



This Is Your Life Podcast

Episode 20: “3 Strategies for Taking Your Life to the Next Level”

Published: August 1, 2012

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Hello and welcome to this episode of *This Is Your Life*. My name is Michael Hyatt, and this is the podcast dedicated to intentional leadership. My goal is to help you live with more passion, work with greater focus, and lead with extraordinary influence.

In this episode, we'll be talking about what it takes to get to the next level in any area of your life. Your health, your marriage, your career, any area where you want to see improvement. I'm going to share with you what I have found to be the single most important thing you can do to make your dreams become reality.

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Let's talk about going to the next level. The very fact that you're listening to this podcast tells me you're the kind of person who wants to grow. I am too. Personal growth is, I think, one of major driving forces in my life. Dr. Timothy Pynchyl, writing in *Psychology Today*, said this: “The successful pursuit of meaningful goals plays an important role in the development and maintenance of our psychological wellbeing. To the extent that we're making progress on our goals, we're happier emotionally and more satisfied with our lives.” That's certainly been my experience.

Tony Robbins says it even more directly. He says, “Progress equals happiness.” If you're feeling unhappy, maybe stuck, it might be because you don't feel like you're making progress. That's essential if you're going to feel happiness or some sense of satisfaction about your life. By the way, this can be in any area of your life. It might be about your health, your spiritual life, your intellectual growth, your marriage, or your career. The key is to be making progress toward a meaningful goal.

But how do you do that? That's the \$64,000 question. How do you ensure that you're making consistent, steady progress toward your goal? I'm going to tell you. This is the single most important thing you can do to make your dreams become a reality. I've done it over and over again in my life. Let me give you an example. I think I may have given this before in episode four, but it's worth repeating.

In 2002, our daughter, Mindy, got married. After the wedding, I took the family to the beach. Not Mindy, obviously. She was on her honeymoon. I took the rest of the family, my four other daughters and my wife and one of the friends of one of my daughters, to the beach. We all read a book called *Write it Down, Make it Happen* by Henriette Anne Klauser. (By the way, there's going to be a link in the show notes.) Her premise is that just the act of writing stuff down sets in motion certain things in the universe so to speak. It's sets forth an intention.

I'm not talking about *The Secret* idea (you know the book, *The Secret*), where if you just let loose an intention in the universe, the universe is going to respond. I don't think it works like that. I think you have to do more than just state an intention, but that's where it begins. Frankly, that's kind of the fun of "visioneering" or creating the future.

So we all wrote out a list of 100 things we wanted to do before we died. I made all the girls do this. I made the friend of one of my daughters do this. Gail and I both did it. We had an absolute blast doing it. It was so fun. We couldn't do it in one sitting. We had to do it over the course of the week because we'd kind of run out of creativity, and then we'd have to think some more. We would share the lists with each other and stimulate one another's thinking. It was a lot of fun. Obviously, now we call this a bucket list since a movie came out by that same title. It's really an amazing, audacious list.

I'll tell you some of the things I wrote. Again, this was back in 2002, long before any of these things happened. At this point, they were only a vision, only an intention in my heart and an item on my list. One of the things was becoming the CEO of Thomas Nelson. At that point I was just a divisional manager. Another thing I wanted to see happen that I put on my bucket list was being in a position eventually where I could write and speak full time. That, of course, came true a little over a year ago.

Run in a half marathon. Frankly, I wasn't in that great of shape in 2002, so this was a big, hairy, audacious goal. Get another book on the *New York Times* bestsellers list. I had gotten one book on the bestsellers list in 1998, but I really hadn't considered writing again until I started putting this list together and put that on the list. Well, when I reviewed that (I just pulled it up a few months ago), I am amazed and stunned at how many of the items I've actually accomplished. Again, not just because I wrote it down, but that's where it started.

The list keeps growing. I have more than I could accomplish in seven lifetimes. Again, the question is...*How do you actually make progress on your goals?* It's one thing to write them; it's another thing to start moving toward them. How do you get from here to there in the least amount of time possible? To the extent that I have achieved any level of success in my life in any area of life, I believe that it's due to this secret, and this is the premise of this episode. *To go to the next level, to go further faster,*

you need to enlist the help of the best coaches and instructors you can afford. Why is this important? Why would you want to enlist the help of others? Three reasons.

