world forward. A leader is someone who steps up during a crisis and who thinks and acts creatively in tough situations. Without leadership, there is no direction. Without leadership, there is no success. Every project, every goal, every success requires a leader.

Legendary football coach Vince Lombardi said, “Leaders aren’t born, they are made.” For Lombardi, leaders emerged on the playing field. In the Boy Scouts of America, leaders emerge every day on campouts, at troop meetings and service projects, and in their homes, schools, and places of worship. The BSA’s definition of leadership, for both adults and youth, is simple: Leaders are those who actively apply the Scout Law. Every day, those leaders are striving to be *trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent*—individually and collectively. Over the course of the last century, more than 100 million young people have prescribed to a life of fulfilling their duty to God, country, and self, guided daily by the Scout Law.



The tenets of the Scout Law are markers of character. They underlie all the skill sets that young men and women must develop and apply in their lives to not only direct others in a given situation, but also to simply

enjoy full, productive, successful lives, wherever their paths may lead. One does not have to be a Scout to benefit from learning about and living by the Scout Law. The Scout Law on its own—even absent the organization that assembled its principles under one title—knows no boundaries of nation, race, creed, color, or belief system.

The benefits of living a life marked by regular, thoughtful adherence to the constants of Scout Law are truly boundless. If your family, friends, peers, and community regard you to be a *trustworthy* individual, you possess a treasure no amount of money can buy. When you display *loyalty*, especially in difficult or dangerous circumstances, your actions reflect some of the highest, most noble and eternal human values. Each time you are *helpful*, *friendly*, *cheerful*, *courteous*, or *kind*, you make life a bit more pleasant and enjoyable for someone, and you help to diminish some of the negativity and darkness that dominates so much of the daily news cycle. The *obedient* youth, student, congregant, employee, elected official, or military member (among others) helps to ensure that the institutions and organizations that we depend upon to keep our lives running smoothly and safely can operate reliably and at peak efficiency.

Being *thrifty* is a hallmark of one who will always be prepared to meet life's unexpected surprises, while striving to be *clean* in word, action, and thought will help you and your conscience to rest easy at night. If you are among the ranks of the *brave*, from first responders and soldiers to volunteers who provide comfort on the mean streets of the big city, the deepest thanks and appreciation of a grateful community and nation will be offered to you. Finally, your *reverent* expression of thanks to a higher power for all of the gifts that flow to you will help to light your path and lighten your load every single day of your life.



The Boy Scouts of America has blazed into its second century with a cadre of proven development methods to help young people become leaders of great moral character. Backed by 109 years of experience and tradition, the modern BSA is now poised to strengthen and grow its position as a recognized thought leader in leadership development.

In the summer of 2008, the BSA took an important step toward achieving that objective when it broke ground for the Summit Bechtel Family National Scout Reserve in West Virginia. The visionary philanthropists who contributed to this important project have shared moving testimonies about how Scouting profoundly impacted their lives, inspiring them to provide transformational leadership opportunities for young people. All of them have set themselves apart as leaders within their professions. And fittingly, the stories of their lives have been included among the curriculum support at the Summit Bechtel Reserve—and for the Scouting program as a whole—in an ever-growing series of monographs focusing on “Lessons in Leadership.”

The experiences retold within these monographs are as wide-ranging as the topic of leadership itself. Each monograph relates the path taken by one individual that led to a place where the consistent application of sound and ethical leadership principles was often all that stood between success and failure. These monographs share real stories about real events that brought into sharp focus both the short-term and long-term consequences of decisions made by leaders on the front lines. Readers of all backgrounds—especially youth—will get to know the subjects of these monographs as real people who remained true to their principles through good times and bad.

By sharing their individual stories, these leaders are inviting us to understand the profound influence the Scouting program can have on one person’s life—whether early in life or later—and they are paying forward their leadership experiences to the next generations. Readers will uncover

that while each leader varies in leadership style—sometimes widely—none wavers from a firm foundation: Each leader firmly believes that following the Scout Law is critical in becoming a leader of the highest character. Their stories define the Scout Law for us, but as you live *your* life guided by that same Scout Law, you will create your own stories of success—your own lessons in leadership.

Good luck on your journey.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Wayne Perry". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Wayne Perry

National President, 2012–2014

Boy Scouts of America

January 1, 2019





Introduction

THE SUN RISES HIGH ABOVE PHOENIX, ARIZONA. It beats down on 14 lanes of stainless steel and aluminum tanker trucks as they move slowly through the hot, dusty shadows thrown by Caljet's gigantic fuel tanks. As the drivers wait patiently in air-conditioned cabs for their turns to take on loads of fuel, they see something odd in their side-view mirrors: A sturdily built man in an open-neck dress shirt is making his way from truck to truck in the sweltering heat.

The man is not giving orders or providing instructions to the drivers. Instead, he is offering them bottled water and snacks while they wait their turns to access the loading facilities inside the fuel terminal. What makes this an even more unusual sight is the fact that the man handing water and snacks up to the drivers as they open their windows isn't the terminal manager or a traffic director; he is Dave Alexander—the man who founded the business.

Dave is quick to point out that he doesn't do this sort of thing all the time; in fact, he regrets that when his office was relocated away from the gated entrance, personal interaction with the drivers became a bit more difficult than he likes. Still, he wants the drivers who come through his facility to know who he is and how much he appreciates them. So, he is out there at the terminal entrance so often—no matter the weather—that almost every driver knows his name and who he is.

Dave is personable, friendly, and gregarious. He is a gifted communicator with a magnetic personality who loves one-on-one relationships. Truth be

told, he is larger than life by every definition of the term, both physically and emotionally. Nothing is small in Dave's world—not his heart, not his care and concern for his employees and his business, and not his passion for accomplishing things other people would consider to be impossible. In fact, many people have noted that Dave has a passion for those things he loves, and when he has set his mind to do something, he is all in.

He enjoys giving personal tours of Caljet, the fuel terminal operation he has built to serve customers throughout the Southwest. He shows guests the state-of-the-art storage tanks and the pipelines and injection systems, and if there is a truck driver at the loading rack while they are touring, Dave might ask the driver how he feels about the quality of Caljet's loading racks. After asking the question, Dave sometimes walks away so the driver can give the visitor his honest, unvarnished response. Dave has no worries about the kind of review the driver will give his operation. He knows his company is one of the best in the business as he drives forward facility and product innovations.

Dave treats everyone with whom he works—from customers, to employees, to vendors—with genuine courtesy and appreciation. They are people with whom he has valued relationships, not faceless accounting codes on a ledger sheet. That perspective is at the heart of the brand he has built and polished since 1982. His business is both productive and profitable, though when compared to the behemoth size of his major competitor, Dave knows it is like comparing a minnow to a whale. That's why he has worked so hard over the decades to differentiate his business from the competition by doing things in ways that their size and bureaucratic complexity cannot match. His integrity, sound business sense, tremendous loyalty, and respect for his customers help him to keep that differentiation sharp and bright. He maintains those relationships in person, in a process he describes as akin to being on stage. That is a good metaphor for Dave,

because the stage has been where he has always been at his best, ever since he was a child.

Dave was born into a family with two significantly older siblings—a 12-year-old sister and a 17-year-old brother. Among other things, that meant that as he grew up, his parents tended to be older than his friends' parents. He was allowed a great deal of independence as a youngster, and he spent a lot of time around adults—two factors that helped him to mature quickly. He projected a quiet confidence that belied his years. His experience in Scouting helped to sharpen that confidence. He also learned confidence through coin collecting, even as a youth becoming a sought-after numismatics speaker for mostly adult audiences. Dave's father taught him a lot about coins, their history, and their value, especially during family trips to Mexico. It was a chance introduction to magic during one of these boyhood trips with his parents that would set the stage for something truly grand in his life—becoming a world-class close-up card magician.

Once he became proficient with magic, a brand-new world opened up to him. He began to perform in many kinds of venues, especially private clubs. Dave remembers that there were some places—including nightclubs—that he wasn't old enough to enter as a patron, but anytime he got the chance to show the manager some magic, he knew it would result in a paid show somewhere.

He quickly established a reputation as a talented magician, and that drew a lot of attention—sometimes too much attention. When he began getting paid \$25 or more per event, people increasingly took notice. That was a lot of money for a boy in junior high school to be making in those days. Even so, when leaving school for daytime magic gigs landed him in trouble, he found even higher paying evening performance offers coming his way. Dave wasn't old enough to drive, so he relied on adults to drive him all over Southern California to his performances. In time, he became one of

the youngest performing magicians at Hollywood's world-famous Magic Castle—which is regarded as the international headquarters for the very best of magic. It was there, on the Magic Castle's stage, that young Dave developed, refined, and learned to project the magnetism and charisma that would undergird his leadership capabilities in years to come.

In his late 30s, Dave embarked on one of the most remarkable challenges of a life already filled with one-of-a-kind accomplishment. He became world-famous as an endurance athlete, completing hundreds of races all over the world—with a physique that would be regarded by many people as being about as far away from athletic as could be imagined. By the time he wound down his career as a serious triathlete, he had completed hundreds of triathlons, making him one of the most prolific racers in the sport's history. Along the way, he achieved what no other endurance athlete in history had done: He completed 30 grueling triathlon events around the globe in just 30 weeks. In doing so, he truly rewrote the book on what it means to be an athlete, effectively turning the prevailing opinions about the relationship between obesity and fitness on its head with his motto: "You don't have to be thin to be fit." His extraordinary accomplishments earned him worldwide praise and extensive media coverage.

Dave's business associates say it plainly: He is a man who thrives on challenge. Tell him it can't be done, they say, and then get out of the way, because he will find a way to do it. He seldom fails. And even when the going gets tough, he remains steady and calm. He rarely gets angry, even when he faces what looks to others like insurmountable odds. Two other characteristics that those closest to him ascribe to Dave is his fierce loyalty—sometimes to a fault—and an exhaustive memory. Dave then applies an ample helping of forgiveness with gratitude. In combination, these are the core attributes of an extraordinary entrepreneur, steadfast husband, magnanimous employer, superior athlete, and generous philanthropist.

In the pages that follow, you will see exactly why all those who know Dave Alexander well use the same three-word term to describe him: passion for life. From his success with coins to his triumphs as a magician to his honorable service to the BSA, which recognized him with its Silver Buffalo Award in 2019, this man—who built a thriving business out of three tanks on a dirt lot and who became a celebrity in the rarified world of the triathlon—continues to live by this maxim: It is more important to be the best *for* the world than to be the best *in* the world.

That philosophy is where his irresistible sparkle originates. He started with nothing except God-given gifts and wonderful early-life mentors who helped shape his future. He has achieved success in many fields of endeavor, but he has no intention of exiting the race any time soon. He has found that magic permeates his life—magic that comes from within him and appears in those around him.

Dave Alexander takes the stage in this book as he has so many times over the course of his remarkable life. He shares his thoughts about leadership and the lessons and experiences that brought him to the center of the brightly lit stage, where he holds his audience in the palm of one hand and, just maybe, a deck of playing cards in the other. His magic, you will find, seems to appear out of thin air.





Chapter I

MY FATHER WANTED TO NAME ME DAVID SOLOMON ALEXANDER. My brother and sister did not like that and negotiated just an initial, and I emerged David S Alexander. I grew up in a 700-square-foot house in an average neighborhood in sunny Long Beach, California. My dad, like so many other men in Southern California at the time, worked at different jobs in the oil industry. His income was comparable to other workers in our neighborhood, but what set Dad apart was his industriousness. While he was in high school, Dad worked full-time to help support his family. With what he was able to save, he bought four residential lots—and eventually, he resold three of them to come up with the down payment for our own home. By the time I was born, the house was paid off.

My dad's family had an interesting history, a classic mix of good and bad. His father made a lot of money, then lost a lot of money. My grandfather was a smart man, my father explained to me, but at the same time, he hoped I didn't wind up with his less-than-desirable scruples that contributed to the ups and downs of his life's finances. Grandfather's troubles affected my father in many ways; for example, Dad had to drop out of high school and go to work to support his family. He did whatever was needed when he was young, just as he did when he had his own family. He was loving and fair, but he could also be very tough. He was a good man and a good father. In those respects, I have tried to emulate many of

his attitudes, especially those he taught me based on the Scout Law, which he learned when he was a Scout in the early days of the organization.

My mother, Verna Cecelia Morning Alexander, was a beautiful woman. She was deeply loving and supportive, and she lived by a strong set of values. She could be a little absentminded, and sometimes it seemed as if she was a bit lost in some situations. Even as a young child, I used to give her directions and help her get to places. However, she needed no help with some things. She created an incredible baby book about me that recorded all my milestones and quoted special things I said during my formative years, big and small. For example, she jotted down a conversation I had with her about God in 1948, in which I announced I was going to live with Him in heaven someday. This wonderful resource has provided me perspective throughout my life.

It was obvious that my birth had not been anticipated. My brother, Don, was 17 years old when I born, and by the time I was old enough to be aware of the ins and outs of life, he had moved out of our home. I eventually inherited his uninsulated attic bedroom, where I burned up in the summer and froze in the winter. By the time I came along, my parents' friends, whose children were more my brother's and sister's ages, were pretty much in their own empty nests. That meant I went along with my parents when they got together with their friends. It also meant that my sister, Dot, who was 12 by the time I made my arrival into the family, took on the role of a sort of junior mom and nurturer to me. But as I reflect on my life, I realize that she was so much more—she was an inspiration who later taught me much about being a risk-taker and an entrepreneur.

My parents were wonderful, and I felt truly loved. They encouraged me to be confident and independent, even as a young child. Because of the roles my parents played in the community, and because of the big age gap between my older siblings and me, I spent much more time around adults than I did around children my age, and I was given a lot of freedom to grow.

Whatever we did and wherever we went when I was little—to the United Presbyterian Church, where my father was a Sunday school teacher, or to any number of adult social activities my parents participated in—I was always in the public eye. I consciously patterned myself after my father’s speech and mannerisms and on the way he carried himself.

