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Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from *The Peak Performing Teacher*, by Mike Kuczala.

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INTRODUCTION

Above all things, reverence yourself.

Pythagoras

An anonymous source once said, “If you put a small value upon yourself, rest assured that the world will not raise your price.” I could not agree more, yet continuously watch people put their own life and well-being near the bottom of their personal to-do list. Doing so not only impacts the quality of their lives, but also the quality of what they can provide to others. The 2020-2021 school year was arguably the most difficult in the history of American education; the impact sometimes devastating. For your own sake, and the sake of your students and colleagues, it’s time to reverse the damage. Satchel Paige said, “Don’t look back, something might be gaining on you.” If you haven’t made it to the bottom of your to-do list, what is gaining is not pretty. Today, you can change all that.

Simply stated, the greatest gift is self-love. Whether you realize it or not, this gift impacts everything you do, every action you take, every conversation you have, and every person you meet. Often people put everything else ahead of their health, well-being, personal vision, and purpose only to be not as effective at life. We take care of our children, students, spouses, parents, employment, pets, finances, friendships, homes, cars, and lawns but often pay little mind to our own bodies, health, and personal journey. If you want to be more effective, loving, productive, and useful, you must begin by putting yourself at the top of the list.

The case for vision, gratefulness, and wellness in a purposeful life cannot be overstated. There is no denying that maintaining a high standard for our lives can seem overwhelming and that it is a daily practice, but once we raise our level of living, living raises us. I call it “getting on the front end of things,” because usually we work from the back end, where everything is a bit more difficult; frankly, a lot more difficult. Once you put yourself first through the creation of new habits, life flows. What once seemed like a chore is accomplished with vigor. The end of the day no longer brings exhaustion but a rested, peaceful feeling of accomplishment and balance. More gets done, and less energy is expended. What used to be tiring is now energizing. What a relief. You can be on that track. It is a choice. Change your mind, change your life. The greatest gift is one of health, wellness, energy, and vitality that you give yourself. Move “you” to the top of the list right now, and everyone around you will say “thank you,” especially your students.

The Peak Performing Teacher: Five Habits for Success is my way of sharing of not only what works for me but also what works for others who enjoy the benefits of a purposeful and grateful lifestyle. Hopefully, the concepts, stories, examples, and practical ideas will

move you to make that one decision that will change your life. I am humbled to provide ideas that will help you:

- Understand the key relationship between the brain and body
- Take responsibility for your well-being
- Create a morning routine that will have you arrive in your classroom with energy and excitement
- Live more harmoniously through personal vision, ambition, and gratefulness
- Learn what belies stress and how to beat it (you might be surprised!)
- Enjoy the power of physical activity, and understand its place in your life
- Unleash motivation you didn't know you possess

At the end of your life, all you will have is the person you've become. Your fullest potential cannot be achieved if the needs of your mind and body are ignored. You are inherently well-equipped for every challenge that lies ahead. It is my wish that with a clear destination, a lighted path, and the proper tools for the trip, you will make your journey with eagerness and a fresh outlook. It is also my wish for this book to become a daily inspiration that will change your life forever.

THE MOST IMPORTANT PIECE OF EQUIPMENT

When I give a keynote address, lead a professional development seminar, or teach a graduate course centered on wellness or motivation, I always begin by describing the characteristics of the single most important piece of equipment in creating a desired lifestyle. The great thing is that most people already have one in their home! If used properly, this tool has the power to transform, lift, and propel us to new heights. What is it? A mirror. In it, you will find your greatest advocate for personal growth, power, wellness, and vision. The source of your sense of self, intrinsic motivation, and your satisfaction with every aspect of your life will be staring back at you. Your ability to act paired with your capacity for making decisions is the single greatest resource for achieving the personal and professional life you desire. Only you can take responsibility for taking the path to optimal daily living. And that level of life is only possible through experiencing unlimited energy every day. Michael Jordan said,

The game is my life. It demands loyalty and responsibility, and it gives me back fulfillment and peace.

Conversely, life is your game. If you demand loyalty and responsibility to it through vision, wellness, and routine, I promise you fulfillment and peace.

THE ABCs OF ACHIEVEMENT

Before you step foot on a treadmill, practice a new breathing technique, or set a goal, I would like to share with you what I call "The ABCs of Achievement." There are three sets of ABCs, each one leading to the next. The first points to the fact that no matter where we start, they are critical to a new beginning.