Number one is because *you want to speed up the learning process and get to your destination faster.* For me, that is really because I have so many goals I want to accomplish, so many improvements I want to make, I want to get there as quickly as I can. I realize that my timetable is not always God's timetable, and sometimes he has detours for me. That's fine. Again, the reason is because I want to speed up the learning process.

Number two is because *you don't want to reinvent the wheel.* Someone somewhere has already done what you're attempting to do. They've figured it out. They've made most of the major mistakes. They've probably documented that, and they can help you avoid some of the major mistakes in getting to your destination.

Number three is because *you want to avoid the common mistakes and pain along the way.* Practically speaking, how do you do this? I think there are basically three strategies you can use to get to the next level. I'm going to give them to you from the least expensive to the most expensive.

1. **Read content.** That's profoundly simple, but so many people don't take advantage of this when they're trying to get to the next level. This is kind of a *duh*, but let me start here. Start with Google. If you don't know the answer to something you're trying to do, start by Googling it. I get questions every week from readers and listeners who ask me questions that honestly, in 15 seconds of their time, they could have Googled and found an answer to. Instead, they write to me, and it frankly takes longer for me to respond, and it's more hassle for them. Start with Google.

Then check out Wikipedia. Wikipedia has almost four million articles in the English language alone. Studies show it's more accurate than *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Why? Because it can be corrected on the fly. It can be crowd-sourced so you're getting the best minds available to write these articles and, more importantly, to peer-check one another and make corrections in real time as they're noticed. I would also subscribe to blogs. There is so much information out there, so many people being generous today, willing to share their expertise and help you avoid some of these common pitfalls, common mistakes, and some of the pain that will get you to your destination without experiencing that.

Then I would say (and of course you would expect me to say this as a former publisher) read relevant books. My dad taught me this years ago. Whenever he wanted to learn about something, the first thing he did was go to the bookstore. He didn't go to the library. I don't know quite why that was. A library is probably a good place to start. He would go to the bookstore, and he would buy four, five, or six books on the topic, whether it was photography, or stamp-collecting, or building model airplanes. Whatever it was, my dad would buy the books, and then he would sit down and begin to educate himself about what he could learn on that particular topic.

I have carried over that tradition. I do the exact same thing. When I'm trying to get an improvement in a specific area of my life (again, I don't care if it's my marriage, or my career, communication, writing,

whatever it is), I buy the books on the topics. What are the main books? Today, with so many reviews out there on the Internet of these books, it's usually easy to find which ones are the better ones. Amazon will even suggest to you what the top-selling and best-ranked ones are. I buy three or four or five of those, and I sit down and read them. That's the first thing.

Why not avail yourself of this content? We live in such an amazing time in history where there is so much information available, a lot of it for free, but come on. The price of a book is pretty cheap. I don't care if you're really on a tight budget. It really comes down to what your priorities are. If you really want to learn something, if you really want to see an improvement, then don't think of buying a book as if it were an expense, but think of it as making an investment in your future. You're making an investment in trying to improve some area of your life that's obviously important to you.

How much is that worth? If you knew you could take your marriage to another level for \$20 by buying a book that would really help you, is that worth it? If you could improve your communication ability at work by buying a book for \$20, is that worth it? I think so. It is to me. That strategy, number one, is read content.

2. **Take classes.** Sign up for specialized classes. There are some things you can learn in a book and other things that frankly you have to be a part of and participate in, and you need to be able to take it to another level by taking a class. For example, when I wanted to learn how to build a great marriage, Gail and I attended several courses on marriage. One of them was taught by Gary Smalley, whom you may have heard of. He's a bestselling author. He actually happened to introduce me to Gail, and he performed our wedding ceremony. We've been to several of his courses. They were fantastic. They *are* fantastic.

More recently we went to one taught by Emerson Eggerichs. There is a link in the show notes to both those guys' websites. Emerson's *Love and Respect* seminar is fabulous, well worth going to. He has a book by the same title. It's also excellent. I had the guys in my mentoring group read that two years ago, and we all, I think, profited from it.

When I wanted to figure out my purpose in life and where I fit into the context of God's plan, I attended John Eldredge's *Wild at Heart* boot camp. In fact, I've been to that three times, including taking two of my sons in law the last time. We had a great time. There were just things that we could only learn by being in that class or in that workshop seminar setting that we couldn't have gotten out a book, because I did read the book by the same title.

