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T.D. Jakes



INSTINCT

The Power  
to Unleash  
Your Inborn Drive

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# INSTINCT

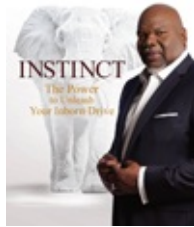
The Power  
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T. D. Jakes



New York Boston Nashville



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*I would like to dedicate INSTINCT to the TDJ Enterprise staff and team who allowed me to learn to lead while leading them. To the Potter's House family—your hunger to know drove me to dig deeper into life. To my many friends who challenged me, inspired me, prayed for me, and encouraged me along the way. I always tried to make sure you knew who you were and your value to me.*

*To my loving wife, Serita, and my five gifted children, Jamar, Jermaine, Cora, Sarah, and Dexter. To my siblings, Ernest and Jacqueline. You are all my family, I love you dearly! I've learned so much from you all about life and love and what matters most. I'm sure I couldn't have survived without you giving me a reason to grow on! Thank you for giving me the gift of having you in my life!*

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## CHAPTER 1



# Instinct Has a Rhythm

Our instincts are the treasure map for our soul's satisfaction. Following our instincts can make the crucial distinction between what we are good *at*—our vocation or skill set—and what we are good *for*—the fulfillment of our purposeful potential. When you're truly engaged with your life's calling, whether in the boutique, the banquet hall, or the boardroom, you rely on something that cannot be taught.

I'm convinced that our instincts can provide the combination we need to align our unique variables with our callings and release the treasure within us. When harnessed, refined, and heeded, our instincts can provide the key to unlocking our most productive, most satisfying, most joyful lives.

We often recognize people who seem to thrive by instinct. Fashion designers who do what they do beyond the training they received, with a flair for the latest trends that's inherent and instinctive. Interior decorators and others in the graphic arts may wield this gift as well, but they are not the only ones. Athletes in the "zone," or investors with a keen sense of timing, performers with the courage to audition for a role outside their fans' expectations. They all know what it means to function by their own unique internal compass.

If you have ever had the privilege of working with someone like this, then you know they can take the mundane and make it magical. They can take the most simplistic equipment and produce the most superlative results. Often they maximize their training with their unique flair. No matter what you call it, the truly gifted simply have that extra something that seemingly others don't have or don't tap into the way they should.

Unfortunately, much of what I see today isn't about fulfilling one's true potential as much as it is about appearing to fulfill what other people expect. Too many people want the appearance of winning rather than the practices and hard work that create a true champion. They mistake the prize for the act of winning and will ultimately buy a trophy without ever running a race. They didn't take the class; they bought the diploma. They aren't successful; they just have the props. They aren't driven to achieve something; they just bust their gut to appear busy to everyone around them.

The irony is what these people fail to realize. When you're living by instinct, then you will naturally enhance everything and everyone around you. In other words, success will come naturally. When both your intellect and instincts are aligned, then producing the fruits of your labors brings satisfaction beyond measure.

Now, it will still require hard work and dedication on your part, but the internal satisfaction will

fuel your desire to achieve even larger dreams. Based on the fact that we are all inherently creative people, if we are in touch with our instincts, then we will naturally increase our endeavors. When you don't become fixated on winning the prize or appearing successful, and instead pursue your passion, then you will discover the fulfillment that comes from living by instinct.

## Feel the Rhythm

Consider this: scientists tell us that even our cells have instincts. Imagine my amazement when I spoke with physicians who revealed the way our physical cells operate. They say even our cell function is based on what has been genetically programmed within them. Instinct is interwoven into the very fiber of our DNA.

We all begin as a single cell, a product of an egg and a sperm. They unite to form a zygote, the result of the fertilized egg, the single cell that will evolve from a human *forming* to become a human *being*. This new cell undergoes a series of rapid divisions that produce a blastocyst, the initial ball of new cells. The blastocyst then multiplies into many daughter cells. One expert describes these cells as being “pluri-potential.” In other words, each of these cells has the potential to differentiate into new cells of many different varieties. Some “daughter cells” instinctively become skin cells, bone cells, spleen cells, and cardiac cells or brain cells. The inherent imprint of these cells activates them to become what they were predestined to be.

This inherent sense of identity based on function is truly astounding. Doctors explain that the cardiac cells are “auto-rhythmic” cells. They actually vibrate and beat together instinctively at the same tempo—*before* they ever unite with each other and function as the heart! Even drummers in an orchestra need a conductor to set a rhythm, but these cells instinctively catch the same beat and have the same rhythm. They draw together and beat together to the same rhythm.

Learning about these “cell instincts” made me think of the old camp song taken from the Old Testament book of Ezekiel—you know, the foot bone connected to the leg bone and the leg bone connected to the hip bone and so forth. Now, I'm not a doctor, and I'm sure not here to sing around a campfire. But what I want you to see is that the body develops by cells that find their rightful place because they know what they were made to do! These cells vibrate to the tempo of their purpose even before they're operating and performing their function.

So how about you—are you in sync with your inner wisdom about your strengths, abilities, talents, and unique contribution to the world? Or is your life somehow offbeat to your inner melody? Have you lost your rhythm because you have not found your place to define and activate your unique contribution? One of the great tragedies of life is not discovering the people, culture, and careers that are part of your tribe and moving to the same beat.

You may have experienced the discord that comes when those around you move to the beat of a drummer different than your own. Successful businesses, healthy relationships, and most collaborative endeavors require a syncopated alignment of roles, responsibilities, and rhythms. Entrepreneurs often need employees with a work ethic and flexibility similar to their own. It's frustrating when you have an urgent idea that requires execution at midnight and a team member who cannot be reached until the following day. It's not wrong to set boundaries and limits on work, but people need to be on the same page of music so the orchestra can play together. Similarly, romantic partners often discover they're out of step because one desires a waltz while the other's leading a tango.

Contentment comes when you find the people, places, and events in life you were created

impact. Most individuals who lead rich, productive lives do so because they allow their instincts to guide them to the intersection of the head and heart, the place where their deepest passions and sharpest skills align with destiny. They succeed instinctively because they each know their own tempo and recognize it in the individuals and institutions with whom they collaborate.