ACCEPTANCE

Find comfort in both your flaws and highlights and with the point at which you start this journey. Remember that success is, in part, defined by self-acceptance.

One must have the adventurous daring to accept oneself as a bundle of possibilities and undertake the most interesting game in the world, making the most of one's best.

Harry Emerson Fosdick

BEGIN

Take the first step, and list the reasons why you must start your journey today. What are the possibilities if you do? What are the consequences if you don't?

A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.

Lao Tzu

REFLECTION

What are your reasons to begin this journey? List the possibilities of beginning the journey now and the consequences if you don't.

Write your response here:

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CHANGE

Change your mental focus to a life fueled by passion and health each day. Prepare yourself for energy, vitality, and productivity!

Change always comes bearing gifts.

Price Pritchett

Once you've given yourself permission to accept your person, begin your journey, and change your mental focus, the next set of ABCs is critical to reaching your goals.

ATTITUDE

Attitude will determine how successful you'll be in your quest for a healthy and balanced life. It's the critical difference between "making it" to the gym or "putting it off" until tomorrow. It determines where "you" end up on your list of things to do. Attitude is the most impactful of personal attributes in creating a contagious environment for success or a toxic recipe for failure.

The greatest discovery of my generation is that a human being can alter his life by altering his attitude.

William James



REFLECTION

What part of your attitude would you adjust to make this journey more fruitful?

Write your response here:

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BELIEF

Belief provides the heat that fuels your personal fire each day. It is critical that you believe you can achieve anything that has your focused passion including dynamic health, your personal vision, and enthusiasm that supports a life of your design.

Keep your dreams alive. Understand to achieve anything requires faith and belief in yourself, vision, hard work, determination, and dedication. Remember all things are possible for those who believe.

Gail Devers



REFLECTION

What is one belief that you would like to change that you know would improve your life? How would you change it?

Write your response here:

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COMMITMENT

Commitment becomes the daily energy that makes a life purposeful. The most amazing thing about committing to a new level of living is how it envelopes all your pursuits. When you feel well and your energy levels rise, what seems impossible becomes ordinary. Wellness becomes the driving force of your life, and commitment to it provides the backdrop.

Desire is the key to motivation, but it's determination and commitment to an unrelenting pursuit of your own goals—a commitment to excellence—that will enable you to attain the success you seek.

Mario Andretti



REFLECTION

What is one thing that you think you'll need to commit to in order to improve your life's outcomes?

Write your response here:

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Attitude, belief, and commitment are a crucial part of achievement; they make it possible, in a world filled with obstacles, to master the principles in this book. Once the second set of ABC priorities are in place, you will feel the enduring pleasure and benefit of the final three.

Achievement of your goals,

Beauty and inner radiance through your response to the world around you, and

Clarity of vision and purpose.

How will you change the world?

THE POWER OF “MUST”

Gladys was a graduate student in one of my wellness courses. She made a choice to apply the principles I've just described and those that will be discussed throughout this book. Not only did she lose more than 60 pounds, last I knew she had kept the weight off for more than a year. She got up at 4:30 a.m. every weekday, was at the gym by 5:00, and worked out for an hour. She dropped three dress sizes and no longer felt compelled to get on the scale. Armed with information, passion, and personal strength, Gladys simply got leverage on herself. Instead of finding reasons not to work out, not to eat in a healthful manner, and not manage her stress, she listed the reasons why she could no longer afford

to ignore what ailed her. In other words, she got disturbed and used it to her advantage. Exercise, healthful eating, and a balanced lifestyle became a “must” for Gladys, and it transformed itself into a brand-new lifestyle; no longer work but rather a joyful habit. At twenty or thirty years of age this all sounds very plausible, but Gladys was forty-seven.

What was misguided became informed. What was informed became a dream. What was a dream became a vision. What was a vision became a goal. What was a goal became a must. What was a must became action. What was “some” day became now. Gladys’s hopes and dreams were realized; her goals accomplished; her life transformed.

I don’t share this with you because I expect you to be in the gym at 5:00 a.m. every morning. I can safely say that I am not and won’t ever be. I simply want you to think about your own life and what needs to be changed. What “should” might become a “must”? It might be practicing stress reduction on a more regular basis or beginning a gratitude journal. It’s a very personal reflection but one I’d ask you to think about as you move through the reading.

