

25 THINGS THAT
REALLY
MATTER IN LIFE

A Little Book, With a Big Message

Gary A. Johnson

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this book to the following people:

My mother, Ernestine G. Johnson, and my father, Samuel H. Johnson. I am as proud of you as you are of me.

My sister, Judy, who has her own story to tell but will never put it on paper.

My uncle Fred Smith, who is more like a brother. You consistently reach out and share life lessons with me for the sole purpose of making me a better father. Thank you.

To Anthony and Christopher for reasons too numerous to mention.

To the memory of my late grandparents Solomon and Ethel Gary. Grandma, I still have your original letters and read them often for inspiration.

Lastly, I would like to dedicate this book to every person who has an idea, a vision or a dream.

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Thank you, Deborah. Your support made it possible for me to take risks with my businesses. Years from now, our sons will have wonderful memories because they grew up with a stay-at-home dad. Make no mistake, you made it possible.

To my dear friend, Patricia Waddell: you epitomize many of the things that *really* matter in life. Outside of my mother, you were the first woman to stand up to me. I didn't like it and you didn't care. Who knew we would continue to be friends for over thirty years?

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INTRODUCTION

— | INTRODUCTION | —

We live in a very fast-paced society. It seems as if almost everything is designed to happen as quickly as possible. We don't need cash these days; we just "swipe and go." We don't have to stop and pay our toll. We simply flash a card and keep rolling. We have drive-thru windows for doughnuts and coffee. We have a generation of children who put food in the microwave oven, watch it turn, and yell, "hurry!" If you are one of those folks who have to have it "now," then this book was written for you.

25 Things That Really Matter In Life is designed to get you started living a better life within the next fifteen minutes. Moreover, here's the best thing: You can read this book in an hour and it will still be relevant five years from now. The book changes with you. If you're looking for a book written by a highly credentialed author with

letters after his name to help you find out who you are and what happened in your life that made you the way you are, this is not the book for you. If you want a book to help you begin to change your life *right now*, then keep reading, because this *is* the book for you. *25 Things That Really Matter In Life* was written for people who have some sense of what they need to do to change their lives, but don't quite know how to go about doing it.

I wrote this book at one of the lowest points in my life. My businesses were heavily in debt and, although I continued to function every day, there were times when I did not feel good about myself. Through it all, I continued to try to affect the lives of others through my training seminars and speeches. I also went out of my way to make sure I was an active dad for my sons.

At times, I think I showed symptoms of depression. I never sought a medical opinion, but I had many of the signs. My weight fluctuated, I became reclusive, I stopped communicating to some of the people close to me, and I did not open my mail for weeks. There were days when I would wake up with no sense of purpose. Intellectually, I knew I should be doing certain things, but I could not get myself to take action. This was unusual for me, because I'd always been an "action-oriented" person who lived with a clear sense of purpose.

Throughout this period, I never stopped trying to be better. I always felt I would bounce back and find my way.

I knew I was not living my best life, because I did not own it. I desperately tried to be the person who was accessible to everyone, the person who always had a minute for one and all. I was not prepared to deal with those who wanted to use me for their own good. People who weren't close to me nonetheless thought nothing of calling me at home and asking for favors or other preferential treatment. Some would even ask for money. There were times when I felt overwhelmed by the responsibilities that seemed to be taking over my life. I could feel myself withdrawing from some people and just wanting to be alone.

As the pressure mounted, it was easier for me to push everyone away, suppress my feelings and endure the stress, rather than talking about my problems with someone who might be able to help me. The only time I did not withdraw was when I was around my children. I actually looked forward to being with them; getting involved in their world kept me out of mine. Their world was fun. At the end of the day, I was still dad, and I always seemed to make things better for them.

What was I missing? What did I need? I grew up in a loving two-parent household, with a large and loving extended family: grandparents, cousins, uncles, aunts and neighbors. I was never abused in any way. And I was surrounded by people who loved me. Yet, as I grew older, I began to question if I ever felt loved. Feeling isolated will do that. It's not rational, but it seemed real at the time.

On a Friday night, in September 2006, I decided to write down the things that *really* mattered to me. I stopped the list at twenty-five. Putting pen to paper was a measure of accountability. I was ready to be accountable and make a change in my life. Writing my thoughts on paper was therapeutic and gave me a sense of relief. This process was a “freeing” experience that helped me to feel good again.

25 Things That Really Matter In Life is a little book with a big message. The techniques and steps that I describe in the following pages are ones that I’ve been using for over thirty years. If you commit to them, I guarantee you will live a more meaningful and healthier life. By design, this book is simple and easy to use. There are three major steps to living a better life:

- Step 1: Read *25 Things That Really Matter In Life*.
- Step 2: List *25 Things That You Really Want To Do In Life*.
- Step 3: Life Mastery —Living your best life.

The first step is to study *25 Things That Really Matter In Life* and make them a part of your daily life. Visualize yourself being *successful*, so when negative circumstances present themselves, *25 Things That Really Matter In Life* will automatically counter the negative with positive affirmations. If you do this, I *guarantee* you will be successful, however you define success, and you will receive all of the gifts life has for you.

Changing certain aspects of your life is not easy. Looking at your life and the choices you've made in an open and honest way can be an emotional and gut-wrenching experience. As you rewind your mental tapes, you are likely to see a pattern of decision making that is self-defeating or sabotaging. It doesn't have to be that way. This is your chance to enhance your quality of life and to feel good about yourself. You can improve your situation today. Don't blow this opportunity. Victory is near.

How did I turn the *negative* aspects of my life into something *positive*? First, I acknowledged I was not in control of some aspects of my life. Many of the decisions I made for my life were sound and reasonable. So what went wrong? I did not know how to *execute* those decisions properly.

25 Things That Really Matter In Life taught me to think *strategically* about the personal aspects of my life. There was a period in my life when I consistently made bad decisions and excuses for my actions when things did not go my way. Self-accountability improved my situation. Improving your life is not about *luck*; it's about *hard work and effective effort*. Most of my barriers were self imposed, which is likely to be the case with you. If you're not willing to do the hard work and look inside yourself, close this book! You are not ready.

The principles in this book will help you create a flexible and customized plan for your life. My customized plan consists of the 3 C's: Commitment, Communica-

tion, and Consistency. I made a personal commitment to change aspects of my life. I learned to communicate openly and honestly with myself. This was difficult because it required me to change my mindset and not listen to the “mental Muzak” that caused me to do stupid things. Last, but not least, I realized my new behavior would work only if I consistently used one or more of the principles every day.

In this book, I list the 25 things that really matter in my life. I also share how the 25 things that influenced *my* life can help you improve *yours*. You can control the quality of your life by making *25 Things That Really Matter In Life* a part of your daily living. Once you have “mastered” them, I will show you how to start *living your best life*.

When you read the words in this book, know that I am not speaking from an exalted position. This is what I’ve experienced and know to be true. My job is to tell you everything I know to help you make your life successful. Your job is to take what I tell you and develop a flexible and customized plan that will work for you. If you make a commitment to do this, you can live every day as if it’s your last, and enjoy your life. If you want to change your life, change the way you act and the way you think.

Let’s get started!