## Connect to Your Calling

If you have ever felt misaligned, this book is for you. If you have lost the rhythm, the passion, or the thrill of living in alignment that you once glimpsed, then keep reading. As he did with the very cells that comprise our bodies and the dry bones that were joined together for new life, God has given us deeper instincts to be attracted to those things that fit a higher and better purpose.

*Never settle for less than God's best for your life.*

Some people have the courage to move beyond the ordinary, from the methodical mediocre into the revolutionary realization of where they belong. You can have this sense of belonging only when you connect to your core calling. If you believe in calling, as I do, you understand it's more than the motivation to minister that clergy experience. The calling to creativity, the calling to teach, to give, to build, are all part of allowing your instinct to guide you to the "something more" that you suspect is out there.

Who can deny that some people move into their life's purpose with the skill of a child prodigy when he first touches a violin? They're aware of a compelling sense of attraction and engagement that cannot merely be taught but can only be caught. I've known musicians who played the piano from childhood, many without lessons. They just sat down at the keyboard and felt connected to it.

It's a sad thing to live your life without this deep-rooted sense of connection to your purpose. Like a lightbulb without a lamp, this kind of disconnect fosters dark and foreboding feelings in the soul. Whether you are the manager or the employee, the homemaker or the home builder, what matters most is that you have been awakened to your purpose and enlightened to the inner fulfillment that it affords.

Early in my life I myself was haunted by feelings that I was created for more than I could access in my environment. The only reason I moved beyond the many potholes and pit stops I encountered was because of an instinctive allure pulling me toward something up ahead on the road that I had to find. I refused to stop and settle for less than the explosive exploration of what God had placed within me.

There is no secret formula for learning to listen to your instincts. These pages before you merely offer my sparks toward kindling the blaze of your own incandescent, instinctive alignment, the deep and fuller life you were created to attain. So as we journey together, let's remove the smoke and mirrors and ask the questions at the heart of our truest self. If we seek meaning in our motives, perhaps the answer will not be the voice of God shouting at us from the heavens but in the whisper of our God-given instincts deep within.

You see, Scripture tells us, Out of the heart flow the issues of life (Prov. 4:23). The heart cannot read. It can't draw and it surely can't drive. But if we will listen to its drumbeat, if we have the courage to be wooed by its wisdom, then we will find our answer. We could spend the rest of our lives in a rhythm so in sync that the melodious sounds we make transform all areas of our lives into an integrated, harmonic symphony of satisfaction.

As we grow and go forward, our master Creator may be wooing you instinctively into a place where your intellect can flourish and your heart can rest. If cells move until they connect and form the

highly complicated and efficient beings we call humans, then maybe we need to put our ears to the heart of the matter and catch the beat. ~~Maybe we need to stop choosing people purely by résumés and rationales that have led us headfirst into disappointment.~~ We need instead to find people who are in sync with our beat and form a more perfect union with those who hear the same rhythm! It is time for us to find the thing we were created to do, the people we were meant to affect, and the power that comes from alignment with purpose.

Having had unique opportunities to sit at the table with champions in almost every imaginable field today, I've found that people who accomplish massive feats don't play by man-made rules. They are trendsetters and game changers. They lead the world into paradigm shifts that we can only study after they've done what they set out to do. They negotiate unprecedented deals, build beyond borders, and innovate virtually every area with amazing accomplishments.

They do it because they don't play out their lives by prewritten scripts. They aren't afraid to leave the cages of comfort and head to the jungles of judicious risk and discovery. These people of whom the world takes notice dare not to fit in but aren't afraid to stand out. They don't run in a pack or stand with the herd. They know where they're going and where they belong.

I'm not suggesting that we take our script from others. The low-grade plagiarism of popularity will never lead you to true contentment. But I am saying perhaps it is possible to learn from the risk-takers committed to living instinctively, listening beyond information and example, for the inspiration of igniting your purpose. If you are already doing what you were created to do, then I want to help you enhance your success. And if you are not, I hope your days of following other drummers will diminish as you listen for the unique, syncopated beat within yourself.

If you listen, it will guide you like a magnet to steel. All else is misguided. Most people are manipulated by the approval of others, the paycheck that supports them, and the lifestyle that has handcuffed them to the brass ring of perceived success. On this path we eventually live like slaves to a man-made system. We chase the goals of others instead of pursuing our own dreams. We anesthetize our despair with the next purchase, pill, or plunder. We do what we think we should instead of living beyond what logic alone can dictate.

If these words resonate with you and reverberate with what you know to be true, then it's time to decode your own instincts, increase your areas of advancement, and illuminate the dark corners of disappointment at the edges of your life. I truly believe that following your instincts will transform your workplace, liberate your career, and enhance your relationships.

Make no mistake, these pages can only offer you clues to stimulate your own process of discovery. The answers you seek are already inside you. So if you're ready to unlock the confines of where you are to discover the freedom of where you were meant to be, then let's get started. *Your instinct is the key!*



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## CHAPTER 2



# Basic Instincts

It's the way mother birds build nests, and build them high enough to elude predators. It's the way bees know to extract pollen and return with it to their hive. Or the way that sheep, cattle, and other animals often travel in herds so that they will not be as vulnerable. It's the surge a mother experiences to protect her cubs when confronted by a startled hiker in the forest. Biological instincts include the fierce determination of the majestic lion to guard his territory.

These creatures don't have to be taught how to do these things; they are born with the natural instinct to behave in these ways. In fact, most scholars define an instinct as a genetically hardwired tendency, a behavior that's built in and automatic, not learned or conditioned. The survival instinct is generally regarded as the strongest in most every species. Instincts to nurture, to gather, to procreate, to secure food and water, to protect and to defend—these sustain life in practical, very tangible ways.

On a basic level, we share many of the same instincts. We see instinct in action when a baby tries to suckle in order to receive nourishment, or a toddler recoils from a hot skillet. It's the sense you have about the stranger lingering behind you on your walk home that causes you to run into a store and call a taxi. Similarly, no one has to teach you to dodge the oncoming bus careening toward you when you're crossing the street.

We are wired to stay alive. Our bodies naturally seek out nourishment (food and water) and protection (such as shelter, clothing, and weapons) to survive. You've probably heard of the "fight or flight" response, which is an instinctive reaction to any perceived danger. Many scientists also believe that language is instinctive, or at least the desire to express our responses to both internal and external stimuli. Some researchers believe that we are instinctively spiritual beings as well, which of course would confirm.