When I wanted to improve my writing skills, I signed up for an intensive, one-week course from American Writers and Artists Inc. called *The Copywriting Success* boot camp. Believe me. It was a boot camp. We were writing ten hours a day, sharing our work with others, having it critiqued. I grew so much as a writer in that one week of boot camp. It was awesome. I don't even know if they still do it, but it was well worth the effort.

More recently, I took a course called *Fast, Effective Copywriting*, which also gave me some tremendous tools and I think took my writing to another level. When I wanted to improve my golf short game (and any golfer knows that's really where it's at, it's in the short game, and I'm still not a very good golfer), I signed up for a one-day course with Nancy Quarcelino, one of the best golf teachers in the country. It was amazingly affordable for what I got. When I wanted to learn how to create alignment in teams, which is huge in organizational life, I took a one-week course from Gap International called *The Alignment Intensive*.

When I wanted to learn how to use Photoshop to edit my digital photos, I took a tremendous, one-day course from Ben Willmore called *Photoshop for Digital Photographers*. These are just examples. I'm just trying to get your brain going so you can think of opportunities where you might want to consider taking a class and taking something to the next level. I've taken courses on fly-fishing, combat handgun (I know it sounds crazy), Byzantine Chant, ballroom dancing (that was a lot of fun; I think I've forgotten everything and need a refresher course)... I've taken courses in all these things.

It's amazing how many courses, how many classes are available out there, many of them for free. Some of them cost a few hundred dollars. In a few rare instances, the courses cost several thousand dollars, but regardless, you can sometimes find very good, free or inexpensive courses taught by other churches or other nonprofit organizations, even local colleges. Like I said, enlist the help of the best coaches and instructors you can afford. If you can't afford something, take something you can afford, but don't let it be an excuse for not growing or taking that area of your life to the next level.

3. **Hire a coach.** In other words, enlist the help of real people who can hone your skills beyond what you can learn in a book or garner from a course. For example, when I wanted to take my business to the next level, I hired Daniel Harkavy, the president and founder of Building Champions, and he helped me craft my very first life plan. By the way, if you haven't read my free e-book on the topic of life-planning, make sure you snag a copy while it's still free at MichaelHyatt.com/lifeplan.

You can also find out more about executive coaching at Daniel's company at buildingchampions.com. I don't get anything for that recommendation. It's just a great coaching experience I had. I love connecting people with him, because I really do believe if you can afford it, it will take your life and your business to the next level.

When I wanted to create a comprehensive, strategic plan for my company, I hired another coach, Dan Meub, who also used to be at Building Champions. He consulted with me for almost five years on every aspect of corporate strategy at Thomas Nelson. He was a huge help to us. When I wanted to take my personal leadership skills to the next level and really see how my own thinking was impacting my corporate results, I hired Ilene Muething of Gap International. You've heard me mention her on these podcasts before because she was such an enormous positive influence on me, and particularly on my leadership ability.

When I wanted to figure out why I kept slicing my drives when it comes to golf, I hired Nancy again, this time not for a class, but for a two-hour session. She videotaped me so I could see the problem in my swing, and we were able to fix it for good. I have a lot of other problems in golf, but slicing my drives is now not one of them. When I wanted to get in the best shape of my life, I hired Tom Gmitter at my local YMCA as my personal trainer, and he designed a plan that I would never have developed on my own, and that eventually led to me running my very first half marathon.

The point is that no matter where you want to go in any area of your life, someone somewhere has already been there. You can learn from a guide and save yourself hours, perhaps months or years of frustration trying to figure it out for yourself.

Let me just say this in conclusion. I have the questions to come, but just in conclusion to this segment, imagine what would happen in your life if you could do what I'm suggesting in this podcast. What would happen to your marriage if you intentionally tried to take it to the next level by consuming better content, by taking classes, by maybe even hiring a coach or a counselor? What could happen in your career or with your company? Why should you struggle for years reinventing the wheel and making the same mistakes others have made? You can go further faster by employing these three strategies I've covered in this episode.

Now let's go to a few listener questions. The first one comes from Jennifer.

Jennifer Hoverstad: Hi, Michael. My name is Jennifer Hoverstad, and I blog at buildeatlive.com. One thing that holds me back is being overcommitted. How do I decide what commitments to pursue and what commitments to let go of? Then, once I decide the ones to let go of, how do I make that happen? How do I tell people I'm no longer going to be committed to that group or that cause? Thanks, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Michael Hyatt: Jennifer, this is a great question. It's something I've been dealing with really for the last six months in my own life at a whole new level, feeling like I was overcommitted, overwhelmed, out resourced, not really having the capacity to meet the demands that were on my life. I'll tell you what worked for me. First of all, I had to realize that I was in this situation because I had an inability to say no, or at least it was difficult for me to say no. I was saying yes to all kinds of things.