I later extrapolated that my father’s Scouting experience guided him to be active in his church, and there was a spoken faith in my family’s life and household that helped me to have an awareness of God. In my life now, I worship God through prayer and action. I like to say, “Church is on the trail,” meaning we can have a relationship with God anytime and anywhere. Moreover, I often tell my friends that the words we pray don’t matter as much as the *intent* of our words.



I remember being at odds with my father one time in particular. An older man from our church would frequently come by our house uninvited, late on Sunday afternoon. I always complained about it to my parents. To me, it looked like a free dinner was in his plan by coming over occasionally just before dinner time. I thought it was just plain rude.

I had an argument with my father over it. That was the first time I remember standing him down.

“Dad, you can love Tom like a Christian, but you don’t have to like him,” I said. “He obviously doesn’t have respect for us, coming over just at dinnertime. He’s begging in a polite kind of way.” Tom was a bachelor and simply didn’t want to cook a meal or was too cheap to go out and buy one. In my mind, he wanted to drop by the Alexanders’ and get a free meal because my mother was a good cook and pretty to look at.

It shocked my father that I stood up to him. Was I afraid of him? I was a little bit. But I remember the shocked look on his face when I confronted him: “You’re looking at this in the wrong way, Dad.”

In my view, which I still do not think was wrong, Dad was looking at it incorrectly. I know he didn't like the situation either, but he wouldn't admit it, and he certainly wouldn't do anything about it. He wasn't honest enough to admit it until I stood up to him. He didn't really like this man any more than I did. I felt that Tom's obviously planned intrusions into our Sunday time together were taking improper advantage of my parents and their Christian attitude and duty. Nonetheless, Dad must have said something to him because he stopped coming over unannounced.



My education began in the womb and continued when I took my first breath of air in 1945 and met my loving family, who helped create in me a thirst for knowledge that I still have today.

My father loved numismatics—the collection and study of coins and money. He was also a student of Mexican numismatic history and an expert on the Mexican Revolutionary period. Each fall, from my early childhood through junior high school, my parents requested permission to take me out of school for a month or so for trips to Mexico. They had an ironclad rule on these trips: From the moment we crossed the border into Mexico until we returned to the United States, I could speak only Spanish to my father. That was a harsh reality for me, and I hated him at the time for making me do that. In hindsight, I love him for it. I learned so much, grew so much, and became more self-disciplined, too, as a self-reliant learner.

Setting aside how I felt about having to speak only Spanish, these really were incredible trips for me. The history of Pancho Villa was a big part of our trip one year. He was the Mexican Revolutionary general whose exploits on and off the battlefield made him one of the world's great legends, as well as the source material for dozens of books, Hollywood movies, and songs. That year, we met Villa's widows and even saw the big, black 1919 Dodge touring car in which he was assassinated in 1923. On Christmas Day

in 1951, I was able to climb up and put my little finger right into one of the 40 bullet holes that riddled the car. What a learning experience. These annual trips were important educational opportunities for me. And while I didn't fully recognize it at the time, sometimes we even found ourselves in situations where our safety was in question. That, too, was valuable experience.

I learned a lot from our Mexican adventures. My parents made a point of stopping at every museum along the way, and we took every tour available to us. Those experiences were part of a deep and expansive practical education I was fortunate to be immersed in over the years. Experiences like these taught me the value of thinking deeply and asking insightful questions. My schools back home were fine with these trips, because it was clear to them that I learned a great deal in my travels.

The education that I received outside of school was incredible, but for many reasons, I did not go on to receive a formal education. While that cost to me is what I could have learned formally, it worked for me and my career. I encourage everyone to get an education and never stop learning, no matter what form the education takes.



My dad's experiences in Mexico made him a sought-after speaker at coin clubs, and so, not surprisingly, I also developed a keen interest in numismatics. I became a coin collector at a young age because my dad was a coin collector. When I was 11 or 12 years old, I was invited to speak at a coin club where my father was also speaking. It wasn't a sophisticated event, but it was clear to me that the audience was getting something out of what I had to say. Before I knew it, I was getting invitations to speak at coin clubs all over Southern California. I was not yet a teenager at the time—I couldn't drive—so people would pick me up to drive me to the speaking engagements. It wasn't long before I was speaking to coin clubs almost as often as my father.

My coin club appearances inspired my first organized go at starting a real business. I borrowed money from my dad and bought \$50 worth of cents at the bank. Pennies were loose-bagged in those days, not rolled in paper wrappers. I would carry the heavy bag of coins in my red wagon for the trip home and then go through the tedious, painstaking process of sorting through thousands of cents, one by one. I always found half a dozen or so old or rare coins that were worth more than face value. After sorting out those that were valuable, I would roll up the rest of the cents and return them to the bank to pay back my father. Then I would trade or sell the valuable cents at coin conventions. I absolutely loved the work of trading coins and haggling over their value. My presence irritated some of the dealers, but I could sometimes coax them into making deals that favored me simply because they wanted to get rid of me badly enough that they let me get the upper hand in the trade or sale. I made a truly remarkable series of trades at one convention. I started with a single cent I had culled from a \$50 bag and then began wheeling and dealing my way up to more and more valuable coins, until finally I held a \$5 gold piece in my hand—all from a 1 cent investment and a lot of deal-making. That felt pretty good. Later, I sold my coin collection for \$400 and purchased my first car with that hard-earned money—a 1951 MG TD!

Owning that car was a lesson in itself. My father did not let me get my driver's license when I was eligible at age 16, so my only transportation was my bicycle until I turned 18 and got my license on my own. Being responsible for my own travel made me self-reliant—and it restricted me to double-dates. When I bought this great-looking MG, my father warned me that the high maintenance cost would be something that I could not afford. Of course, he was correct. It was a big lesson in cost analysis, something I use every day now.

There are so many different types of knowledge and ways of using what we have learned. While I do not have a formal education, I possess an

incredible number of life experiences and memories. God has blessed me with the power to organize my life experiences and put them to use in creating a successful life.





Chapter 2

I JOINED MY LOCAL CUB SCOUT PACK for a simple reason: All my friends were joining. I enjoyed it for the social activity, but I was never thrilled with it. But when I heard others talking about the weekend camping adventures that the older Boy Scouts were having, I thought, “OK, that’s more like it.” For me, building papier-mâché crafts and other projects the Cub Scouts did just didn’t stack up next to all the exciting stuff the Boy Scouts were doing. So, when the time came to make the transition to Boy Scouts, I was very excited.

My Boy Scout troop provided me with a great pathway for the development of my self-confidence. Our meetings were all about learning things, so we could be prepared for camping and other outings. Little did I know then that these lessons were preparing us for adulthood and life in general.

The Scoutmaster, Orin Dyer, became a powerful influence on my life. He was both a great Scoutmaster and an amazing man. He was a big, burly, tough fellow who worked as a lumberjack. He didn’t use a book to learn skills like how to tie a bowline; he did it for real in his work, and that earned him great credibility in our eyes.

Every boy respected him completely. He never needed to raise his voice; one cross look in a boy’s direction was all it took to square him away.

From his example, I have taken on a calm temperament in my life and have learned to use the power in my eyes, which are big and bold. Mr. Dyer truly was someone who was known to speak softly and carry a big stick, as President Teddy Roosevelt said. His quiet encouragement made a big impression on me and drove me forward to do my best.

Mr. Dyer challenged us to take on greater responsibilities and to be on a path of continuous personal growth. Immediately after I earned the rank of Star, our senior patrol leader left the troop. The first of us four Star Scouts inquired about the vacant post. "Who is going to be senior patrol leader now?" we asked Mr. Dyer.

"Whoever gets to Life Scout first," he answered.

I didn't need any motivation beyond that. I sat down and laid out a plan for how to get there. It became obvious that the other Star Scouts did not move on what I considered a challenge quickly as I did. I did not talk about what I was doing; I just got it done. I put everything I had into it and got to Life Scout ahead of the other boys. True to his word, Mr. Dyer made me senior patrol leader. But I didn't sit back and rest after that achievement; I kept working hard and pushed straight ahead to earn my Eagle Scout rank just before my 14th birthday. My parents didn't even know I had made Eagle until I told them they needed to prepare for my court of honor. I set out to achieve Eagle on my own, and I made the push on my own.

Not long after I received the Eagle Scout rank on April 20, 1959, I was invited to participate in the local Boy Scouts of America council's Century Club banquet. Local businessmen would each donate \$100 to sponsor one of the council's Eagle Scouts at the event. The sponsorship included picking the Scout up and escorting him to the banquet, where each Scout's accomplishments were praised. Because I had earned the Eagle rank at such an early age, I was asked to prepare a short speech for the occasion, and I was looking forward to it.

Somehow, though, instead of being paired with a local businessman, I was put together with the keynote speaker. He was an Eagle Scout who, I was told, flew the rocket-powered X-15 for NASA. The X-15 was a revolutionary hypersonic jet—to this day the fastest manned plane ever built. In 1967, it set a speed record of 4,520 miles per hour, at a record-shattering altitude of 102,100 feet. A handful of the brave (and lucky!) men who were certified to fly the X-15 each went on to become astronauts. So, I was excited when the keynote speaker pulled up in front of my house for the ride to the Petroleum Club for the banquet.

When I heard the knock at the door and opened it, a handsome man stuck out his hand: “Hi,” he said. “I’m Neil Armstrong.”

Neil Armstrong, Eagle Scout and X-15 pilot—and later, the first human being to walk on the moon—came inside my home and met my parents before driving me to the banquet. Later, he also autographed my program from the event. After the event, Neil drove me home and said good night to my parents. We stood in our front yard and watched him drive off into the darkness. It was a truly memorable night. By the time Apollo II Mission Commander Neil Armstrong walked on the moon several years later, I had lost track of my autographed program, but I still have that amazing memory.

Incidentally, on February 22, 2018, I returned to Long Beach to speak at the Long Beach Area Council’s Eagle Scout Recognition Dinner, where this story began in 1959. My Eagle has also now landed.

I loved Scouting then, and I love it today. Some of the most important lessons of my youth came to me through Scouting. Even so, by the time I was old enough to get into Explorer Scouts, I was ready to move on to other adventures. It was time for me to apply my abilities in pursuit of the single biggest passion of my youth—magic.



I got my start in magic when I was quite young. My dad taught me my first card magic on Christmas Eve 1951, during one of our trips in Mexico. I showed the trick to a couple of Mexican boys through the window of our hotel room, and they were surprised to see the magic, especially in my eyes. Later that trip, young girls we passed along the street pointed to my eyes saying, “Ojos azules,” meaning “blue eyes.” I was a little embarrassed, but from that moment on, I knew there was something special about my eyes.

God gave me powerful blue eyes, which I have used as a very important communication tool in my life. Looking people in the eyes and smiling lowers stress, eases tension, and gets even the hardest of people to smile back at you. Once I understood the power of my eyes, I began to develop their use. Depending on how I use my eyes, I can make someone afraid, intimidated, at ease, entertained, or anywhere in between. In combination with creative facial expressions, my eyes can bring me into a control position immediately.

As I sharpened my magic skills, I learned how to use my big blue eyes to maximize the way I engaged and held the attention of the audience, just like I did in Mexico with my first card magic. I knew that I had powerful eyes, and I used that advantage to train myself to employ a direct, focused gaze to command any room I was in. I became expert at communicating feelings, and even selling ideas, by engaging people with the spirit and emotion they saw in my eyes and my facial expressions. When I accomplished that, I was elevated to a greater level of entertainment ability.



I fell in love with magic—the technique, the mechanics, the sleight of hand, the mystery, and the way the magician mesmerizes the audience from start to finish of each trick. I began to practice my newfound craft ceaselessly, and by the time I was 9, I was performing for friends and family. Before too long, I was running a successful magic business, and I was being well paid

for my performances. I was passionate about magic, and I took the process of honing and perfecting my magic very seriously. Plus, I had a dream to chase.

In the summertime in the early 1960s, my father would drive us to Alamitos Bay to swim. For a time, in the beach community where we would park, one homeowner would leave his bicycle in his yard. I always stopped to admire it. The bicycle was the first 10-speed that I had ever seen, and yes, I coveted it and wanted one.

I was already doing magic shows for money and had an allowance for doing chores around our home. There was a bicycle shop along the route I walked to school, and I stopped in occasionally to look at the bicycles. A Schwinn 10-speed on the showroom floor for \$99.99 caught my eye, and while I had saved quite a bit from my magic and allowance, I still didn't have enough. While my father was out of town, I asked my mother to co-sign for a loan with me. She did co-sign, but when my father found out after he returned from his business trip, he was not happy. Luckily for her and me, I got several magic shows and paid the loan off.



It wasn't long before I was performing magic shows all over Southern California. People came to my home to take me to and from my performances because I wasn't old enough to drive. I started performing at private clubs, in ever-larger venues, and my reputation grew as a professional magician who knew how to put on a great show. My parents fielded calls from so many people from clubs that wanted to book me that it got to the point where my parents wanted me to back off the busy schedule a bit. I'm sure they were also concerned about the fact that people they didn't even know were coming by the house to take me to magic shows in places like Hollywood—30 miles away!—and because I often didn't get home until late at night.

Even though my reputation as a performer was growing, magic remained a mostly private passion for me in those days. I did magic when I wanted to. By the time I was a teenager, in fact, only a few of my close friends knew that I was a professional magician. They knew that I was good at it, but it wasn't something I bragged about. The other kids at school didn't know, nor did my teachers or the school administrators—at least not yet.

Magic required the same captivating projection of personal presence and confidence that I had first learned to apply in the numismatic world when I gave talks to clubs filled with adults who were decades older than me. I was comfortable in those situations, mostly because I grew up around so many adults and could, as a youth, speak to adults on their level. Talking to people who were older than me was never an issue, and I was becoming used to always being on stage, always in the public eye. There was never a time when I was uncomfortable being in the spotlight.