## **Our Instincts Evolve**

As we grow and mature into men and women, our various instincts also evolve and become more sophisticated and personalized—but so does our reliance on intellect, evidence, and technology. We are assaulted by so much information each day that it's easy to lose touch with the voice inside us, the compelling sense of knowledge, the awareness we have in our gut.

In addition, we're often conditioned to dismiss our instincts as primal and animalistic, subjective

and unscientific. We're taught to rely on facts and figures, data and digits, not hunches and gut feelings. Some people may even consider relying on instinct in the same way they regard superstition and mental telepathy: fodder for science fiction and superhero movies.

Sometimes we rely on our instincts without even realizing it. We notice details about how a job applicant has dressed and groomed himself and form an accurate opinion about his qualifications. Perhaps we sense the timing is right to have a difficult but necessary conversation with someone in our family and find them receptive when approached. It could be an inexplicable attraction toward one particular field of study or area of business. For instance, you can't help but notice the lines of other people's clothing, wondering about the fabric: how it drapes; its shape, color, and fit. Maybe you've always been fascinated by the way numbers work and enjoy creating order by making the columns balance. Whether you recognize those glimpses of instinct or not, it's there.

On the other hand, our instincts are not necessarily accurate all the time. That hunch about someone else's business deal wasn't true. Your sense of timing for the big date wasn't on target after all. The sense of dread about a client's reaction to your work proved to have no basis in reality. Your intuition about getting the promotion wasn't accurate.

So how do you become more aware of your unique, naturally developed instincts? And perhaps more important, how do you discern when to trust your instincts and when to rely on logic, fact, and objectivity?

Obviously, this is where our relationship with instinct gets tricky.

And that's what this book is all about.

## You Just Know

Not one of us is born without instincts. A person is more likely to be born without sight than to be born without insight. In fact, many of my blind friends rely upon insight. All of us have internal senses beyond the physical with which we can better determine what's next, what's safe, or even what's right. Our instincts speak to us daily, prompting us to pay attention, to listen more carefully, to sidestep danger, and to seize an opportunity.

Some may be more in tune with their instincts. And some may be less inclined to listen to them. But we, like all of God's creatures, come complete with them on the inside. From this inner sanctuary springs wisdom we don't even know we possess. But in a fast-paced, busy world, we tend not to give ourselves the quiet moments of reflection that are needed to unleash them.

Think about it: there are some things you just *know*. You don't even know how or why you know, you just do. This inner knowing is instinctive. It is as natural as the ability to sense when you've found the thing you were born to do. Unfortunately, many of us often spend our lives doing what we were trained to do. Some do what they were asked to do. And most of us do what others need us to do. And all the while, we wonder why the feeling of fulfillment eludes us.

Our Creator designed everything he made to have a purpose. Yet most of us live our lives wondering what our purpose is. Worse still, there's an aching in our hearts as we sense that there has to be more in life, something beyond the monotonous compliance with convenient opportunities which most of us have lived our lives. I encounter so many people who dread going to work, not because they are lazy but because they are unfulfilled.

Without understanding the guidance that our innate God-given instincts provide us, we simply adjust to the urgency of circumstances, all the while sensing deep within that we were created for something more.

much more. Yet the uncertainty or fear of pursuing this inner sense keeps us contained in the contrived cage of the ordinary. Simply put, we've never learned to rely on our instincts.

But regardless of where we are in life, it's not too late to align our lives with the inner wisdom who we really are and what we were made to do. God, the master designer, has equipped us with a fundamental instinct that draws us to our divine purpose. This sense of potential being realized is more fulfilling than any paycheck. It is the feeling of fitting in, like a piece in a puzzle, to form a greater picture than what we may be doing right now. It is the innate satisfaction that comes from giving the gifts that you and you alone can contribute to the world.

Once we embrace this instinct of identity, we understand why we are so shaped and designed. We realize why we were rejected in other places, why we grew bored by other roles, and why over and over we're haunted by the possibility that there's some place, some plan, some design to which we should be aligned. Deeply spiritual people pray for it to be revealed. Other people wander for the lack of it.

But the most fulfilled, confident people live their lives in the very midst of it. These individuals have answered the question, moved into the sweet spot, and been guided by a God whose design is revealed in them. When we have the courage to leave the familiar and step into the destiny to which our instincts keep drawing us, we can live the same way.

I am not writing a book to show you how to get rich, because I know that many rich people have not identified their purpose. I am not writing to share how to be famous. Too many famous people are miserable. I write to share with you the importance of being led into your fulfilled purpose by leaving the confines of your conventional cave and entering the space where your heart longs to reside.

The place you will discover when instinct is your guide.

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## CHAPTER 3



# Instinct in Action

Instincts are the product of what we have and what we want to have. They are the inner compass guiding us from where we are to where we want to go. Perhaps this explains why artists, inventors, and entertainers may be more in tune with their instincts than bankers, engineers, and accountants are with theirs. It's not that these latter professions do not require the power of necessity to stimulate innovation; it's simply that these fact-based fields rely on numbers, equations, and balanced ledgers as their building blocks.

Creative careers, on the other hand, require participants to produce something new from more malleable materials such as words, images, and music. This kind of resourceful resilience often emerges in childhood, requiring some to rely on instinct more than others, not just to survive but also to thrive. This was certainly my experience, the way my own instincts were initially activated.

Being a relatively poor boy born in the hills of West Virginia, I grew up with meager means but with an enormous work ethic instilled by my parents. We lived in a bedroom community in the suburbs of Charleston, and its topography, punctuated with stately trees and rolling hills, abundant in beauty, provided one of its more pristine features. However, none of its natural opulence succeeded in camouflaging its economic limitations. Still, it was the matrix that developed me, and now I can more adeptly see why.

Growing up, I was a little chocolate-colored boy with short pants and greased knees tromping through the neighborhood. I'm sure I must have glistened from the Vaseline my mother used to moisturize my skin, but since I had few friends and an overactive energy level, no one seemed to notice. As a result, I spent a great deal of time outdoors, and must confess that since my first name was Thomas I became a bit of a "Peeping Tom."