Find the mirror!

WHAT ARE YOUR HOPES, DREAMS, AND GOALS?

The great end in life is not knowledge but action.

Thomas Henry Huxley

Now it is up to you to make a simple decision to change your life and turn your “shoulds” into “musts.” Set your intent, know your purpose, and begin. Your time for the to-do list is now. You hold this book in your hands because you are ready to put yourself, your life, and your health first. Your ability to act, one of our great human powers, will make it all possible. It comes down to having a vision and being determined; to cut away all other possibilities except the one that has your focus of being healthy, dynamic, and vibrant. You will see your life expand right in front of you!

*What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters
compared to what lies within us.*

Ralph Waldo Emerson

A WORD ABOUT PAIN AND PLEASURE

First, the pleasure . . .

To begin my graduate course, *Motivation: The Art and Science of Inspiring Classroom Success*, I purposefully try to create an association of pleasure within the group. As participants arrive, they find their course workbook opened to display a quote by Bo Bennett, a personal development speaker and coach:

*Enthusiasm is excitement with inspiration, motivation, and
a pinch of creativity.*

The class is then instructed to be prepared to answer “get to know you” questions such as teaching responsibilities, hobbies, and the most interesting place they’ve traveled to in the last two years. At this point, my only goal is to create a fun and

engaging environment that produces a sense of pleasure and belonging. While most participants enjoy this first section, some find it stressful. We introduce ourselves to each other, find people with the same birthdays, get the names of three people taller or shorter and the same height as we are. We share things about ourselves with a partner using only our bodies, introduce ourselves in conjunction with making a silly face, toss balls for more introductions, and discover similar likes and dislikes. This work at the beginning of a course pays off handsomely as we do cooperative work throughout the term.

Participants are then asked to work individually to select a preferred quotation from a curated list. After they have had the opportunity to read and select a quote, they are put into groups of three or four to discuss quote selections and choose one that will represent the entire group so they can relate it (through a spokesperson) to reasons for taking the course and its relationship to training. We end this activity with a quote from Billy Graham:

Hot heads and cold hearts never solved anything

Finally, I ask participants to create a list of goals for the course. What do they want to take away? What do they hope to get out of the course, and so on? We reference this list throughout the course.

It's a carefully crafted course introduction to purposefully create pleasure and build relationships—a foundational building block in classroom success. The usual response is smiles, laughter, and favorability. An hour into the course, people are feeling good and so much less stressed about taking a graduate course!

Now for the pain . . .

All Regional Training Center graduate courses feature a research-based project to complete their requirements. With that in mind, participants are now asked to review the many options of Learning Extension Project Guidelines. This information is reviewed carefully—project options, style and formatting considerations, and deadlines. It takes a bit of time to go through the entire process. Almost instantly, body language changes, and the positive energy I so carefully crafted leaves the room, which is perfect for this activity. After fielding questions, I hit participants with this question:

Will you be staying for the duration of the course?

This gets us to the point of the opening activity and highlights the fact that participants have been involved with learning on many levels since they entered the room. Most look at me like I'm crazy and answer "yes, of course." I repeat the question a time or two, ask "why," and chart the answers. I also ask about their feelings when they arrived and after the initial activities versus after the class discussion of the Learning Extension Project. Did they associate more pleasure with the course after the opening activities; more pain after they learned of the project requirements? It's normal to get answers such as "fun" and "pleasure" about the opening activities and "painful" and "unpleasant" with regard to the Learning Extension Project. My job is to lead them to these conclusions. I then ask, "*why did you stay?*" The following are some of the normal answers I receive:

I'm working on my master's degree.

I'm working on a certification or state requirements.

I'll get a raise.

I want to learn how to motivate myself and my kids.

I want to learn to be a better goal setter.

Now, a more interesting question. "What if the project requirement had been a fifty-page research paper? Would you have stayed?" The answer is often "no." What wins out—*pain or pleasure*?