Good magicians don't need to raise their voice to take control of a room. Neither do good leaders. I learned how to use my physical presence and my eyes to bring rooms with 1,000 or more people to a complete hush. That is a powerful tool in magic—and in business. Magic can't happen without understanding the power of the eyes. The same is true for effective interpersonal and group communications in any setting. My father and Scoutmaster modeled it, and so did a future mentor of mine in magic: Dai Vernon.



Chapter 3

MY NAME BEGAN TO GET AROUND after I had been doing magic shows for a few years. As my reputation grew, I received the opportunity of a lifetime—a chance to work at the world-renowned Magic Castle. Every magician knows about that remarkable institution on Franklin Avenue in Hollywood. Part club, part performance venue, and the permanent international home of the Academy of Magical Arts, it's the place where every magician wants to appear. I had the talent to work there, but unfortunately, I was not old enough to even walk through the door. It's kind of funny today, because I discovered some years later that the Magic Castle's management knew I was underage, but they didn't care. In my case, I was there to entertain and to learn from the best magicians in the world. When I stepped into the building, I was in heaven.

I might have almost always been the youngest person in the room, but that didn't stop me from becoming one of the first house magicians at the Magic Castle. I loved being there as often as I could, and it inspired me more than ever to work hard to get better at my craft. Audiences loved me, my peers respected me, and the professionals who performed there respected me, too.

One man at Magic Castle changed everything for me. His name was Dai Vernon, a Canadian magician who was also known as “The Professor.”

Dai was universally regarded as the best card magician who ever lived. He used to joke that he had learned his first trick from his father when he was 7, which meant he had wasted only six years of his life. Dai was world-famous for inventing and improving a whole host of card and coin tricks—magic so good it baffled even professional magicians.

I saw Dai sitting alone late one night, and even though I was in complete awe of this legend of magic, I worked up the nerve to properly introduce myself to him. I walked over to his table, took a deep breath, and said hello: “Mr. Vernon, I’m Dave Alexander. We’ve met, but I’m sure you don’t remember me.” He nodded and shook my hand. “I just wanted to tell you that my all-time favorite piece of card magic is your Twisting the Aces.” The magic effect uses only four cards—the four aces—and with every lateral twist of the cards in the magician’s hands, a different ace appears face-up. I fell in love with it the first time I saw it done. “It’s my favorite effect,” I explained. “I’ve been here a while now, and I’ve noticed that I haven’t seen you use it. I would like to ask your permission to use it here at the Castle since it’s not part of your current repertoire.”

I’m sure he smiled to himself. “Sit down,” he said. “Show it to me.”

I sat down and began to perform the magic. It was intimidating to be an apprentice presenting an advanced, world-famous trick for the man who had created it. Dai watched me as the cards moved in sequence, and when I was done, he made a suggestion and asked me to do it again. I adjusted my routine based on his suggestion and did the sequence again, and yet again after that. Dai simply said, “Good. You did it very well. You may use it.” And that was that. He left the table, and I just sat there for a minute, beaming with pride.

After that evening, Dai took me under his wing. He mentored me and introduced me to new people and new kinds of magic. The way I saw it, Dai Vernon took me up into the stratosphere, to the greatest heights a

magician can reach. There I was, a welcome member of the circle of some of the world's greatest magicians. It was incredible.

Sometime later, my dad visited the Magic Castle, and I introduced him to Dai. My father was not one to share his feelings with me, but he often would check on me to make sure I was safe and not getting into situations that could put me in harm's way. My father and Dai talked for a moment while I was away from the table. I learned about their conversation later. My dad told Dai, "You've been so kind to my son. Thank you so much. I know it means the world to him. May I ask why you have been so nice to him?"

"In all my years as a magician," Dai replied, "your son is the only one who has ever come to me and asked permission to use one of my tricks. You have taught him to be respectful. You know, he didn't have to ask for permission. The Twisting the Aces card effect has been published in a book and is in the public domain, but he came to me anyway. I saw potential in him. That's when I decided that I was going to look after this young man. He is a very accomplished performer."

It was quite a compliment to hear that one of my greatest idols said those things about me. I suppose I was being polite when I asked Dai for permission, but I knew it was the right thing to do—not to mention the fact that my dad would have punished me big-time if I hadn't politely asked an adult for something like that. In any event, I was doing something right, and from a very young age, I learned to act when I felt strongly convicted about something.

Under Dai's tutelage, my technical skills soared. Much of what Dai taught me is not in any books on doing magic. In helping me perfect his Twisting the Aces card effect, he entrusted priceless, specialized knowledge to me. That and my diligence in practicing helped me to excel at card magic. I was proficient at magic when I first came to the Magic Castle, but suddenly, the best performer in the world was coaching me personally. The fact that

he was so happy to do that made this whole experience a truly amazing time for me. In a way, he shared his stage with me in a once-in-a-lifetime way, and for that I am eternally grateful.

In 1967, I received an award for being the best close-up cards magician from the Society of American Magicians. It was a great honor to have my passion, hard work, and commitment recognized. And I knew how much Dai Vernon had contributed to my journey. He led me to realize that the magic comes from within me—a critical philosophy that guides my life to this day.



Most magicians gravitate to a particular area of specialization. For me, it was cards. As I progressed with my skills at card magic, I discovered that many established magicians couldn't begin to approach my level of performance. They might have been great stage magicians, or they might have done great cigarette magic or any number of other specialized skill sets. Age didn't matter—you either had the skills or you didn't. Because of that, it wasn't long before older professional magicians began coming to me to learn how I did my magic. I was a confident kid to begin with, but that attention from seasoned magicians made me more confident than ever.

The opportunity to work with someone as skilled and famous as Dai came about only because I already had a strong sense of what was right and proper. I didn't think a lot about it at the time, but it's fair to say that I was a pretty good kid. My dad was a great leader and mentor to me, and Scouting clearly underscored for me the importance of living by a code of values that guided good behavior.



Because of its stature and location, the Magic Castle drew some unique crowds. I regularly worked the smaller rooms, where I was up close and personal with the audience—and sometimes the people in the audience

were the sort who drew attention just by virtue of being in the room. I often worked for celebrities, including such luminaries as Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi Jr.

One night around 1967, I had to contend with the presence of a huge star, one who was himself a magician at the start of his career: Johnny Carson, America's best-known late-night television host. Johnny's presence threw off the energy and the balance of power in the room. I just couldn't hold on to the audience with him in the room. I knew he wasn't intentionally trying to throw me off, but it was still a difficult situation. If he simply laughed or coughed, all heads swung in his direction. I ended up feeling about as compelling as a couple cents' worth of old meat up there on the stage.

I finished my show seriously frustrated; my spirits were pretty far down in the gutter. Suddenly, there was a knock at the backstage door, and somebody said that Johnny Carson wanted to talk to me.

He realized his presence had disrupted my performance. "I'm sorry about that," he said. And then came the silver lining. He asked if I would I be willing to perform at a private dinner party he was having that night at the Castle. Wow! Just, wow! My spirits rocketed up out of the gutter. Johnny Carson wasn't simply being kind, he genuinely respected me. He engaged me as his peer. That moment holds special meaning in my life, because through it all, I learned how to be bold and to share my stage with big personalities.

On another night, I was watching through a screen while an opening magician warmed up the audience. The opener on this night was Johnny Platt. While he wasn't a particularly good magician, he was a terrific performer and a great all-around entertainer. Johnny could tell I was nervous that evening.

"Dave, I want to explain something to you," he said. "Sure, there is a big crowd out there tonight. Some of them are famous, some of them are

people you will never see again in your life. But every single person out there shares at least one thing in common: They each paid good money to come here and watch you perform.”

Johnny’s remarks hit me like a ton of bricks. In fact, what he said that night actually changed my life. I realized that they were here to see *me*; I wasn’t there to watch *them*. In a very real and tangible way, my realization was a simple reminder, a kind of validation: The magic is within *me*. The people in the audience were seated out there because I was here, and they wanted to see me. It was one of the first times in my life when I truly realized that I belonged—that I was important. My confidence got a huge boost at that moment. I went out on stage and put on one of my best performances.

I’ve heard it said that the most important person is the one who holds the information. I love being on stage, but I also appreciate how important it is to share the stage. I’m not always the person with the information, after all. That’s an important concept for leaders to always keep in mind. I do know when to take the stage, and I also know when to release the stage to someone else, so we achieve the best results for everybody involved, no matter what the venue or objective might be.



I have been a natural salesman roughly since birth, and that has put me on stage for most of my life. It drew attention to me as a young person, and being an interesting teenager and a successful adult has kept me on stage performing in life. Being a good salesman, I have learned to share the stage. It is enjoyable to share the stage with those around me to make a more meaningful experience for all, whether it be in a conversation, at a meeting, or on an actual stage.

Magic is how many people define me. But while magic has been my life stage since my early years and is one of my most important tools, I do not

think it's the path for everyone. I want those around me to develop their own magic.

Making those I meet feel that I am almost supernatural has just happened over time. Many people I meet incorrectly assume that they could not, on their own, accomplish what I have done in my life. However, a dream does not become reality through magic; it takes sweat, determination, and hard work—then it looks like magic. I have worked so hard that what I've accomplished can sometimes seem like magic even to me.

In life, if you believe in yourself, believe that you can make things happen, what you accomplish will look like magic to others. When 200 years ago science discovered a phenomenon such as magnetism, it was indistinguishable from magic. It might have even seemed to be supernatural. Nothing has changed; we see magic around us all the time when looking at the accomplishments of others. Yet, it only appears magical because we don't know about the sweat, determination, and hard work it took to accomplish the goal.





Chapter 4

THERE WAS A LOT GOING ON IN MY LIFE by the time I finished high school in 1963. I knew that big things lay ahead on the horizon for me. But as much as I loved magic, it seemed pretty clear to me that, despite my skill level, magic might not offer the most promising career path. I needed to find other work to make ends meet, so in addition to working nights and weekends at the Magic Castle in Hollywood, I got a job in the mailroom at National Gypsum. It was a “practical” job my high school guidance counselor helped me to land. And then, in the fall of 1967, the future Mrs. Alexander—Marilyn—came into my life like a lightning bolt.

Marilyn and a girlfriend of hers came over one afternoon to visit my roommate. When I saw her, I knew. I said to myself, “I am going to marry that girl.” At the time, I was not looking for a wife, but after meeting her it was all that I could think about. I spent as much time as I could showing her around, and I was overjoyed when she accepted my request for a date.

Our first date was a double date. We all piled into a Volkswagen van and headed to Griffith Observatory for a show in the planetarium and a picnic in the park. It was a free date—and free was good on my budget in those days. After a first date on a blanket in the park, I was doubly sure that I was going to ask Marilyn to marry me. Of course, I realized that

I would need to convince her that I was the right man for her, and magic wasn't going to get that job done for me.

Our romance was intense, and I saw Marilyn almost every day. At the time, my family owned a cabin in Cedarpines Park, outside of Los Angeles. I asked Marilyn to go there with me for a weekend trip with my sister, Dot, and her husband, Dick, as chaperones. It had only been three and a half weeks since we met, but I swore to myself that before the weekend was up, I would persuade Marilyn to marry me. I took that oath to myself seriously and spent the weekend talking to her about why we would do well as husband and wife. In the process, I made her many promises.

"But, I can't get married," she argued. "I have to go to college. Nobody in my family has ever gone to college, and I am supposed to be the first."

"I'll put you through school," I promised. "I will make it happen."

"How will that work?" she asked. "I don't even have a car. And besides, where are we going to live?"

"I'll make sure that we have a good, solid, safe place to live," I assured her. "And I will get you a car and your college education."

I responded to her concerns one by one as the night slowly turned to day. Finally, she had no more questions, and she agreed to marry me.



I was so thrilled when Marilyn said yes, but almost immediately, I began to wonder how I was going to make it all work. I had promised her a lot, and I had every intention of delivering on every count. But how, exactly, was I going to pull it off? No matter, I thought; I had made the promises, and I was a man of my word. I would just have to make it happen, whatever it took.

One of her major goals was to complete her college education. When we met, she had just started at Long Beach State College, majoring

in art and minoring in education. No one in her family had ever attended college, and she very much wanted to get a degree. I made a promise to her that I would do whatever was necessary to provide her with the education that she desired. At the time, I was working days in the mail room at National Gypsum Company and evenings at the Magic Castle in Hollywood. Magic was providing income but not enough to support a wife and send her to college. I was driven to immediately work on getting a stable career started. Magic was not the career to base my commitment to her on.

After the engagement, we were not married for nine months. During that time, I had to build Marilyn's trust in me and make her feel comfortable enough to make a commitment beyond the initial promises we made to each other. During that nine months, I had a great deal to accomplish: Get a steady income, hopefully in the form of a career position. I also had to provide us with a place to live, transportation for both of us, enough income to live on, and the funds to pay for her education.

My first move was to sit down and talk to my boss at National Gypsum and see what I could count on to make working with them a career. I did not know it, but they were unhappy with the sales order desk manager. They told me about the position, and I accepted the job. This put me into the sales department, where I could see a possible career path opening. My personal goal was to perform well on the sales desk and then move into a sales position, which came with a company car. OK, I thought, I would get this job, have a company car, and give mine to Marilyn for the transportation that she would need.

After being on the job for a short time, I asked to meet with my boss. He was curious about why I wanted the meeting, and it shocked and impressed him when I entered his office, shut the door, and told him about my career as a professional magician in the evenings. I brought out my deck

of cards and showed off. When I offered to take him and his wife to the Magic Castle, he was thrilled and accepted. He came back to me later in the day and asked if he could invite the president of the company and his wife. Of course, I agreed, since it worked into my plan to impress them at the Castle. I wanted to show off my communication skills in public. I made arrangements with one of the founders of the Castle, Milt Larson, to work in the close-up gallery on the night the executives of National Gypsum planned to attend.

It worked as planned. They had a great time, and immediately, I was no longer the mail boy who just got a job on the order desk, but someone special with whom they worked. The next day at work, I offered to entertain customers for them or with them at the Castle. Immediately, I was a star in their eyes. As time went on, occasionally I would entertain, along with their sales staff, important customers at the Castle.