Yes, I know how that sounds, but I don't mean it to connote someone spying inappropriately who will eventually get arrested! Instead I simply mean that I learned by watching and allowing what I saw to become fuel for my imagination. A voyeur of life and people, I witnessed events and ideologies that became the catalyst for many of my adult conclusions and an impetus of the logic with which I attacked life.

You see, research from observation can be quite conclusive. This explains why scientists have laboratories and not just libraries. It is why lawyers seek an eyewitness at a crime scene to testify at trial. What we see often creates quite an impact. But it's how we process it internally that influences our instincts.

Now, I realize that everyone didn't come from my era or environment. But any time you have been denied a passage to privileges and access to opportunities, you have a tendency to develop a certain adaptation, sensitivity, and instinct through which you compensate for that denial. And it is the development of this instinct for success that is the catalyst of my focus, research, and now writing this book.

I've climbed high enough in life to peek into the minds of some of the most accomplished people in the world—award-winning entertainers, world-class athletes, and world-changing political leaders. Having come from meager and mediocre beginnings, I am astutely aware of my surroundings which allowed an actual glimpse into the lives of those usually seen only from the distance of blogs and news reports.

Over the years, both through my business and my ministry, I've had dinner with many of them and been entertained in their homes. I have had intense conversations that lasted until the restaurant closed and have observed their families and friends and listened to stories about how they became who they are. I've been on the set of their movies and visited the Oval Office of their leadership, watching them do what they do, discovering what shaped who they are.

I've seen their instincts in action.

## Highly Evolved

I've learned that most highly successful people didn't develop in an environment of success; they evolved into it. When obscurity precedes any level of accomplishment, it does so as a mother birthing a child. First generations of successful people are often shocked to find that giving their children all they dreamed of providing doesn't necessarily create the same skills and ambitions in their kids that their own parents' lack of resources instilled in them.

Born in the 1920s, my parents were raised in an industrial age where the primary goal was to get a great job, earn a gold watch, and draw a modest pension when you retire. My mother was a strong advocate for education, and she recommended getting a degree in something marketable so you would always have a job, maybe even a management position of which her generation was enamored. Rightfully so, as their parents were sharecroppers in the Deep South who spent their lives picking peas, sawing lumber, and living off the land.

Now, my parents' ideals are good ones, and I support them to the highest. But my parents could only promote us to the levels to which they themselves had been exposed. This is why you can't imagine my astonishment when I pulled back the curtain on the Steve Jobses of the world, the Bill Gateses of the world, and others, only to find that some of the most influential leaders of our day either didn't have a degree or didn't have a degree in the area in which they became most well known.

There is no doubt that these men and women are quite intelligent. And through that intelligence they would without question have reached some modicum of success. But what blew my mind was the discovery that somewhere along the path of intellectualism they either took a detour based on an instinctive decision or incorporated an instinctive move that lifted them completely out of the league of their peers and enabled them to be the icons of power they are today! In other words, the successful icons not only had great instincts, but they were dialed into them and acted on them.

I noticed that most of my new constituents discovered the ideals, products, or passion they have now come to epitomize (and many of them were way past the age of twenty when they did!) by blazing their own trails. These men and women listened to the promptings within them and had the

courage to derail the scripted plans of their lives and take the road less traveled by the inner impulse to go further than what their background would've predicted.

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They listened when prompted to that nebulous space undefined within the human soul where there is house a navigational system—one that virtually all of us have, even if in most of us it's often underutilized. This innate compass provides guidance in answering the age-old questions: Why am I here? What can I do with the life, gifts, and opportunities I have been allotted?

Instincts provide us with information that has been synthesized through the filter of who we really are and our truest goals in life. Facts, data, information, and knowledge provide nourishment and stimulation for this capacity within us. Our powers of observation and of experience are stored here. Our creativity, resilience, and resourcefulness also abide within our instincts. Fused together, the basic instinct in each of us compels us toward the unique fulfillment that is ours alone.

Also, please understand that the kind of instinct we're talking about here is not an uncontrollable urge, self-indulgent desire, arbitrary impulse or compulsion. Instinct may seem similar to these other aspects of our humanity at times, but ultimately our instincts include an acute sense of timing along with an awareness of self and others that transcends selfish lusts and addictive desires. In other words, our instincts are not motivated by immediate gratification, personal gain at the expense of others, exploitation, or the pursuit of satisfaction untethered from conscience.

Since we are made in the image of our Creator, I'm convinced that our instincts also bear the imprint of the divine. As human beings, we not only possess the instinct for survival, just as any other living creature does, but we also have instincts for purpose, fulfillment, and dominion. God made us to reflect his creativity, resourcefulness, and imagination. He wants us to see beyond the literal, above the bottom line, and beneath the surface of appearances.

We all have access to the same information and opportunities. But some of us never go beyond what is required to add to the task what is inspired. In this highly competitive world we live in today, meeting the demand will never produce exceptional results. These people exceeded what was commanded of them and veered into the creative to which there was no previous point of reference.

*Trailblazing people move by instinct, because there is nothing outward that suggests that what they see inwardly is possible.* Like a good detective on a crime scene, they look for clues but don't ignore the unsubstantiated hunches that have often solved cases. They combine instincts with intellect to discover a new way of seeing what's missing in plain sight.

People who combine these two are far more likely to excel than people who only operate according to job descriptions and acceptable past practices. They unlock the undiscovered treasures of instinctively formed creativity; they enhance their life's work by not limiting themselves to the script and structure of other people's minds. As I looked in the window more closely, I noticed that these people did more than shatter glass ceilings—they literally tore the roof off the status quo!

There is indeed a great deal of difference between a job and a career, a place of employment and a rendezvous with destiny. Finding the thing you were created to do can be a dubious task, highlighted by the fact we generally don't have time to do the soul-searching that is required to find the hidden clues to unlock our fullest and best potential. Instead we fill out an application, gain a reasonably good-paying job, and go to work for someone who found the thing they were created to do!

This inward urging or prompting is far too often underutilized, and consequently so many people feel stuck at a certain stage even as they long to be more productive. Beyond pursuing the direction of their instincts, as you may have done at times, the question remains: have you maximized your findings, or only stored the data and acquiesced to the mundane routine of fitting in with what has already been done?