I point out that for most of them the pain of leaving the course is greater than the pleasure of not taking the course; that the pleasure of receiving a pay raise by moving up on the salary guide is greater than the pain of not getting the raise. That the pain of not completing certification or master's degree requirements is greater than the pleasure of leaving or not having taken the course at all. This is called the pain/pleasure principle and is one of the primary driving forces behind all human behavior. Every decision we make is driven by these components. It is unmistakable and undeniable. Our brain has an internal scale that is constantly weighing the pain/pleasure outcome of our decision making. We are hard-wired to gain pleasure and avoid pain. A recent study published in the *Journal of Consumer Psychology* (Hardisty & Weber, 2020) essentially showed that we want to have pleasurable things as soon as possible and delay bad things as long as possible. Unfortunately, much of our activity occurs in the *strong desire to avoid pain*. This discussion leads us to the conclusion that one of the cores of all motivation is our brain's weighing the pain/pleasure outcome of a certain decision/activity. Depending on the situation, the brain does more to avoid pain than it does to gain pleasure. I examine the depth of simple questions such as why do women put on makeup in the morning, or not? Why do we exercise? Who, here, procrastinates? Everyone raises their hands, and then I get some specific examples. Why? Again, a variety of answers. I then continue with this statement: The reason you procrastinate is because the pleasure of not doing something (whatever it is they are putting off) is greater than the pain of doing it; plain and simple. What happens when two pains come up side by side (you've procrastinated so long that you now have to complete the painful activity)? If it is something like the RTC project, the pain of not doing it now wins (no grade, no tuition reimbursement, lose your certification, no pay raise, etc.), and you can no longer procrastinate. It now becomes more painful not to do the project. More than a decade ago, I saw a CAT scan of my heart, which already showed calcification in the arteries in and around it! It moved me. It made eating well and becoming aerobically fit a must. It was a real epiphany, and I made some major changes in my life. The pleasure of eating what I wanted no longer outweighed the pain of that CAT scan and what that could mean for my future and the future of my family.

PAIN/PLEASURE IN PRACTICE

The following activities are meant to give you an insight into what you attach pleasure to and what you associate with pain.

Name three things you do to avoid pain.

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2.
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3.
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Name three things you do to gain pleasure.

1.
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2.
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3.
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List three actions that you have been putting off that you need to take right now. Is it a phone call that needs to be made? Do you need to begin exercising? Do you need to make a doctor's appointment? Is there something you need to communicate to someone else? Do you need to lose weight or stop smoking? Have you been interested in some professional activity you just haven't taken the time to research and use?

1.
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2.
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3.
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List the pain you've associated with these particular actions. Has it been too painful to make the call? Why? What pain have you associated with not eating in a more healthful manner (as an example)?

1.
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2.
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3.
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List all the pleasure you've received by not doing this or these action(s) now.

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2.
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3.
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Write down the opposite effect of your nonaction. What will it cost you if you don't take the action; next week, next year, in ten years; financially, for your health, for your life's purposes, in terms of relationships? *Make it emotional! This is what takes something from being a "should" to being a "must."* It is the process of getting leverage on yourself so you ACT!

1.
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2.
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3.
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Finally, list what you will gain if you take immediate action!

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2.
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3.
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You can advertise in your own mind to set up the pleasurable associations you desire instead of having someone else do it to you, which marketers and advertisers make a career of! The pain/pleasure principle is constantly at work in our lives. Teachers need to know how it works in their lives and be comfortable with the concept so they can recognize it in students. Not doing homework or doing homework is a pain/pleasure issue. Being excited about learning or school is a pain/pleasure issue. Remember, the key to using the pain/pleasure principle in your own life is to focus on the pain of not doing something and the subsequent cost to your life. What will it cost you if you don't take this action? Unfortunately, avoiding pain is the greater of these two forces, and focusing on what we'll lose or the consequences then becomes the more potent motivator.

I write about pain and pleasure because, personally, it has become a simple tool for me to do a gut check that reveals my motives, motivations, and levels of desire. My wife understands the pain/pleasure issue well, and we often say to each other "it's a pain/pleasure issue" whether it's regarding a choice to procrastinate yet again or drive

forward and complete a task or goal. What I've learned to do is to recognize the cost of my inaction to my goals and quality of life. That drives and fuels me. What if I don't take this action? What will it cost me? I'm going to be asking you to do things throughout this book. Whether it is to be more physically active, manage your stress, set goals, create a personal mission statement, or create a morning routine that will ignite and drive you, make no mistake—your decision to partake or not is a pain/pleasure issue. Sizing up the cost of your action or inaction could determine the quality of your personal and professional life and have an unmistakable impact on the students you teach.