In March 1968, a sales opportunity opened in Flagstaff, Arizona. I needed this promotion for the car and enough of a base salary to support Marilyn. She and I spoke about the opportunity and decided I should apply. I had built a good relationship with the sales staff, and a couple of them took me to lunch to tell me about the sales position that I was going to be offered. They were kind to me and explained why the position was open. Our company had never done well in Flagstaff, and each sales person who had taken the job had failed because there was not enough business in the territory. They advised me not to take the position, but to wait for something in a better territory. I took their advice and did not take the position, but I was getting nervous because we were planning a wedding for August and my plan was not in place.

I thought about my high school counselor who got me the job at National Gypsum. I had entertained her and her husband at the Magic Castle as a way of thanking her for getting me the job, and they had a blast. She hadn't known about my magic, and my performance blew her away.

After the show, she told me, “I don’t care where you are, what you’re doing, or what’s going on in your life. If you ever need help finding a job, I insist: Come to me. I will do everything I can to help you.”

Now it was time for me to take her up on the offer. “I need a better job,” I told her when we met. “I love doing magic, but I’m going to have to cut back; it’s just not consistent enough. I’m one of the best in the world at what I do, but that doesn’t mean it’s a profitable enterprise. I’m getting married soon, and I need something that I can count on.”

She got back to me quickly with a job referral. “There’s an interesting oil company—Southwest Grease and Oil,” she said. “They’re a private brand manufacturer of lubricants. They’re looking for a young salesman, someone who is intelligent, hard-working, and articulate.” She told me more about the job and the company. They were a big and fairly specialized operation, with headquarters nearby. There would be some traveling involved with the work, but that didn’t bother me. With her help, I set an appointment for a job interview.

I was supposed to meet with the vice president of sales, but he was out for some reason when I showed up for the interview. I met with the president of the company’s West Coast division instead. I didn’t know it at the time, but the president knew my father; their paths had crossed in the Long Beach area. They weren’t close friends, but he knew my dad, and I’m sure that didn’t hurt my chances.

The president introduced himself and apologized for his vice president of marketing sales not being available. We sat in his office and he said, “Tell me about yourself.” I described the work I had been doing at National Gypsum, figuring that was my most relevant experience.

“What else do you do?” he asked.

“Well, on weekends and some weeknights, I work as a professional magician,” I said. I described the Magic Castle, and his eyes lit up as I told him about my act.

“Would you show me something?”

I always carried a deck of cards in my pocket. I showed him an effect that had earned me the award from the Society of American Magicians. It was a bold thing to do for someone one on one, and he was stunned.

When I finished, he just sat there, shaking his head. Then he looked at me and simply said, “You’re hired.”

“Excuse me?” Had I heard him correctly? “We haven’t talked about the job or pay or anything,” I said.

“That’s all right. If you can create the excitement in customers that you have in your eyes doing magic, you’ll do just fine. We’ll work the rest of the details out.”

“OK,” I answered. What else could I say? My communication skills, the way I utilized my eyes, and the way I handled myself under pressure had proven their worth yet again. Less than half an hour after I was introduced to the president of the company, I walked out the door with a job paying \$800 per month—a huge sum to me in those days—plus a company car.

I was thrilled. This new job would be the basis for making my marriage with Marilyn work financially and the beginning of a real career in the oil business.

That evening, I needed to tell two people about my new job; the first was Marilyn. I went over to her home, where she was recovering from a skiing accident. She was very excited, mostly about the fact that in two weeks she would take possession of my Austin Healy Sprite. No more bus rides, walking, or asking to borrow her family car. The other person who I went to see was my father, who was himself in the oil business. He had never heard of Southwest Grease. He said the only good grease company that he knew was Battenfeld Grease and Oil Corporation out of Wichita. What my father didn’t know was that Southwest Grease had purchased

Battenfeld Grease several years before. In our discussion, it also came out that he had met Bob Nowell. Once he learned both of those things, he was very happy for me.

Later, when I gave my two weeks' notice to National Gypsum, they tried to convince me to stay with a nice counteroffer. I didn't accept it, but I sure appreciated it. It was another reminder that I had some worth that others recognized—and it was good for my confidence.

Once my introductory training with Southwest was complete, I quickly got up to speed on the grease lubricant part of the business. I traveled all over the western United States. Grease is a very small part of the oil business—a specialized niche. As a salesman, I wasn't the one calling on the major oil companies. That was the vice president's job. I called on jobbers and distributors, the ones who were large enough to have a private brand. I quickly discovered that I had a knack for the job.

One of my skill sets is my ability to build trust in people. As I traveled from business to business, people shared things with me that they wouldn't normally share with a provider of fuel. As I built trust with them, they would open their books and records to ask me a question or for an opinion, or just to show me something about their operations. They taught me a lot about the industry, and as time went by, I built relationships with these people that went far beyond what you would expect to find between a salesman and a customer.

Later, when I went into business for myself, the perspective I gained from those sales experiences proved to be invaluable. Some of the same people who had been my customers now became personal friends. Sometimes, they even invited me to go on trips that I couldn't afford, at least in the early days. I finally bit the bullet and took one of those trips many years later—my first European vacation. I had a blast, and it strengthened the relationships I had with those who had invited me. That was another

important lesson for me about how relationships grow and develop. Travel took me to a different level, and it introduced me to new people, experiences, and associations that I couldn't have accessed previously. I like to say that I caught the travel bug, and I really scratched that itch when I got involved with endurance racing in the years ahead.



Oh, and in the end, I did get the girl. Marilyn and I became husband and wife on August 16, 1968, at my parents' church, First United Presbyterian Church, in downtown Long Beach, California. It was a simple ceremony with a large attendance of friends and family, plus famous magicians such as Zicarte, Dai Vernon, and Johnny Platt. We were on our way.

Marilyn knows how seriously I take promises. The weekend that we spent in the mountains with my sister and brother-in-law, doing my best to convince her to marry me, was a time of many promises. I have kept every single promise I made to her—every single one. She has shared with me and with others that she appreciates how I always do what I say I will do. I am so very thankful to God for Marilyn, who has been so positive, loving, and patiently supportive of me throughout our marriage, which has now been over 50 years.

Times were very tough when we were first married. I was traveling about 60 percent of the time, and that often included weekends. It was hard on both of us. From time to time, she would tell me that we didn't have enough money for even the basics, like food.

That's when I would tell her that it was time for a road trip, and away we'd go. My lodging and meals were covered by work, so we lived it up like millionaires for a week. Each time we came into a new town, I dropped her off at the local library so that she could work on her college assignments. Marilyn did her work while I did mine, and by the time we got back home a week later, everything was better. That's how we got by in the early years.

I believed in Marilyn, and she believed in me. The success we enjoy today happened because we made it happen together. When we renewed our vows on our 50-year anniversary in 2018, we agreed that they should be shaped according to the Scout Oath, Scout Law, and Scout motto—we live by those principles every day in our marriage.





Chapter 5

THE OIL EMBARGO OF 1973 REALLY SHOOK UP the geopolitical stage, and the tremors were felt throughout the oil industry, right down to my backyard. In response, the president of Southwest Grease and Oil changed the direction of the company. He wanted to move me into a different position that offered a small raise (\$100) and a new role, but at the same time, I would have to give up my company car and work inside the office, not out in the field. The raise of \$100 was a pay decrease because the small raise would not cover the cost of buying a car and having to pay for insurance, repairs, and gasoline.

Then, one of our largest customers of grease and lube oil base stock, Witco Chemical—which had acquired Golden Bear, a company that I had done a lot of work with—offered me a job in an area I was much more interested in: crude oil. They wanted to train someone to become their new crude oil buyer, and they knew I had a background in crude because my father had been a crude oil buyer. To make the offer even sweeter, they were also offering the use of a company car. The only drawback: I would have to move north to Bakersfield. That last catch took some figuring. I wasn't keen on moving to Bakersfield, but it felt to me like it was the right time to take on a new challenge. I was asked to make only a six-month commitment to Bakersfield as a training period, and they

would pay my expenses to travel back and forth so I could be with Marilyn. So, I agreed.



Witco's refinery was small but very profitable. Right from the start, though, even as I was settling in, I felt a little uneasy. I liked the people, but I did not like working for a large national company. It didn't take me long to decide that this job wasn't the right fit for me as a long-term career path. "The first time I get a good offer," I told Marilyn, "I'm out of here."

An offer eventually did come from a small trading company called Petroleum Trading and Transportation Company—PTTC. I asked for what I thought was a lot of money—they had to double my take-home pay—and to my surprise, they agreed to my request. Marilyn and I were able to buy a little home in Bakersfield, and we began to put down some roots. I put to work the relationships I had developed over the years and delivered a number of new suppliers, which enabled them to make more deals of a larger size in the market. After some time, I was sure of one thing: I was doing far more for them than they were doing for me. I wasn't crazy about the fit at PTTC either, and I was beginning to appreciate how much value I had brought to their business. I started to wonder if it made more sense for me to go to work for myself rather than being someone else's employee. Marilyn and I had just settled in to Bakersfield, though, so I decided to stick it out for the time being.

A year or so later, I got a call that changed my life. A wealthy man I knew in the oil business asked me to meet him for breakfast. He was the owner of a successful refinery operation called Sunland Refining Corporation.

As we ate, he dropped a bombshell: He had sold the refinery the night before, and he wanted me to become his partner in a brand-new business venture. I was stunned. He would put up the initial capital, and I would be responsible for running the day-to-day operations of the business. He let

me sign a note for 10 percent of the stock with operations to buy up to 50 percent of the stock over time. I couldn't turn down an offer like that. We shook hands on the deal, and then we went on a working vacation together to the Caribbean to sort out all of the details. At the end of the trip, we stopped in San Antonio at the National Petroleum Refiners convention and let everyone know about our new company.

My partner had established a name for himself in the industry, which certainly opened doors for us, but it also included some baggage. Everywhere we went, people asked, "Hey, why did you sell the refinery?" They couldn't understand his reasoning. In those days, in the wake of the oil embargo, owning a refinery made you a king; you were invited to the best parties, and everybody wanted to be your friend. It just didn't make sense to people why someone in his position would willingly walk away from such a great situation.

I finally told him, "I've got to go out alone. All they want to do is talk to you about why you sold the refinery." He understood, and on most deal making calls I went alone. I had to establish myself in my new identity as a business owner, not an employee.

I also reconnected with people I knew going back to when I worked for Golden Bear. Some of those old connections I developed into new and larger relationships. I found good sources for buying crude oil; in fact, sometimes we would turn right around and sell the crude we had just purchased for a fast profit. Other times, we would take the crude to a refinery and have it processed into gasoline and diesel, and then market the fuels. There was always an angle to work, no matter what the prevailing market conditions were like.

ENEXCO launched with just my partner and me in a little one-room office. Eventually, we hired out some accounting services and brought in an employee who had an accounting background. In those days, I touched

every single piece of paper, and I wrote every single letter that went out. I had to do everything.

Even with all my responsibilities, we were still generating positive attention from some of the other industry players. One of our biggest customers was a company called Louisiana Jet Fuel Company—Lajet. I was selling them a lot of crude. One day, they reached out to me, saying they were planning on getting into the crude oil-buying business in California and wanting to know if I would still do business with them after they made the move. “Well, no,” I told them. “If you’re going to become a competitor, I can’t continue supplying crude to you. That just doesn’t work for me.” I’m not sure how they thought I would respond. I was quite happy with the mutually beneficial arrangement we already had in place.

They returned a couple of weeks later with a new proposition. They asked me to be their partner. I would be president, and I would run the business. We would use their line of credit and adhere to their credit rules.

Eventually, Marilyn and I pulled up stakes and moved from Bakersfield to Phoenix, Arizona. As I started with the new company, our initial plan was to buy out Lajet in Phoenix, where there was already a terminal. The transition would be anything but seamless. In fact, getting the business off the ground was a real struggle.

The temporary partners included some of the executives from Lajet. They would not personally guarantee anything to do with the financing of operations, mostly, I concluded, because their wives wouldn’t let them. They were good businessmen, but they weren’t entrepreneurs willing to take on risk. So, I personally funded everything. I sold my entire stock portfolio and borrowed against my retirement plan. I went all in. By that point, there was no reason not to—I was committed. We might be uncomfortable in the short term, I decided, but the upside for taking on the risk and staying the course was going to be tremendous.

Looking back, I think we might have pushed too hard to expand the business too quickly and in too many directions. When that became clear to us, we whittled down our focus into just being a fuels terminal company. When we did, the tide began to turn in our favor. We lost some of our early investors who were interested in other businesses, but we wound up partnering more deeply than ever with the Cardon family. The Cardons were the largest independent fuel retailer in Arizona. I knew of them dating back to my days as a traveling lubricant salesman, when they had a Shell distributorship and a warehouse. We had met at a convention or two but had never developed any significant relationship. But when I acquired the terminal in Phoenix, Craig Cardon wanted to get to know me. They had tried to buy the terminal that I was successful in acquiring.

I had been immersed in the oil business my whole life. I used to go to work with my father every Saturday morning and climb derricks, and later, I learned how to gauge tanks. The Cardons did not have that kind of background in the oil business, but they were extremely savvy businessmen, and they were fast learners. Over time, they learned from me, and I learned a lot from them. I also earned their respect, and they earned mine in return. They were the right kind of partner at just the right time.

Craig Cardon turned out to be one of the best mentors I have had in my life even though there are plenty of things that he and I do not share. There are also a great many experiences in his background that helped to fill in gaps in areas where I did not have the right kind of knowledge. The one vital thing we do have in common is a rock-solid belief in the importance of living with integrity. Another thing we share is the way that we approach challenges and opportunities. Show us something difficult, and we will each respond with the same words: "I can do that."

Craig and his brothers invested in my business at a critical time, and he has been my partner since July 1982. Even though they pursue other

business interests outside our mutually owned companies, we have done well together financially, and so he and his family give a lot of time and attention to our projects.