# Extra Edge

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Now, all of us aren't created to lead a country like the president or compose a classical concerto like Mozart. Instead many of us are, in fact, intended to be a support to these high achievers and realize our dreams by the often-fulfilling task of using our gifts and talents to support a person in power. But even in these roles, the people who live out their opportunities with advancement and promotion do so because they always sense the extra and not just the ordinary!

Whether you work in a government office, a cubicle, a courthouse, or the corner of your apartment, your instincts know truths that can enhance your performance and increase your productivity. There is one thing that is needed to find fulfillment in life: to find that place in life, that station of being, where all that is within you resonates with the challenge before you. This is the spot where inborn nature and innate creativity soars into the horizon of possibility! It's the extra edge that some use and some do not!

Anything that we do for years that doesn't match the inner imprint of our gifting will eventually become monotonous and routine, ritualistic and frustrating. Like a key that will fit a lock and yet is inadequately structured to let us open the door, we find ourselves jammed into a role that fulfills the needs of those around us but may not unlock the door to the larger life, work, and cravings of our inner soul.

If we are to find alignment between the external career and internal call, we are going to have to navigate through the maze of low-hanging opportunities offered to sustain us and fulfill the open-door area of need that awaits us! It is the vision of what is beyond the routine that heightens the blood and stirs the adrenaline within each of us.

There is a satiety achieved when we get out of bed knowing that although the day ahead may be demanding, it can't require something of us that isn't represented within the inventory of what we can handle. In fact, it is often the more challenging job, ministry, marriage that either causes us to shrink away and grumble or activate the creative instinct to find a remedy or create a solution.

This is the choice we face each day.

In a staff development training session with my team recently, I explained to them that at the management level I needed around me people who bring innovative solutions, not people who gain access to my office merely to reiterate problems. Truly great leadership is solution oriented. While it is true that the proverbial buck stops with me, many issues made it to me that should've been resolved before they ever got to me. I further explained that if they weren't participating in the solution, they were by default adding to the problem!

Great instincts lead to great promotion. Since leadership instincts have the power to influence our worth, it may be worth your time to spend a little time enhancing those instincts and acting on them when given the freedom to do so. Because at the end of the day, all that matters in this brief vacation we take on earth is that we didn't shrink into a corner and waste the days we're given doing what we have to do rather than rising and taking on the challenge of becoming all we were created to be.

In order to do this, we must not live in the practical nor the pragmatic but must have the courage to move into the premier. That satisfaction of being able to meet the demands of our lives is in part reached when we have a keen sense of the inner instincts we have of being the right person in the right place at the right time to handle the task. Often the complexity of our lives spawns the creativity of our lives! Our instincts can cut through the clutter of chaos and forge a clear path for us to follow—that is, if we're listening and courageous enough to follow.

But obviously, listening and following is easier said than done.

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## Instinct from Adversity

When I was a child there were not many gadgets to assist us. Even our toys had few features. Girls had to imagine their hard-bodied Mattel baby dolls were wet and needed changing; we boys had to turn apple trees into army tanks with only our imaginations to guide us. As we played in the backyard while our mothers peeked occasionally out the window, we became quite proficient at turning sticks into baseball bats and rocks into softballs. Left to our own devices, ants transformed into armies and snowflakes evolved into snowmen.

We were forced to be instinctive enough to sense danger when a snake was near or to discern a buddy from a bully while walking home from school! We didn't have to do character assessment from a laptop or search Facebook for common "likes." We didn't realize it then, but those simple circumstances were in fact the gymnasium that gave our instincts a workout. My backyard turned into a jungle. Our little playground toys had all the thrills of a Disneyland design and created by a child who some would have said had an overactive imagination.

As I look back on those days, it was the necessity of not having enough that spawned the creativity to see the invisible, but I learned how to play in what I dreamed and not in what I had. Today I am most grateful for the clarity of thought and the nimbleness of mind to spark creativity, even though it originated in what sounds like adversity today. Imagination was a coping mechanism through which we were allowed—no, encouraged—to see an inanimate object not just for what it was but what it could be. This ability to see the invisible was a great stimulus for instinctive reasoning.

## Maternal Instinct

As poor children we were inspired through the absence of the obvious to tap into the presence of the imagined. I remain grateful to this day that I was given that backyard wilderness to teach me to dream of what could be without getting lost in what is. Little did I know that, standing in creek water surrounded by scampering rabbits and hawks gingerly perched on branches, I would playfully start a cycle of innovation that would one day be the mother of my own creative instinct!

This is not how we usually define the term *maternal instinct*, but I think it applies just the same. Later as a young pastor I used this same sheer instinct to step into a condemned building and look beyond the deplorable stench and dilapidated walls of its present condition and see what it could be given some remodeling, care, and enhancement. My instinct became the impetus for a vision, for the power of imagining its filled potential, and for the tactical steps needed to create a plan of fulfillment.

As I got older, the same instinct that remodeled the building later became the impetus through which I could salvage a flailing company, or enhance a weak script into a blockbuster movie. Instinct and imagination become the parents of our creative visions. They allow us to see opportunities where others see only limitations. Instead of focusing on what we don't have, we concentrate on what we do have—and what can be created from those ingredients. *People with great instincts always transform what they are given to more than what it was when presented to them!*

The best thinkers, builders, draftsmen, architects, designers, hairstylists, preachers, and chefs are



those who walk amongst us with one foot in reality and the other planted firmly in the realm of the potential. If, like them, you're blessed to recognize the gap between where you are and where you want to be, then you may also know that in order to cross over into a more successful, fully realized life, you must allow your instincts to become your bridge.

Our instincts teach us how to take less and do more. Like a gourmet chef with a limited pantry, we combine the various flavors to create something new and delicious. Our instincts up the ante and propel us to the next level. Our instincts illuminate our path amid the bleakness of realities, statistics, and studies and guide us from the mundane to the magical.

Innovators live by their instincts to break barriers and resist complacency. Consider someone like Oprah Winfrey, whose unprecedented business model changed daytime television, not only in terms of content but also even more important, in terms of an innovative business model. Or Cathy Hughes, who changed the game of radio forever by developing models that not only built a communication empire but affected how R&B music would be marketed within our community. Instinctive pioneers such as the Bronner Brothers or the makers of Dudley products, who had the foresight to pioneer hair care companies that revolutionized how black people purchased beauty products.

When we look at these individuals, it's not enough to simply applaud their success. We must examine their creative propensity through which they created something unique then successfully marketed the fruits of their labors. In other words, it's not enough to know what people did if you can't learn why they did it like they did it. John Maxwell says that those who know how to do a thing will always have a job. But those who understand why they did it will always be their bosses!

The real catalyst of creative instincts is about peeking into the windows of your own heart and soul. Others can inspire you, but ultimately the only thing that empowers you is what lies within you and learning how to better utilize what you've been given.

Even if what you've been given seems wrapped in nothing but problems, these barriers can become breakthroughs. They are just blessings camouflaged as burdens, creek beds from which you will develop oceans, backyard trips that will eventually open your mind to safaris. Whether you are wrestling with a poor marriage, a pathetic career, or a plummeting business, there isn't any area of your life that will not be transformed by your instincts if you're willing to look within and exercise them. If you go beyond the facts and failures, and explore the feelings and impulses you have been given, you will increase what you've been given, you will light a trailblazing torch that will illuminate your steps, spark your dreams, and nourish your aspirations.

Isn't it about time you activated what you've been given inside you?

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## CHAPTER 4



# The Elephant Is Ova Dere!

My own life-changing encounter with the power of instinct in action occurred recently, on a safari in South Africa. Yes, the kid who grew up playing in creek beds behind his house now felt an even keener thrill as I found myself lurching over open terrain in a Jeep! In fact, there was no way I could ever have imagined what a truly life-transforming event this safari would become, catapulting me into the “aha! moment” that inspired this book. I wasn’t there to stalk big game but to hunt for insight into this new world of roaring lions, zealous zebras, and the creatures that have always, for some unknown reason, fascinated me—elephants!

## **Air Traffic Control**

I had been invited to Johannesburg by a group of black billionaires to discuss faith and finances and how one affects the other. These men and women were among the first to have risen to such heights economically after the Apartheid. It was a very powerful exchange of ideas. We had ended the sessions, and my wife and I had been awarded a complimentary couple of days to recuperate from jet lag and the completion of a grueling schedule marked by several teaching sessions. My host explained that we would have to take a small propeller plane from the city into a more rural location.

Our youngest son, Dexter, was also traveling with us, and he shared an excitement about our excursion that my wife did not. Hours later when I looked down at the narrow patch of pavement doubling as a runway, I understood her trepidation. I looked out the window and couldn’t help but notice that there was no control tower, nor anything resembling a terminal.

The place was void of a fixed-base operator or even a house for guests to rest or wait. The lone little strip used for landing and taking off also had another occupant—a huge rhinoceros was parked in the middle of it and watched us with an implacable expression. Talk about air traffic control!

As we circled around him, hoping he would move and allow us room to land, my wife suggested that we return to the city. However, there was no way the men of our house would be denied this extraordinary adventure of a safari. So we waited patiently until the rhino cleared us for landing and we were then transported to a beautiful mansion surrounded by dense trees and small wildlife.

As we unpacked our carry-on bags and got settled, our host warned us not to wander outside the palatial fence surrounding the estate. He warned us that this was not like a visit to the zoo in Dallas.

where the animals were caged and the people were free. Instead, we were contained in the house so that the elephants and rhinoceroses would have the liberty to browse the plains without restrictions. As I anticipated the thrilling journey that awaited us the next morning, I felt like Tarzan about to burp with one of his famous yells.

The next morning I was up before the sun and enjoyed a delicious pancake breakfast on the lawn before donning my newly acquired khaki safari suit. We climbed into the Jeep, my son still sleepy but excited about our first day in the bush. Then I met our guide. He was a distinguished gentleman who was incredibly knowledgeable, and I listened intently as he unloaded priceless information about the habitat, the eating and mating habits, and so much more concerning the beasts that inhabited the wilderness.

Honestly, it all felt a little surreal. Considering my background, I marveled at this “if my mother could see me now” moment. Without a doubt, we were entering a world that couldn’t be further from where I grew up. The African wilderness has unspoken rules and regimens that the zoologist guide shared with us as I oriented myself into this new environment so foreign to my background and previous points of reference. There were no street signs, traffic lights, or road manuals, just the voice of the zoologist guiding us along the way.

We saw gazelles leaping in the air like grease spattering in a cast-iron skillet at a fish fry. They skipped and lunged forward so fast that my camera palpitated in cardiac arrest while I snapped away as fast as I could. We spied on lions with their cubs, resting in the shade. Later we watched zebras move like painted horses loosed from a carousel. So much beauty, energy, and primal instinct came alive before us, more vivid and startling than any IMAX, HD, or 3D film could ever hope to capture.

As the sun hovered above the horizon like a scarlet ember, we looked for a place to make camp. It had been a good day, an unforgettable day. My only disappointment, which I kept to myself, was that we had not seen any elephants. The powerful pachyderm had eluded us all day, and as the sun melted into twilight, I assumed that we had missed our chance. But then our zoologist guide casually mentioned that he looked forward to showing us the elephants tonight.

Had I heard him right? He planned to be out here at night! And for us to be with him? I swallowed hard and acted brave as we persevered deeper and deeper into the entrails of a world completely new and now even more foreboding draped in shadows. Now, there were certainly a lot of animals I did not want to encounter in the dark of the African wilderness. And elephants remained high on that list. Nonetheless, as we continued bouncing along the dimly lit path that was our road, it was clear that our guide intended on saving the biggest, if not the baddest and best, for last.

Soon our driver stopped the Jeep, and a man draped in loose, native garb seemed to appear out of nowhere alongside us. Our guide told us that he was a Zulu, and he would be assisting us this evening. I couldn’t help but remember my history classes from junior high about Shaka Zulu the warrior, and I imagined that he might have looked like this stoic, dark-skinned man who proceeded to perch on the edge of our Jeep in a makeshift chair that looked as though it had been welded onto the hood to accommodate his small but muscular frame.

Apparently, he knew where to find the elephants. But based on his silent, impassive demeanor, I wasn’t so sure. We hadn’t seen one all day. If our zealous zoologist couldn’t locate them, how was our new addition going to find them?