I've done work with other members of Craig's family, too. The Cardons have partnered with me on many deals, and in the process, we have set up separate limited liability companies for each of them so that they can weigh in and make decisions quickly when necessary. Because of our longstanding connection, the Cardons treat me differently from others with whom they work; they treat me more like family.

Integrity is the glue that holds my relationship with the Cardons together. They trust me, I trust them, and my team knows that they are an integral part of that network of trust. The Cardons keep their promises, and that is very important to me. My wife, Marilyn, knows with absolute certainty that if I ever wound up under a speeding bus, the Cardons would keep the businesses running smoothly and profitably, and most importantly, that they would take care of her. That unqualified trust is the bedrock of our relationship.

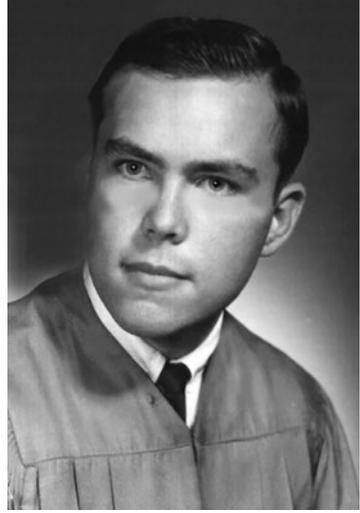




David S Alexander



Future Eagle Scout Dave proud of his Cub Scout uniform



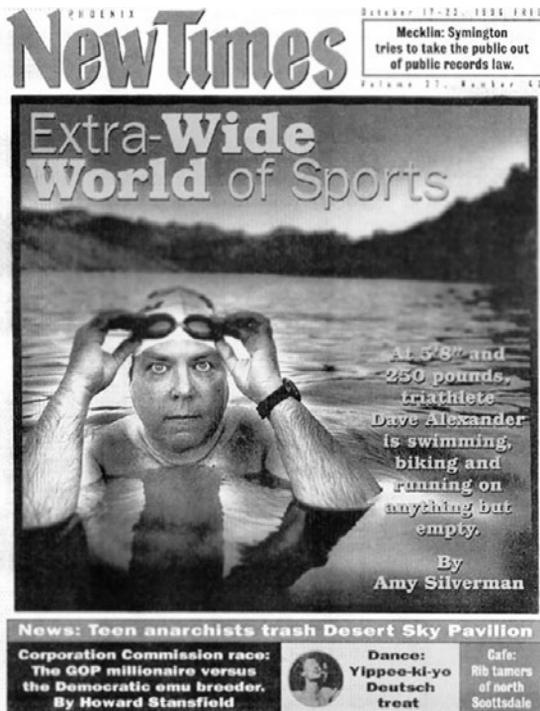
Graduating high school at age 18



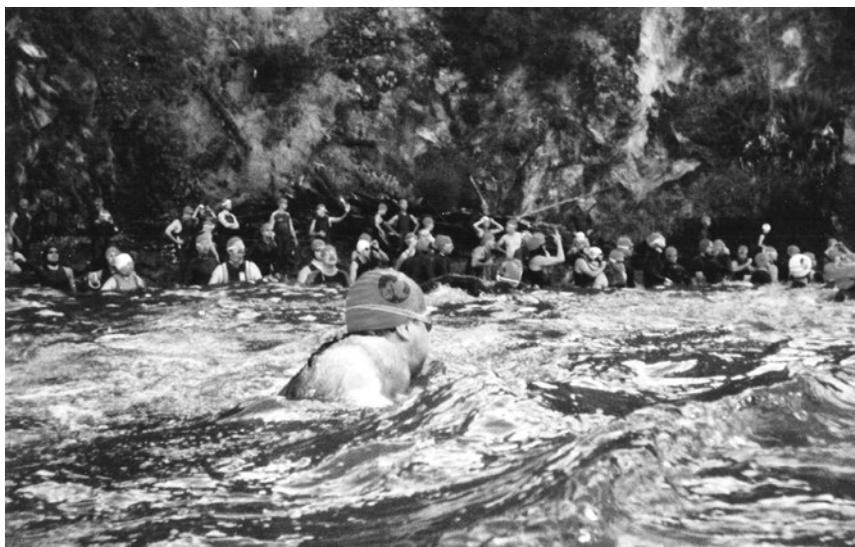
Age 11, at Knotts Berry Farm in October 1956



*Marilyn and I tied the knot—and cut the cake—on August 16, 1968,
at First United Presbyterian Church in downtown Long Beach, California.
We've been together ever since.*



As somewhat of an unorthodox athlete, I became world-famous in another discipline: endurance racing.



Warming up for the Escape From Alcatraz Triathlon



My beautiful wife, Marilyn, and I celebrated 50 wonderful years of marriage in 2018.



At the 2017 National Scout Jamboree at the Summit Bechtel Reserve, I am triumphant in dedicating one of my venues that will help Scouts from all over the world become leaders of great moral character.



The Eagle has landed: Here I am in 2018 returning to the Long Beach Council fund-raising banquet where I met Neil Armstrong when I was a young Eagle Scout.



*Marilyn gives “me” a first kiss at the bronze unveiling ceremony.
I’m blessed to have led such a magical life.*



*I was proud to become a member of the BSA’s WP Society in 2017.
The “other” WP, Wayne Perry, and his wife, Christine Perry,
inducted me and presided over the ceremony.*



Chapter 6

MY BUSINESS HAS GROWN QUITE DRAMATICALLY since those early days, and that is something I attribute to the incredible team of people with whom I work. I trust them to do the right thing, every time, every day. They're an incredibly strong, capable, trustworthy, and motivated group of individuals. When it comes to leadership style, I learned over the years that if I must actively manage someone, then I really don't need them on my team. I have never wanted to manage people. I want to focus on continually building the business.

One of the most difficult things for an entrepreneur to learn is when to relinquish control. No one person can do it all when an enterprise grows to a significant size. I learned that if we were going to operate at the most efficient levels possible, I needed to delegate roles and responsibilities to those who were most qualified to fulfill them. I don't always have to be the one in charge of meetings—I don't always need to be on the stage! Things don't always have to happen my way; in other words, it is possible for us to get great results doing something totally different from what I would have done. Having said that, I do recognize that it can be difficult for some entrepreneurs to just let go.

I founded each of my 12 (as of 2018) companies, essentially working my way from a grease salesman to owning and operating the largest private

fuel terminal and affiliated companies in the Southwest. I did everything in the early days of each startup—accounting, emptying the trash cans, cleaning toilets—whatever needed to be done. I would still be happy to do whatever needs to be done today, but I must give up certain levels of control. If I don't give up some level of control, and if I don't delegate tasks to others, then I won't get as much done myself. Giving up control is a critical leadership function when developing a high-functioning team. Part of bringing people along and mentoring them is making sure they are ready to perform and can handle making decisions on their own. If I should happen to fall under a bus tomorrow, I want to know that my team will be able to handle things without a hitch. As I look at them today, I know that they could.

Building a strong and effective team is not easy. For example, I have hired people in the past because I liked them and saw their potential, similar to how Dai Vernon saw potential in me and coached me along in card magic. However, not everyone is a great fit for every position in a company, and you just don't know what you don't know until it's too late. For example, a person might be personable and likable, but if he or she doesn't perform to support the company, then changes in roles need to happen quickly. A leader knows that performance matters above everything else, but truthfully, it isn't always clear how to make employment changes when needed. Finding the right person for a position can take some time, but the time is worth the wait when the right person has been found.

A high-functioning, efficient, successful business machine needs all kinds of people and personalities to keep it on track, of course. Each of my team members has strengths that I rely upon. We are not all good at everything, and that's OK. Leaders need to recognize that fact. For example, Mike Gray, my executive vice president and right-hand man—

who, ironically, is left-handed—manages most business meetings and business development very well and had been instrumental in helping to develop our businesses. I met Mike when he was 17 and working in a bicycle shop that I used.

One day, after much consideration, I decided to bring on a CFO in a consulting capacity. Rich Tarnopolski was a chief financial officer for hire, and he had worked with a major accounting firm, where he was a star. I brought him onboard initially to provide analysis of several financial matters and, more importantly, to perform a deep-dive review of our accounting. From the time he undertook the job, I met with him almost constantly. Rich was very thorough, and he did such great work that I brought him on permanently. His work during the seven years he has been with me has been amazing. From a leadership perspective, the quality of work that Rich has done makes everyone's job easier—and that is the kind of thing that helps me have peace of mind.



I can't wait to get out on stage—any stage, big or small. That's who I am and where I shine, from my days speaking about coins, to leading my fellow Scouts as a peer, to performing magic throughout Southern California. I was always on stage. I am completely comfortable interacting with people in one-on-one settings or standing behind a podium in front of hundreds. Johnny Platt's admonition to me all those years ago at the Magic Castle—that every person in the audience paid money to watch me—applies in every situation in which I must communicate to people. There was a time when I felt that the audience—client, customer, etc.—was the most important ingredient in the communication recipe. But over time, I came to realize that the reason they are coming to me is because they know I will deliver the expertise and insight they seek. That puts me squarely in the center of the value delivery proposition in any communication forum.

This is a reality I have always sought to convey to young salespeople: *They* are the important ones in the conversation; they are the ones who will solve a problem, deliver a solution, improve a supply chain issue, provide a better product, help the customer save money, etc. So many positive and productive interactions begin with this simple, sincere question: “What can I do to help?”

My leadership style is not to micromanage people—or to manage them much at all, for that matter. Instead, I want to help to develop and strengthen their capabilities, delegate specific duties and responsibilities to them, and then get out of their way. In other words, I want my team members to recognize where and when they can add value to the customer and to our company, and then let them dive in without being told every little thing they must do.



In my experience as a leader, I have seen that it can be all too easy for a company to forget what its core purpose is supposed to be. For instance, some companies spend a great deal of time and money to create mission statements that can be as much as two pages long and set in tiny print. When I was a member of a CEO group a while back, we were talking about mission statements. One of the statements we examined is about as simple and direct a statement as you will ever see: “We sell peace of mind.” This company is FedEx, and their mission statement is right on: When I give a package to FedEx, I consider it delivered. I have peace of mind.

I found that statement to be refreshing, and when the time came for us to develop our own mission statement, I insisted we match the same kind of brevity and impact that company had achieved with its statement. Our statement became: “We sell convenience and added service.” That is the perfect summation of what my companies do.

In something of a twist on the company mission statement idea, I also asked myself, “What is it that I really want from my employees? And in line with that, how can each employee learn to do his or her job better and more efficiently?” I began asking each new employee to write down my answer to those questions, to commit it to memory, and maybe even post it where they could see it at the beginning of their workday. The phrase I created means something different to each employee, of course, but no matter what their role or responsibility may be, each employee understands where he or she fits within the mission statement I asked them to write down. It’s short and to the point, but it says it all: “I give Dave peace of mind.”

My chief financial officer, my executive vice president, and each of the people working in the terminal all do their part to give me peace of mind. Overall, I experience that peace of mind because I know that each member of the team is dedicated to making it real. That is a profound realization, one that I have even learned to turn around on myself. Each day, I ask myself, “What I can do to give *myself* peace of mind?” Furthermore, I ask how I can give peace of mind to others, starting with my wife and moving on to my employees and those with whom I do business.

I want my employees to have peace of mind, and I want them to feel secure. If a business or personal matter comes up that might affect them, for example, I want them to hear the news directly from me. And I want them to know—personally—that if something should happen to me and I could not carry on in my role and was no longer around to run the companies, it would not matter who stepped into my shoes—as employees, they would be secure. The more knowledge you have, especially when that knowledge comes from a trusted, credible source, the easier it is to experience peace of mind.

I work best when I have peace of mind, and I get that when I know that the people to whom I have delegated critical tasks are handling things properly. I don't need a blow-by-blow accounting of every action they undertake, and I don't need or have time to attend all meetings. But to ensure my peace of mind, I do want verbal reports from those meetings. I want to know if there's anything I need to know—especially anything that has changed—but I don't want people to worry or get bogged down with making reports. There are better ways to keep the flow of information moving and to watch what's happening with the staff, the suppliers, the truck drivers, and so on.



One of my habits as a leader has been to encourage my employees to reach out to each other and build bridges of understanding and respect that are mutually beneficial. I encourage them to have lunch together, get to know each other, and have a good rapport. The shoptalk they engage in during lunch is an important way to build a high-functioning, effective team.

I have always gone out of my way to engage with pretty much everybody. I like people, and I'm interested in them, and that probably makes it a little easier for me than for those who don't enjoy getting out of their comfort zones. I've always been naturally inclined toward the human element of business. Many people must learn how to engage others with comfort and ease; in my case, it's just part of my nature.

A company is only as good as its people, and it is only as strong as its people, too. The happier your people are, and the more they understand the business, the better they—and the company—will perform. Camaraderie within a company impacts the bottom line as much as sales or accounting. However, one thing truly impacts the bottom line more than others, and that is simply this: Every day, do what is most important first.

Living in this manner allows me to prioritize my day, and it certainly gave me the freedom to focus on another aspect of my life that is dear to me—triathlon racing.





Chapter 7

I AM COMPETITIVE BY NATURE. That's the most important thing to know about me if you want to understand how I became involved with triathlons and endurance racing. I first learned about the sport through a neighbor and an employee who each completed triathlons a year before I began to participate. Together, they launched a coordinated lobbying effort to talk up their accomplishments, while at the same time joking with me about my masculinity and parentage. I'm sure they thought that they were doing me a favor by cajoling this short little fat guy into losing some weight and getting into better shape. I knew they liked me, and they were persistent, and before you knew it, they wore me down. I was ready to race.