## **Water for Elephants**

As our journey continued, the zoologist began spouting a fountain of scientific information about the

area. However, I noticed the Zulu seemed unimpressed by the intellectual prowess of the other man who continued to lecture with impressive factual data about our surroundings. But the ancient-looking warrior remained silent as we careened deeper into the bush, jostled by bump after bump, until suddenly he opened his mouth and proclaimed, “The elephant is ova dere!”

Seated between a zoologist and a Zulu, between intellect and instinct, I saw something more startling than I had seen all day. I realized that intellect can explain an elephant, but only instinct can find one! The zoologist had used hundreds if not thousands of words to describe the environment where we might find elephants, along with their eating habits, mating patterns, and fighting skills. And yet, the Zulu waited quietly, listening to something even more powerful than his counterpart's knowledge, and uttered five simple words: “The elephant is ova dere!”

Moments later, his instinctive exhortation proved true. Based on the direction the Zulu was pointing in, our driver careened over rocky roads into a clearing by a small lake. There, a herd of elephants lounged and frolicked like guests beside the pool at the Ritz. Throwing water over their heads with their long trunks, they ignored their new spectators and continued cavorting.

I was speechless. Such power and might. Such enormous grace and agility on such a gigantic scale. We took picture after picture and had an incredible time, but I couldn't get out of my mind that God had brought me all the way to South Africa to show me something. Through this simple encounter, he revealed a profound metaphor on how to position my life and career for the future.

You see, it was there that I realized that I must not only surround myself with talented, well-informed people in order to prepare for the future. I must also include those individuals gifted with what the Zulu had afforded us. He reminded me that most things are not captured or conveyed by intellect alone. In fact, intellect without instinct can only explain and explicate but not execute. Only instinct can successfully find what intellect explains.

This is the one thing that university degrees and on-the-job experience cannot instill in you. Your professors and bosses can invest countless hours exposing you to critical information and inspire you with historical empirical data that will be invaluable as you trek through life. But the gift they cannot give you is the instinct to know when to do what only you can do and where to do it!

In order to harness your intentions with your actions, you must rely on instincts. Every visionary learns that they must be well-informed and well-equipped to accomplish their targeted achievement. But they must also be in touch with their instincts in order to use their experience, education, and equipment to fulfill their expectations. Instincts can help connect the dots between where you're trying to go and how you will get there.

Intellect can make a salesman knowledgeable about his product, but it cannot tell him how to reach his client. The police academy can teach an officer about crime scenes, but it cannot teach him how to search his gut and go with his instincts. The dating service can bring the right age, IQ, and physical attributes of a possible spouse before you from its extensive database. But it can never accurately measure the actual chemistry that will exist between you and your prospective mate when you finally meet.

## **The Guide Inside**

The lessons of South Africa stayed with me.

I realized that my father certainly knew this truth as he built his one-mop-one-bucket janitorial business into a fifty-two-employee company. Dad had instincts to increase. Great preacher.

experience this urge as they unload a biblical text. Gifted leaders recognize that knowledge and talent are not enough as they navigate through crucial decisions. Movie stars know the secret to being more than just an actor. Instincts separate the mighty from the mediocre!

How about you? Do you have the instincts to know when you are on to something or when you are just going for a ride? Do you trust your instincts when making a business deal or hiring a new employee? If not, you may attain a modicum of success, but you will never fulfill your maximum potential until you advance from being a zoologist to a Zulu!

This insight changed my prayer life, altered my interview process, revised the way I evaluate effective friendships, and ultimately thrust my vision forward from the ordinary to the extraordinary. All of my life I had thought that some people had it and some people didn't. But I didn't really have a word to describe what my eyes had witnessed. Now I can tell you what "it" was, that crucial difference that makes magic out of the mundane.

Thanks to an encounter at the tip of a continent thousands of miles from my home, I now had a term for the nebulous criteria of successful living. It wasn't just talent. It wasn't just intellect.

I had found the secret of champions. As I went back through all the people I had met in my life like a reel-to-reel tape stuck on rewind, suddenly it all made sense. From concert stages to corporate lunches, from church revivals to courtroom closing statements, the one thing each encounter had in common—instincts!

So if you are going after the big game of an idea, remember elephant tracking requires instincts; you may not have had to use chasing rabbit ideas! It isn't just intellect or even understanding. It isn't just giftedness and opportunity. It is the gift of activated instincts. Where do they come from? How can we sharpen them? How can we utilize what our creative Creator has invested in our deepest part? Yes, I said "in"-vested in all of us—to adapt, to transform, to create, and to sense moments of significance or danger. Moments to be wary and moments to be warring. When to cringe and when to capture. How to craft and not to crash.

It is the law of instincts that determines how we manage the moment, move into position and adapt, resourcefully create, and strategically forge ahead without fear. The common denominator of instincts wins presidential elections, makes comedians successful, causes architects to build timeless monuments, and elevates engineers to artists.

Living by instinct elevates your ability to know where you're going and how to get there. It can help you know when to slow down and step back and when to accelerate and step up. And it can guide you to what you're ultimately looking for—whether that's the elephant in the room or the elephant *ova dere!*

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## CHAPTER 5



# Instinct or Extinct

In order to activate our instincts, I'm convinced everything starts with *exposure*. You cannot be what you do not see. It isn't that exposure gives us instincts; it's that exposure awakens instincts and stops us from ignoring what we know to be true within us. Most people adapt to their environment more quickly than they should. They adjust themselves to the situation rather than adjusting their situation to the dreams they have inside.

You'd be surprised to find that you have accepted and adapted to being much less than what you're capable of becoming. It's alarming that people seek to fit in without considering the power they have to cultivate the gifts they've been given. You may even be mystified as to why you aren't further along in life. You have checked off all the boxes on the recipe for success and yet find yourself falling short. Isn't it time for you to understand what you've been given and how to sift the stirrings within you that your survival instincts can surface?

As the Zulu taught me, you must combine all your ingredients with the inner wisdom that God has given you if you expect to thrive. My prayer is that you will experience the same kind of revelation that struck me while sitting in a Jeep in South Africa as a wizened tribesman proclaimed, "The elephant is ova dere!"

Several years ago when I came to Dallas, I decided I wanted to buy some land and build affordable housing as a way of giving back to my community. I thought it would help many people who couldn't afford a home to be able to bring the cost down to their individual means. My goal was well intended and came from a good heart, but when I begin to gather statistics on the process, I learned something that would inform my hypothesis: people adapt to their own expectations. In other words, we often behave based on our perceptions more than the reality of our actual circumstances.

You see, in this case the reality became clear: people who move into low-cost neighborhoods soon lose interest in repairs and home improvements. If their required investment is small, so is the commitment. They acquiesce to the environment and so do their children. They assume *low-cost* means "inferior quality," "temporary," and "inadequate," which of course is not the case. But it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy when they neglect their new homes, ignore needed maintenance, and disrespect their opportunity for advancement.

Instead I learned that the wiser way to influence and effect change was to avoid the subtle segregation that creates sociological constructs for the possibility of ghettos. We learned that mixed-income housing creates a stronger tax base, which in turn improves public school systems without

subsidies. The result is a win-win: neighbors influence one another in not just community maintenance but through the exchange of ideas that help to raise the diversity in that community!

Often we don't recognize the urgings within us because we haven't been exposed to people who have affirmed their importance. If we don't learn to listen to instinct, then we will soon find ourselves extinct! To ignite your own unique instincts, you must recognize how you have handled them thus far in your life. If we are to institute change, then we must recognize the environmental influences which we've been exposed to. Is your perception of reality skewed by what you expect or by what you really desire? Obviously, our attitude and outlook on life have an enormous influence on both the accuracy of our instincts as well as our inclination to be aware of them and trust their guidance.

## **Instinct of Identity**

I have a set of twin boys—well, I say “boys,” but my sons are actually grown men now. And while they are fraternal, not identical, twins with the same mother and father, they couldn't be any more different. When they were still in the crib, I noticed each had a distinct personality that continued to evolve and solidify as they developed. One is personable and artsy; the other is quiet and independent. One is nurturing and compassionate; the other is responsible and diligent. One is spontaneous and social; the other is methodical and private.

I'm certainly not a licensed clinical psychologist trained in early childhood development. I'm just a father who started out peeking over their cribs. While my wife and I never intentionally tried to make them conform to the same personality type, I'm sure we assumed that they were more similar in temperament than they actually were. We probably dressed them alike when they were too young to protest and worked to make sure each got equal attention. But clearly they were not alike!

And as they grew through puberty into young adulthood, I continued to ponder how two people so closely intertwined in such a small place as the womb, raised in the same house, and parented in identical environments could gravitate to such different clothing, diverse types of friends, and separate courses of life.

In observing them as adult men, I remain fascinated to watch each of them unpack their inventiveness of uniqueness and become acquainted with the substance of their individuality as they pursue the fulfillment of their divine potential. It's been an often-raucous adventure as they've explored and discovered their own uniqueness, for each brings a distinctly remarkable thought pattern and skill set to problem solving.

Perhaps the primary reason for their successful development as independent, distinct individuals is their commitment to discover the power of their own unique talents, abilities, and proclivities. They clearly are not clones of each other, and they haven't simply become the opposite reaction of each other.

Because they're twins, though, they probably faced the challenge of self-discovery sooner and more deliberately than most of us. And yet their accelerated journey is the same one we're all traversing: to know who we are created to be, to know why we're here on this earth, and to live out the pursuit of our divine destiny.

Like my twins, many of us share the same variables for success as others around us, and yet we each fail to discover our distinct, personalized combination to unlock that success. Have you ever wondered why people with less talent, fewer resources, and more obstacles than you pass you by? Have you ever attempted to follow a formula or check off five “easy steps” to fulfillment only

become frustrated and feel like you're the exception? Too often, we imitate others and conform to popular standards but fail to tap into our most powerful, most precious resource—*our own uniqueness*.

Obviously, my twin sons shared numerous similarities, both genetic factors and environmental influences. But the fact remained that each of them had been divinely designed as a one-of-a-kind, inimitable reflection of his Creator—not of his twin or even his parents.

As they matured, my twin sons naturally noticed the ways in which they differed from each other—but more important, they relished, cultivated, and celebrated these differences. As I mentioned before, they were more self-aware and more determined at an earlier age to discover their own unique abilities, interests, and personal passions. As much as they loved each other and enjoyed being twins, nonetheless they didn't want to be a duplicate of someone else, certainly not each other. Like each one of us, each wanted to know the fingerprint of his own personality.

They were blessed to have both the motivation and the freedom to explore their inner resources. Growing up, many of us aren't encouraged to identify our individuality; in fact, we were likely told both word and by example to conform, to fit in, to not stand out. Whether it was overtly expressed or covertly implied, the message we got was to accept the status quo and not make waves. This may have been our parents' attempt to make life run smoother or even to protect us from the scrutiny, and often cruel mockery, that comes from standing out in a crowd.

And yet, most of us knew at an early age that we were not like everyone else, let alone who others wanted us to be. It might have been our desire to stay indoors and get lost in the adventures of the Hardy Boys or Harry Potter instead of playing pickup basketball in the park. From my experience and observations, our true identity rarely enjoys the freedom to emerge without first enduring conformity, social modification, or outright suppression. Peer pressure as well as parental expectations and the demands of our circumstances all exert various amounts of force on who we really are. Our instincts may have even guided us to hide parts of ourselves in order to keep them alive when we were younger. We instinctively knew that we could not express our creativity, unleash our imagination, or announce our dreams without them being injured by the ridicule, rejection, or retaliation of others.

As adults, however, we now have the power to liberate ourselves. We need no one else's permission to empower the God-given essence of our identity! Whether we think we have the time, money, or other resources needed to uncover who we really are, it's vitally important that we discover our core and allow it to grow, develop, and flourish.

You see, it's not about whether you can afford therapy or complete your education or attend the self-improvement seminar. And it's not about becoming self-absorbed, babying your inner child, or excusing self-indulgence. It's simply about whether you have the courage to look within yourself and embrace all that you find there!

## **Exposure and Independence**

People successfully living by instinct, the innovators, trailblazers, and playmakers, are liberated by their own instinctive drive, the fuel for their own unique GPS systems.

This motivational contrast can inspire, equip, and model for you the areas of development required for progress on your own journey. This helps explain why the mixed-income housing solution mentioned earlier emerged as the most solid, change-inducing one available. We often learn from our



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