My friends told me that they were getting ready to run another race, and I agreed to train for it, too. I got into a jogging routine and prepared myself as best as I could both mentally and physically for my first 5K run. On the day of the race, I felt ready to run with my friends. What I found out, though, was that I was signed up for the 5K, but my friends were running the 10K. I raced without them beside me, and to my complete delight, I completed every step of the course. This was a huge personal accomplishment for me, and when I was handed that little piece of paper at the finish line congratulating me for participating and finishing, I felt like I had done something monumental. However, when my friends finished

the IOK run, I saw that they each received a T-shirt. That did it for me: I didn't want a certificate; I wanted a T-shirt! Yes, I *am* that competitive.

I immediately upped my training regimen so that I could run a IOK with my friends a few weeks later. I successfully completed that race (there was no way on Earth I wasn't going to finish), and I damn well got my T-shirt. I think my friends were impressed that I had made it to the finish line, but they didn't let up on their teasing, and I didn't let up on my training. It was official: I had caught the endurance racing bug.

After my initial successes, my friends goaded me into entering a triathlon at Firebird Lake in Phoenix, Arizona. I will never forget the date: May 23, 1982. I was 38 years old, and I was attempting the first serious sporting event in my life. The conditions that late spring day were intimidating, with temperatures reaching triple digits. I had a lot of mixed feelings about my first attempt at the swimming, biking, and running events that make up a triathlon. But the one feeling I did not have was that I couldn't do it. I knew I was as ready as I could be.

The race began with a 5-mile run and then continued with a 1-kilometer swim in a shallow lake made for water-skiing. The swim was a disgusting event; the water's surface was covered with a sheen of oil in this shallow lake used for everything from high-speed boat racing to water-skiing. Every time I turned my head to take a breath between strokes, I felt I was going to throw up because of the noxious fumes from the fuel and oil. I kept focused on finishing and barreled my way through the water, then hopped onto my bike for the 22-mile ride. It was an out-and-back course, totally flat, with no hills or elevation. I've got strong legs, and I pedaled with everything I had.

Then, not far ahead of me, I saw a rider suddenly turn off the course. An instant later, he veered back onto the course and started back in my direction. I immediately realized that he had intentionally cut the course. At first, I couldn't believe it. This guy had turned around well before the

turn-back point, and now he was carrying on as if everything was normal. I was furious. I couldn't believe I was actually seeing someone cheating like that, and at my first amateur triathlon to boot. I mean, who cheats at amateur athletics? What's the reward? And here I was, working harder than I ever had in my life, while this guy was cheating right in front of me. I was indignant!

I pedaled even harder, putting forward every ounce of strength and focus I had as I approached the turnaround. I swung around the turn and pushed even more. I was determined to catch that cheat. I was pedaling so hard—I was so angry—that I'm pretty sure I almost went a little crazy. My heart was pounding, my lungs were bursting, and my legs were aching, but I finally caught up with the cheater. And then, I passed him. I rolled across the finish line, but instead of experiencing an emotional rush of satisfaction at having completed my first triathlon—an absolutely *huge* accomplishment for me—all I could think about was finding a race official and pointing out the cheater. I found an official, explained what had happened, and identified the cheater. I got the satisfaction of knowing that he did not receive a finisher's medal. Just like when I knew to ask permission from Dai Vernon to use his card magic out of respect, the same convictions to do what is right filled me so completely that I had no choice but to act.



While my first triathlon was packed with drama, I had lot of pride in what I had accomplished. With the race bug now fully in play, I wasted no time preparing for my next triathlon in Long Beach, California, the place that I still considered my home. This race was part of the USA Triathlon Series, and it was quite a step up in size from my first triathlon—there would be a 2-kilometer swim, a 40-kilometer bike, and a 15-kilometer run. I made it through every single inch of the race, and when I crossed that finish line, I was about as exhausted as I had ever been in my life. A friend from Bakersfield was there at the finish line to greet me, a cold beer in his

hand. That sounded like a good idea at the time—but it wasn't. As it happens, beer saps the body of oxygen, and oxygen is what I needed most after the grueling event I had just completed. I drank the beer, and I got sick. Still, I had completed another challenging triathlon, and that was an achievement that a no amount of illness could diminish.

At the end of that year, I signed up for the Fountain Mountain Half Ironman race, which is known for the way it pushes even the most seasoned endurance event veterans to their physical and mental limits. My friends warned me that I wasn't ready for that level of race and that I simply had no place putting myself in harm's way by attempting it. They might have been right, but I made the decision to go for it anyway. I chose not to overthink the difficulties and dangers the race might pose for me; I just continued to train and prepare as best I could. Did I show up with a bit of a chip on my shoulder on race day? Yes, I probably did. I came to compete and complete. Period. Nothing was going to stop me.

The sense of accomplishment I felt when I conquered that half-Ironman race was unlike anything I had experienced. What made my achievement all the sweeter was the fact that at the time of the race I was experiencing some significant problems in my business. Employees, friends, and family thought that putting so much effort and energy into this race was a bad idea. What they did not know about me is that for my entire life, anytime I went all-in for something and toughed my way through to triumph in a difficult situation, I ended up feeling like the great monarch of the jungle, King Kong. And sure enough, when I completed that race, I felt like I could do anything, face anything, and take care of any problem, including my business problems of the time. After that triathlon, I wasn't just committed to endurance events—I was hooked. From that day forward, there would be no turning back or slowing down. In a very real way, I was no longer just plain Dave Alexander. Now, I was *Tridave*.

I raced frequently in the following year, traveling far and wide around the world. The intensity of my training regimen ramped up as my race schedule grew, and so did the logistical issues that had to be conquered so that I could get to all of those far-flung events. I even had to acquire a set of new skills, including how to repair a bike on the road. I didn't know squat about bicycle repair before I began racing, but when you're in the middle of the bike portion of a race and something goes wrong, it's on you to fix it.

The skills I developed came in handy, and not just for me. At one long race in which the bike portion was the final leg—an unusual order—I was racing back toward town. As I sped along, I saw a man standing next to his bike at the side of the road. I could tell he had a flat tire, and I also quickly realized that he didn't look like he knew how to fix it. I swung my bike over next to him and stopped, which is not normally done during a race. I recognized him from other races I had been in. His name was Wyatt Earp—he is the grandnephew and namesake of the famous frontier lawman and hero of the 1881 gunfight at the O.K. Corral in Tombstone, Arizona. Stopping to help a fellow racer was not going to change my position in the race, and being a Good Samaritan is always the right thing to do. Oh, and there is that little line in the Scout Oath that says, “To help other people at all times”; I make it a point in my life to live by the Scout Oath every day. I fixed Wyatt's flat, and we rode to the finish line together. A special bond born of respect forms between triathlon competitors, and I'm glad to say that Wyatt and I have been close friends ever since.



After completing my first triathlon in 1983, I realized that I enjoyed the experience and began racing longer and more difficult races. The mental tactic that I employed was to tell everyone in my life what I was training for, because in my world, once I tell people that I am going to do something,

I must complete what I have said. This news broadcasting puts pressure on me.

I ran a triathlon in Del Valle on my 40th birthday, and I didn't turn in my best performance. I was so fatigued that I could not run the entire IOK and had to do some walking. When I struggled across the finish line, the time sign had already been taken down. I barely felt like I had completed the race—no one was there to greet me at the finish line or to give me the finisher's medal. In the distance, I could see and hear the awards ceremony going on, but I needed to walk off the soreness and hydrate my body.

During my cooldown, a man came up to me and asked, "Are you just finishing?" I answered, "Yes, I had a real tough day." He introduced himself as Dave Horning. He was an elite athlete known for his swimming and early triathlon racing successes, and he was the founder of the Escape From Alcatraz Triathlon. I shook his hand and asked, "Well, how did you do today?" Dave said, "I got sore toward the end of the bike and quit for the day." I am not proud of my reaction now, but I exclaimed, "That means that I beat you!"

A few weeks later, an issue of *Triathlete Magazine* came out with a self-promoting article by Dave Horning titled "Dave Does It Again." In the article, Horning basically said that after not being able to complete the race at Del Valle the day before, he made his way to the Bay to Breakers event and completed the arduous run. I, too, had a tough day at Del Valle—but I completed the race—and I also went to compete in the Bay to Breakers, after which I packed up, rode to the San Francisco Airport, flew home, and celebrated my 40th birthday with Marilyn.

What Dave Horning's actions, written and verbal, did for me was motivate me to complete what I start—in life, not just in sporting events. Dave Horning and the cheater I encountered in my first triathlon lived in my brain.

I did not see or speak with Dave Horning for probably five years. Dave and his wife formed a company called Enviro-Sports. They produce tough races in natural surroundings throughout the West. One of those races was the Death Valley Marathon. At the time, this event was about a mile longer than a traditional marathon and went from California through the Panamint Range though the Titus Canyon trail into Death Valley; it was a very tough course. At dinner the night before the race, I saw Dave Horning across the room. I went over to speak with him.

Dave did not remember me, so I thanked him for helping me in life in many ways. I told him what happened when I first met him and how he had motivated me. He laughed and apologized for the way he had spoken to me and said that was his sense of humor. I told him how much it hurt me after the tough day I had. We spoke about the short article that he wrote for *Triathlete Magazine*, and I asked him if the real reason he did not complete the course that day was that he was out of the prize money. He admitted that was the reason. As a professional athlete, if he was not going to make money, he would find a reason to quit and save his resources for another day. Hearing that made his article anger me even more.

A few months later, at the mandatory racers meeting the night before his Escape From Alcatraz Triathlon, he presented me a sincere apology and told the entire story to the athletes in attendance. He and the cheater taught me lessons that still motivate me to this day.

Dave and I are on good terms now, and he always recounts the story and laughs when we meet.



In 1986, I participated in 30 triathlons over 30 weeks in a row. My athletic year ended up completing 38 races. It amazed me that during that time, I had not become ill, had a business problem, or encountered a family issue that would keep me from racing. None of these things

happened—or at the very least, I did not let the issue stop me from competing. When I was invited to compete in a race in Saint Petersburg, Russia, I was very excited and not worried about the Olympic-distance event (1.5K swim, 40K bike, and 10K run). I was racing that distance almost every week. I had been to Russia before on business, but now it would be for an athletic event.

I had met so many Russians while racing in Alanya, Turkey, that when I arrived, I had instant local friends. It was like old home week, with the Russians, Italians, Turks, and assorted other European athletes in attendance. A reporter from *Triathlete Magazine* was there to cover the race. The stage was set.

The morning of the race, we were transported with our equipment to the race site at a remote lake outside of town. When you fly halfway around the world from Phoenix to Saint Petersburg, the time difference is 11 hours and the jet lag is enormous. On top of that, the morning of the race was cold and the preparation, including pulling on our wetsuits, was difficult. On this morning, I learned a new trick from another athlete, who was having a friend spray his entire body down. I approached him to find out what he was being sprayed with. It was nonstick cooking spray. With this spray, the wetsuit slid off the body in the same way that food slides out of a nonstick frying pan. It made the transition just that much faster both in pulling the wetsuit on and taking it off. The moral of this story: Good ideas can come from anywhere.

Not being a fast swimmer, I always let the faster swimmers begin first so they do not have to swim over the top of me and possibly injure me as they race past. It felt like a normal start that morning, but for some reason, I felt out of breath. After swimming for a couple of minutes, I felt so out of breath that I stopped swimming to try to determine what was wrong. I started and stopped several times, not feeling right about the fatigue and

being out of breath. On one of the stops, I flipped over on my back, floating and resting for what seemed like a couple of minutes. I flipped back over and began to swim, and again I did not feel right. At this point, I did what I had to do. I swam to the side of the lake, walked back to the starting point, and declared myself a DNF (did not finish).

At this point in my racing career, I had competed in more than 400 races, including about 230 triathlons at that time, and I had completed every one that I started. Immediately, I felt I had to start explaining to everyone what happened and why I could not complete the race. I was being interviewed by the press, including *Triathlete Magazine*, as well as friends and family of the other athletes as to why I did not finish. It wasn't fun. When the other athletes came in at the end of the race, they did not have an issue with me not finishing. Most of them had competed with me in much longer and more difficult races and knew what my level of fitness was. The ones whom I knew the best consoled me, telling me stories and reasons why they had not finished certain races. The consoling did not seem to help me; I was still embarrassed.

Much later, after reflecting and speaking with other athletes back home, I realized that all athletes have off days for whatever reason—regardless of their athletic prowess—and have problems either with poor results or a DNF. I am not sure what happened that day, but it did relieve the pressure of not completing a race. I had a DNF, but I knew I would continue to prepare properly for any event, business deal, or relationship and always do my best. My performance that day was the best that I had to give.



With each triathlon I completed, I felt more than simply a sense of achievement and accomplishment. It meant so much to my spirit and my general well-being and outlook on life. Even so, when people ask me,

“Dave, what do you get out of racing?” or “Why the heck do you do that?” I have a simple answer: “I do it for the T-shirts.”

That’s obviously not the complete answer, but in a way, I suppose T-shirts are as good a reason as any to explain why I have trained for thousands and thousands of hours and traveled hundreds of thousands of miles around the globe, all so that I could throw my heart, soul, and body into hundreds of endurance competitions designed to whittle down to size one’s strength and spirit. In my early days of racing, I felt a deep sense of pride when someone would take a look at me—a short, fat, bald guy wearing a T-shirt from a major endurance race—and ask, “Where did you get that?”

I felt enormous satisfaction—a feeling I have to this day—as I smiled, looked that person in the eye, and told them the truth: “I *earned* it,” emphasizing the “earned” part with a deep, low growl for dramatic effect.

Not long after I completed the Escape From Alcatraz race some years ago, I bumped into a man at a IOK race in Phoenix. He was wearing a souvenir Escape From Alcatraz shirt—the kind you buy in a tourist shop, not the T-shirt you get as a certified finisher of the Alcatraz race. I made eye contact with him using my eyes for impact like my Scoutmaster, Mr. Dyer, used to do years ago, then I smiled and nodded in his direction. I simply said, “Nice shirt.” He looked me up and down, and I saw the expression on his face change when he realized that my Escape From Alcatraz race T-shirt was the real deal. Then, I quietly turned away and walked off. That was fun.

In time, I got used to people saying (usually in shocked tones), “Oh my God, *you* did that?” when they learned I had completed a major race. With each race I completed, my confidence that I could do anything I put my mind to deepened. And by the time I had completed lots of races, I no longer felt I had to prove anything to anyone. That’s when my participation in the races became more about the experience of the race, not the result.



I do not have an unusually high IQ. What I do have is great comprehension of what I have learned or have been taught. I do not forget and can extrapolate with that knowledge better than most. This ability to extrapolate has been a huge part of my success in life. My creativity is what has differentiated me from others. I exercise my mind to figure out solutions to problems in business or my personal life, using what I have learned in life or using my gifts from God. This is a great self-reliant way to make good decisions. The mind is incredibly powerful and is attached to you always. You just need to exercise your brain and make good decisions.

Our brains work in different ways. I could not be a Wall Street trader but can develop a company that will be traded on Wall Street. Everyone's mind uses its database in different ways, and it shows in people. Many people find it impossible to take the risks that entrepreneurs take every day, creatively venturing out and founding a new business. My ideas come from controlling my mind. It is not a superhuman ability but can be a strong tool for those with a strong mind.

I found out in my athletic life that I could lower my heart rate during exercise by relaxing my mind and body into the pain. My heart rate would drop a bit and I could then dig deeper, raise my heart rate back up, and go a little faster. I would repeat this process until I had no more to give. This form of mental discipline allowed me to make great physical achievements. Although I have never studied it, I've been told that I was unknowingly practicing transcendental meditation.

I found myself practicing this heart rate-lowering meditation when I was at rest and discovered that I became more mentally relaxed. I began using that relaxed state to focus on an issue in my life and the process became increasingly successful.

Then I began using meditation to think about an issue that could happen in the future, extrapolating with all the data at my disposal, and

creating a plan. I learned that choosing a place of solace in a natural setting helped my meditation. I love being alone in nature to pray or meditate and have found that the top of one of my tanks or a pipe in the middle of our tank farm is a terrific place for me to sit and meditate, extrapolate, etc., to work out personal or business issues. Meditation helps me see the future and hopefully see my plans work in my mind's eye. This is something that all of us can do, by at least thinking about the cause and possible effect of our actions before acting. Think about how many times you have acted quickly and then regretted your actions. We are all at fault in doing so. Quiet mental or verbal planning at leisure, alone or with your family, can be valuable. It can help with issues as simple as whether to buy a new television or to invest more in the company-sponsored 401(k) or in planning the best way to prepare for a triathlon.



During my years of competition, I built lasting friendships with race people who would become important to my life.

I became a member of a community I never knew existed, a ragtag group of hardy souls who lived for the thrill of completing demanding triathlons all over the world. In many ways, these fellow racers had their own language, their own rules, their own set of ethics, and significant personal goals that they pursued above all else. I eased into this special culture without giving it a thought and soon found myself to be a fixture in the endurance event world. I suppose it would be fair to acknowledge that I became somewhat famous within the world of triathlons. My big personality—and bigger physique—ensured that I stood out from the crowd at any race. “Svelte” and “buff” were not words the media or my fellow racers used to describe me, that’s for sure, not even at the height of my racing career. Many people couldn’t believe what they were seeing when larger-than-life Dave Alexander came running or biking past them.

For several consecutive years, I traveled to Hungary to do a triathlon. One year when I arrived for a race, I did a double take when I saw a picture of myself in the local newspaper. In a side column next to the full coverage of the race was an article about me. I couldn't believe it. Here I was, halfway around the world from home preparing for a race, and on the table in front of me was a newspaper with a feature article about me in a language I could neither speak nor read. Fortunately, I had a Hungarian friend who translated the article for me; it recounted the race I had completed there the year before. I was truly flabbergasted. Wow; a press file on me in Hungary!

The appearance of that article was something of a turning point for me. These races had come to represent an idea that was bigger than me, especially as I came to realize that what I was doing was providing an inspiration to many people. I'm sure my achievements in racing were a real conundrum to people who had incorrect assumptions about the relationship between fitness and fatness. I just didn't fit their mold or their preconceived notions of what an endurance racer should look like. In fact, I pretty much exploded the mold, and that was difficult for many people to accept. I loved stirring up so much debate.

When I would show up for a race, many people would take one look at my girth and immediately assume that I was a race organizer or, perhaps, a representative of one of the race sponsors. And sometimes, fellow racers would pass me during a race and call out unintentionally amusing (and sometimes condescending) things they believed would boost my "fragile" morale. It's as if some folks took one look at my admittedly substantial body and couldn't help but take pity on me: "You're almost there!" they would say as they slid past, or "You'll make it; don't give up." They had no clue that not only would I never give up—or have any intention of giving up—but that I always, *always* made it to the finish. I remember having a quick exchange during one race with someone who took that kind

of pity on me. He proudly announced that he was running his *third* triathlon. The guy was shocked beyond words to learn that the race he was encouraging poor old me to hang in and try to finish was my *200th* triathlon.

I took it upon myself to be an encouragement to my fellow racers. Sometimes in midrace, I would come across young racers sitting by the edge of the road, exhausted and ready to give up. I would stop and do my best to coax them to keep going. “Do you have anybody waiting for you at the finish line?” I might ask. If a young man nodded and replied, “Yes, my girlfriend,” I’d tell him, “All right, what does she look like? I’ll meet up with her at the finish line and give her a great big hug for you. Does that sound good? No? You don’t like that idea? Then you’d better get up off the ground and come with me.”



When you are traveling the globe alone from one race to the next, it’s nice to see a familiar face as you come down the finish stretch of a long, hard event. I once took a local racer down to Saint Croix with me for a particularly difficult race. She was a second-tier professional and couldn’t afford to pay for the trip by herself. She was an elite swimmer, and she had been a huge help to me in preparing for swimming events. I was happy to make it possible for her to participate in this race as a way of repaying all she had done for me. Plus, I knew if she came along to compete, there would be someone familiar to give me a hug at the end of my event. On the day of the race, it was 88 degrees, with 88 percent humidity (122 degrees apparent temperature), and it took me an agonizing 9 hours, 30 minutes, and 56 seconds to finish.

When I finally hit the finish line, my friend and her boyfriend had been waiting for me for several hours. I got the hug I had been promised, and the experience was all the sweeter because she understood better than most people just how difficult it was to complete the kinds of events in which we

participated. This race, the Beauty and the Beast Triathlon in Saint Croix, was so difficult that 35 percent of the starters did not complete the race. I was last, but I got there. Through all the activity at an event, good and not so good, funny or sad, a real sense of camaraderie develops among racers. Every single athlete knows just how difficult the challenges ahead will be. And a lot of times, when you're traveling alone, it's nice to have a familiar face at the end of a long, hard race.



The more I raced, the better I became known, first in the triathlon world and a bit later in the sports world at large. I found myself in demand as a public speaker, and after a while, I accepted the fact that many people looked up to me as an inspirational figure. While I sure didn't look anything at all like most people's model image of an accomplished athlete, no one could deny that I had successfully completed an almost unimaginable feat—30 officially sanctioned triathlons in just 30 weeks.

When I returned to my office after a race, it seemed like the red indicator light on my phone was always blinking to let me know that there was yet another message from reporters or race organizers. The invitations typically began, "We've read all about you, Mr. Alexander, and we would like you to speak to our group." I was flattered by the attention, of course, at least at first. I enjoyed speaking and telling people my story and encouraging them to participate in life, both physically and mentally. What's more, people were beginning to write about me in books and magazines; one example is the following poem sent to me from a friend of a friend—a person I didn't know but who understood me and my life very much just from articles and stories told to him by a mutual friend:

The Contender

Fire fuels,
Piercing blue eyes.
It's a fight,
To finish the race.
Enveloped in pain,
Buried in sweat,
A torso tortured
From the grueling pace.

Outwardly heard,
Only soft-spoken word,
Tho' inward,
Frustration and pain.
His bike, we're told,
When rubber meets road,
The pounding's too fierce
To contain.

Nikes cry out
'Neath this ton of a man.
The pounding just part
Of his game.
Among demigods,
He defies all odds,
Competing with Herculean frame.

A kind gentle beast,
This mountain of a man.
His articulate tales
Flow on.
With travels and glory,
Enhancing the story,
He's a master
Of Triathlon.

—*Ron de Jaray*

Perry Cochell, who was director of the BSA's Office of Philanthropy when we met, said after reading the poem: "Dave, this is not about triathlon. It is about your life." He was right!



During my athletic career, I went way beyond short athletic events designed for weekend warriors and eventually participated in hundreds of ultra-distance competitions all around the world, from my first 5-kilometer run to eventually being the last competitor to complete a four-times-Ironman triathlon distance that lasted, for me, 85 hours, 46 minutes, 37 seconds. Training for the longer distance races took as much time as the number of hours that I worked each week. It made for a very busy schedule. The growth in intensity of the competitions required the need for more and more mental and physical discipline.

The foundation and peace of mind I received from training and racing helped me in business in immeasurable ways. Work, sport, and personal life have so many similar aspects. They are all about completion of the project, finishing the competition, utilizing your best efforts, and the continuing commitment to the promises made to all facets of your life. Most important of all is not ever giving up on that project, competition, or commitment. After a long race, I was incredibly inspired to do better than ever in the other portions of my life, and I felt empowered. I could do anything I set my mind to do.

The challenge of entering athletic competitions was not just completing the race but simultaneously doing a good job at my business and spending appropriate time with my wife. I seemed to be successful at all three, and it has fulfilled my life.

My drive was not to just cover the course of the race but to do the best job with the physical assets that I was given and had developed. Even though I was slow, I was noticed by many professional triathletes. They respected

my efforts and knew that I was racing all over the country almost every week while also managing a large business. Several of them mentioned that I inspired them with my dedication and hard work. A certain group of them would occasionally wait for me at the finish line to greet me as I crossed.



Preparation begins with everything that you do in life. I could write a book just on preparation. Every day, do what is most important first. My preparation in life came from many parts of my upbringing but mostly from my Boy Scout training and trying to live my life guided by the Scout Oath, Scout Law, and Scout motto.

Throughout my life, certain events stand out as having fed my thirst for success. These were times I failed or didn't participate at all because of different types of fear. After facing those incidents, I found ways to motivate myself to succeed to the best of my ability or complete what I had begun.

In 2001, I was on stage with former U.S. President George H.W. Bush at the Western Petroleum Marketers Association convention. He was the keynote speaker, and I was the motivational breakfast speaker. As I was waiting to go out on stage, a phrase popped up in my head that I realized encapsulated my experience perfectly. The phrase was: "You don't have to be thin to be fit—mentally or physically." For years, people looked at me and immediately assumed that because I was a big man, I must be in bad shape. In fact, I was extremely fit. The proof? I completed hundreds of triathlons. People who are not fit could barely get off the starting line at most of those events. There is no arguing that evidence. It's time for perceptions to change, and I am glad to play a small part in seeing that happen.

One way I am working to make a change is with the Boy Scouts of America, through the Summit Bechtel Family National Scout Reserve in Beckley, West Virginia. There, I have funded Tridave Lake, Dave Alexander Low Gear, and The Caljet Way as venues for the Alexander Triathlon to pave

the way for triathlons to be replicated in BSA local councils throughout America and around the world.

As a youth, I found myself on stage during coin presentations to adults and also when I performed magic shows. Later in life, my stage was found selling grease and oil, and I also become a world-famous triathlete, but now, I'm taking the stage in a new and exciting way, teaching others what I have learned about what it means to be fit and have a passion for life and everything that you do.





Chapter 8

A TRUTH OF LIFE IS THAT SOME PEOPLE HAVE INTEGRITY, and some don't. My name and my reputation matter a great deal to me. I try to live by a code that has integrity at its core. When I encounter people who lack integrity, I'm not inclined to get to know them better, and I sure don't want to be their friend.

I do not cheat or cut corners in races or anywhere else in my life. Unfortunately, that attitude is not true of everyone you will meet. As you know, I encountered a cheater in a triathlon when he cut out a lap early from the bike ride. This man exhibited no honor or integrity. When I called him on it, his expression said everything—he had been caught. Incredibly though, his first response was to lie: “No, I didn't do that,” he said. Then he doubled down on the lie and insisted I was wrong about what I had seen. His response didn't matter to me; I knew I had behaved with integrity, and he had not.

“Well,” I told him with a shrug, “have a good life.”

Integrity is the foundation of every personal and business relationship we have in our lives. If I can't trust you, and you can't trust me, we will never be able to work together. Every relationship I have that contributes to the success of my business is rooted first and foremost in a foundation of absolute integrity.



If you are honest, you do not have to remember what you said or did, maybe just how you did it.

I say the first thing that comes to mind—sometimes to a fault. That's when I am most frank and honest with others. It just feels natural to tell it like it is and not hold back. This applies to both stressful and light-hearted topics.

In the same way that I have given my employees a mission statement to give me peace of mind, my honesty with others gives them peace of mind and lets them know what they can expect. Time is money, and for that reason, if I receive communication from someone trying to sell a good or service and I am not interested, I tell them quickly, so as not to waste their time or mine. I am always honest with my co-workers regarding the direction of our privately held companies, so they can make decisions for themselves and their families regarding their future. We have had very little turnover in our companies, so I believe that my honesty and actions have brought my employees peace of mind.

Peace of mind means everything to me. Everything I do is geared toward maximizing the peace of mind I experience in my day-to-day life. I believe that there is an inextricable link between acting with integrity and experiencing peace of mind. I'm not one who sleeps a lot of hours, but when I do sleep, I rest well and without worries or concerns about how I have acted in any given situation. Like most business leaders, I have enough real worries and concerns at work; I don't need to create or be party to additional worries and concerns outside of work. Worrying about myself is really nothing more than a waste of energy. My life is complex and full in every way one can imagine. I know that I will be far more effective in everything I do if I don't have to worry about myself and, frankly, if other people don't have to worry about me, either.



As complex as my life is, I still like to keep things simple. Living by the 12 points of the Scout Law helps me to do that. I don't take the points lightly; I spend time thinking about each point and reflecting on how and where it is present in my life. For example, what does it really mean to be trustworthy, and why am I considered to be trustworthy by others? What do others see in me as being worthy of their trust? Are there ways in which I could become even more trustworthy?

I work my way through the other 11 points of the Scout Law in the same manner—loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent. I actively work every single day to embody these concepts in every area of my life. I'm not perfect, of course. But to my mind, any person who strives to live by the points of Scout Law is a person of great integrity. That is why I have written what each Scout Law means to me and have shared those thoughts with my wife, my investors, and my employees. In fact, I have begun Scout Law training at my business and have set the expectation that The Caljet Way is really the Scouting way.

“The Scout Law according to Dave” has led me throughout my life. These are the ways I incorporate the 12 points of the Scout Law into my life.

I am trustworthy. My partners and I have such trust in one another that they have only one rule I must abide by, and that is I cannot sell our companies without concurrence.

I am loyal. I have been in my main business partnership for 36 years, and Marilyn and I have been married for 50 years.

I am helpful to a fault at times. Sometimes people need to help themselves, as it says in the Bible. I cannot solve everyone's problems.

I am friendly. I have been a successful salesman roughly since birth, and I've made friends all over the world.

I am courteous. I have lived what was taught to me by my parents and especially my sister, Dot. I endeavor to treat others with respect.

Most of the time, **I am kind.** However, I know when I have not been kind because my administrative assistant chastises me for saying to someone I do not want to speak to again, "Have a nice life." Those people are mostly stock brokers cold-calling on the phone with a new idea!

I am obedient. I obey the obligations, rules, and promises that I make (except for speeding in fast cars). However, I prefer to make the rules myself rather than follow those made by others.

I am cheerful. It is difficult to catch me without a smile on my face. I am a happy person most of the time, and it shows.

I am thrifty. I have no personal debt. Only one of my businesses has any debt at this time. That changes over time, but debt incurred has always been paid off earlier than the loan requires.

I am brave. Sometimes it takes bravery to do the right thing. I stand up in defense of those in need and do whatever is needed to protect my family, my team, and my investors.

I am clean. Marilyn and I have an extremely high water bill and eight bathrooms even though it is just the two of us at home.

I am reverent. Being raised in a Christian home was very helpful in learning reverence. The experience of traveling and racing all over the world, to more than 60 countries, has exposed me to

many different religions and cultures. I try to be reverent and respectful to all of them.



Relationships are the bedrock upon which you build a life, and I have been very successful in building strong relationships. When reflecting on my life so far, I think very often about how I could have improved certain relationships or maintained them with certain people or groups.

It might seem strange, but my most powerful asset in developing relationships is being mysterious. My stability, consistent attitude, integrity, and loyalty have helped me maintain lasting relationships, but the mysterious person I can be at times makes me intriguing to many people I meet. The mysteriousness of Dave helps to draw people in, and then I can start to lay the foundation of the relationship and build trust.

Yet for trust to thrive, it needs to be two-sided. I have always been trusting, but as I've matured, I've become more selective with whom I share certain aspects of my life and knowledge. As my knowledge and experience have increased, I've made better choices about to whom I give my trust.

My success at building relationships is based primarily on trust. Our companies are still small enough that some relationship can be built with each employee, although that is getting to be more difficult the busier I get and the more our companies grow. Each of these relationships is important and based on a mutual foundation of trust.

Most humans need a reason to drive them, and it is usually another human. Those with whom we build relationships are our most important motivators. I was lucky to be born into a loving family, with an especially loving sister who helped set me on a path toward success in life. That early relationship has not weakened, and it is still growing in strength. Dot taught

me most of my social etiquette, how to treat and respect women, and how to be accepted by adults.

My brother, Don, was 17 when I was born, and I never developed a close relationship with him as he left the family home before I was old enough to build one. Although he hasn't been much of an influence, I hope that, someday, we may get to know each other.

After 6 years of age, I lived with only my parents, who were very loving. My father was 43 when I was born and was an excellent mentor. He was very private and did not have a single close friend, but he had many good acquaintances. I wish Dad and I could have been closer because he had so much more knowledge he could have passed on to me. My mother was great but was not very strong. Even when I was very young, she leaned on me for help. I was always there for her.



Chapter 9

I WAS BROUGHT UP IN A SOLID, STABLE HOME, but my life has not been without fear. That is something I have thought about a great deal. I believe that you must understand and respect fear. First, though, you need to appreciate that there is a big difference between fear that is rational and fear that is irrational. Rational fear keeps us alive; it protects us from harm. Rational fear heightens awareness, and awareness makes it possible for us to choose between different courses of action. Irrational fear comes from lack of knowledge and understanding, and it tends to slow down people who allow it to fester in their lives.

I don't ignore fear; I respect it, and I just keep moving forward. I work through it. I do that not so much for myself, but for everyone who relies upon me, including my wife, my business team, and my family. If I allow myself to be caught up at any time in any irrational fear, I cannot be the leader I need to be. That's why I say that you must respect what fear represents, but you cannot allow yourself to be dominated by the emotion.

I know that my understanding of fear and the techniques I developed to deal with fear came from the world in which I was raised. Because I grew up in a home with parents and siblings who were so much older than me and whose friends were older, too, I attended many more funerals than a

young person would ordinarily go to. And the older I get, of course, the more I encounter death among those who are my peers.

Ironically, one of the best life lessons I have received—and one of the saddest things to ever happen to me—happened shortly after my high school graduation. One of my closest friends had gone right to work for Pacific Gas and Electric. He was working on a high-tension wire and got electrocuted. Just like that, my friend was gone. It was hard to wrap my head around—it was one thing to attend the funeral of an older person who has lived a full life, but something quite different when I had to say goodbye to my close friend, a guy my age. That was a powerful life lesson: My friend's death reminded me that I wasn't going to live forever.

I have learned other valuable lessons from the deaths of those close to me. In one instance, I had a close friend who also worked in the oil business. His death affected me profoundly. It made me think about the irreplaceable value of time and about how important it is to find the time to talk things through with the people you're closest to—and that includes the people you may be drifting away from. It is so important to tell people how you feel about them. I wish I had been able to talk with my friend before his death. I wish I could have told him that I always liked him, and I still thought about him even after we went our own ways. One positive outcome from his death is that it encouraged me to face my fears and share my feelings more readily with the people who matter most to me. I'm not sure that I am succeeding completely at that objective, but I do know that I am no longer afraid to be more open with people.

One of my greatest regrets is that I didn't speak with my father more before he died. I have concluded that there aren't many men who are comfortable telling another man that they love him. I loved my father, and I know that he loved me, even though we didn't say the words. He showed it through his actions as he checked in on me periodically with my principal,

with Dai Vernon, and with others. I understand that you don't have to say the words "I love you," but to love someone does mean that you must demonstrate your care, concern, respect, and affection for them. In my opinion, not enough people do that. I try. Sometimes, though, I still find myself wishing I had said more or done more to let someone know how I felt about them. None of us is perfect, and I think we have all experienced a feeling of regret from time to time when we didn't tell another person how we felt. I'm aware of how important it is to speak up, and I am doing it as much as I can. We all need to hear those words from the people we care about. And if we all need it, then we all need to do our part and share our feelings.



I have been a giving person my entire life, but I'm afraid I am not very good at receiving. That's something I am working on. Sometimes, Marilyn will gently chastise me by saying things like, "You're always picking up the meal check. Sometimes other people want to do it, but you don't let them." Wanting to pay the check isn't something I do to show off; it's a habit and a way of life that is ingrained in my character. But I do listen to my wife, and I am trying to get better at accepting other people's generosity, so sometimes when we are having a meal, I let someone else at the table pay the check if that's what they want to do. I realize that the joy I have always felt giving to others is a joy they should be able to experience, too.

I have always loved giving, even when I didn't have so much as a dime to share. Once, while a young traveling salesman, I went to the hospital to do a magic show for the sick son of one of my customers. I didn't have money to buy flowers or a card, so I showed up and did what I knew he would like: magic.

Giving is a very complex factor in life. It is not just about donating money or canned goods at Christmas, but about giving of yourself and your

knowledge to others. Now that I have grown in resources and the desire to give and help, I feel more fulfilled as a human being. Many people think that giving is about charity, but that is only one very important part.

In giving, I was mentored by my family, my church, and my father, who was a very consistent giver of his money and time to church activities. This mentorship also taught me to lend a hand to those in need, not just give money. In 2017, I was voted by the Caring Institute in Washington, D.C., as one of the most caring people in the nation.



When thinking about giving, most people don't think about the gift of forgiveness, but this is very important to me. We all have been in situations in which we should forgive and forget. I have not been especially good at forgiving and am working on improving my forgiveness and opening my heart to those who have hurt or offended me. On Valentine's Day 2015, I forgave all of those who have done something that I feel has hurt me. That does not mean I will be inviting them over for Christmas dinner, but it has given me peace of mind and has lowered any stress in my mind regarding the relationship. Opening your heart and soul to others in conversation and action is an unmeasurable gift.

Giving can become a part of every facet of your life. At Caljet, we try to give "customer convenience and value-added service," which many large companies have lost. Working my way up through business and recognizing what was important to me when I was a customer of a terminal taught me how to operate my terminal better once I owned one. I had a good idea of how to make the customer and the carriers happy with our services. It has always been important to me to make everyone in our business food chain either happy or respectful of how we operate our business, using the best safety, cleanliness, and maintenance with operational excellence. Giving our customers what they want and need must be working,

as we have received numerous awards and accolades, including being named “The Most Innovative Company” in Arizona.

When we were small and did not have the level of assets that we do today, I had to find other ways to differentiate ourselves from the competition. It was done at first in small, easy ways by treating the truck drivers who come to our terminal with respect. We provided the drivers with a clean, efficient place to perform their tasks, while having available for their convenience water, coffee, popcorn, etc. As we grew and could afford more to make our customer experience better, we added electronic notification signs for safety and notification along with improved efficiency in getting them in and out of the terminal faster. I also give to my employees, providing them a good, stable, rewarding place to work.

Giving begins with gifting a smile, a hug, and laughter to those connected to you. Very few of us start out life being able to give large financial gifts, but other gifts—our time, a helping hand, a smile—given with love, respect, and the intent to help others cannot be outdone. Supporting people’s needs, both physical and emotional, is great for the giver, too.



All of the qualities, characteristics, and values I have been addressing are ones that can be applied to every area of life, including the act of giving. In that regard, it has been many years since I have been as excited as I am right now to be working alongside the Boy Scouts of America. I feel that the combination of my life lessons and leadership experience will deliver great value to Scouting for years to come.

I’ll benefit from interacting with Scouts, too. I get along well with young people, and I hope to always be in touch, not out of touch. I believe it is extremely important for young people to be able to interact with and relate to older people in a positive way. And I’ve learned along the way that if you

want young people to listen to you, you need to listen to them. Most people say that I act and look younger than my age, which I chalk up to a positive attitude and good genes. A benefit to looking and acting younger is that it helps me to relate to young people.

I have a photograph of my dad from when he was 92 years old. You can clearly see in the picture that he was still very much engaged in the act of living fully—as some say, “the lights were still on.” Later on in the year the picture was taken, he had to give up his driver’s license. That was the beginning of his physical decline; I really don’t think his age was a factor. He told me, “Dave, my children are all doing well. I’m tired now, I can’t work anymore, and I can’t drive anymore. It’s time for me to go be with your mother.” And so, he essentially willed his life to shut down. After a series of strokes, he was gone.

That’s not how it will go for me. I’m staying in better physical shape, and should the time come when I can’t drive a car, I have made enough money that I will hire a driver. It gives me peace of mind to know that I will not end my days sitting alone in a hospital bed or staring for hours on end at the wallpaper at the retirement home.

These days, I make fun of myself, and that makes people laugh. I stopped telling jokes some years back, because most jokes are told at somebody’s expense. I don’t want to hurt anyone. So, now I joke only about myself, and honestly, that feels pretty good. I refuse to listen or to be party to bad, cruel, or insensitive jokes being told, no matter who is doing it. I don’t criticize the teller; I just leave, because I don’t want to be associated with people who do that sort of thing. Life is precious. There is no reason to waste a second on anything that doesn’t bring joy and fulfillment, and that goes for inappropriate humor, too.



As I look to the future, I see a bright horizon. I will engage even more with philanthropic work, especially with the Boy Scouts of America, and I will provide support and guidance to other charities, as well. With Scouting, I have just begun my performance on a new stage as an Eagle Scout focused on bringing triathlons to nations around the world—starting with the Alexander Triathlon at the Summit Bechtel Reserve. Another way to say that is: I have had many mentors in life, and now it's my turn to mentor others.

As for my business, my team gets stronger with each passing year, and my partners are more educated about the business than ever. If I should ever go away, under that darn bus or on a sailboat to the tropics, my business will go on without me.

Watching the growth and improvement of my team gives me the peace of mind that is so important to me. It means more time for me to devote to Marilyn and to the things I am most passionate about. The finish line is still far ahead, and until I cross it for the last time, I will engage in every part of my life the same way I approached each endurance race I ran: I am all in! Are you all in? If not, what's stopping you? Don't you know, my friend, that the world is our stage?





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Lessons in Leadership From Dave Alexander

From a young age, Dave Alexander found himself in the spotlight on the stages of his life. Driven by his competitive nature, yet softened by the values he received from his parents, his mentors, and the Scout Oath, Scout Law, and Scout motto, Dave became an accomplished professional magician and then a world-renowned triathlete—all while building a business that today leads the Southwest. But despite all his amazing lifetime achievements, Dave lives his life guided by a humble philosophy: It is more important to be the best for the world than to be the best in the world. His lessons in leadership are simple but profound, based in his faith in God and his inherent drive to retain and protect his integrity. He doesn't have to work at it—it is an indelible part of the character of this larger-than-life personality.

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