Where it began for me was getting in touch with what I really wanted to say yes to. I just don't want to be a naysayer, somebody who just goes around saying no all the time, but I want to know what I'm saying yes to. So I had to get clear and refocused on my priorities. *What really is important to me? What matters the most? Where do I want to be at the end of my life?*

I started getting really clear on my family, on my relationship with God, on my involvement with my church. There are a lot of things that are really important to me. My mentoring group, another hugely important thing. Those were the things I was saying no to inadvertently by saying yes to lesser things and just trying to be a people-pleaser and pleasing everyone else. I got clear on the yes.

The second thing I did was I began to say no to all new requests that were coming in. I was kind of like the guy who had his plate full already. I had no business going back to the buffet and loading up my plate until I ate or consumed what I already had. I just started saying no to everything that came up. That meant saying no to a lot of great opportunities. It meant disappointing some people. Honestly, the lifestyle I had was not sustainable. This was essential if my life was going to amount to anything, if I was going to stay on track for accomplishing what mattered most.

Then I think in the middle were those commitments I made where I was overcommitted, a lot of them in retrospect didn't seem that important, but I'd made the commitment, so I wanted to keep the commitment. In some cases, I went back and explained to these people where I was. I just said, "Look. Here's reality. I'm overcommitted, and I want to ask if I can bow out of this."

I tried to come up with a solution for those people and ask them for release from the commitment I'd made. I don't see any problem with that. If they did say no, I'd say, "Fine. I'm going to continue to fulfill what I said I would do. In most cases, people understand. They're overcommitted themselves. They were very gracious, and in many cases, they let me out of the commitment.

You have to ask. I think you have to find the courage to be able to say yes to the most important things and say no to the less important things. This is something I have to find every day. I've written a lot of this on my blog at MichaelHyatt.com. You can go there and do a search for "margin: saying no." There are some examples there, some real life examples that I give on my blog.

The next question comes from Chris.

Chris Stevens: Hey Michael. This is Chris Stevens from French Lick, Indiana. You can find me at chrisstevenslive.com. I just wanted to hear your thoughts on what you had to say on taking your family along for the ride with you as your life is getting better and things are starting to move up. How can we make sure that our families grow with us? Thanks. I look forward to hearing what you have to say.

Michael Hyatt: Great question, Chris. I think including your family in this kind of stuff is really important. Gail and I often read the same books, listen to the same podcasts, and attend the same classes...even when I've employed a coach in the past. By the way, Gail had a coach this last year which was hugely helpful to her. After those coaching sessions, we would always... First of all, we would take a lot of notes in the coaching sessions, and then we would share those notes with one another so that the other party got the benefit of the coaching we were experiencing.

I think you just have to be intentional about it and grow together. If you don't grow together, reality is that you grow apart, and you don't want that. This has really kept our marriage alive, and kept it vital, and kept it healthy. By the way, I've done the same thing with my girls. There have been classes that some of my girls have taken with me before. I've shared with them a lot of notes from my coaching sessions as well. I think we just have cultivated this culture in my family of learning and of growing together. That's the first thing I would recommend.

This next question comes from Bobby. It's a little off topic, but it's one I want to answer that is related to this.

Bobby McGraw: Hey, Michael. This is Bobby McGraw. My website is bobbymcgraw.com, and I am in Sugar Hill, Georgia. I had a quick question. I'm not sure if this is a podcast question or not, but I was just curious. In all of your years of traveling and busy schedule, when you're on the go, what are the things you found helpful to make sure you stay refueled spiritually, physically, emotionally, that you're eating healthy, because it seems like the longer I go and the more I travel, the harder it is to fit in and to stay on an exercise routine and eat healthy while traveling. So in all of your years, I'm just curious if you had any tips. Thanks so much. Have a great day.

Michael Hyatt: Bobby, this is also a great question. Again, it's a little bit off topic. Not Bobby's fault. I could have put this in on another episode, but I do think it relates to this. That is taking your life to the next level because there are many obstacles that will threaten to take us off course and keep us from accomplishing what it is that we set out to do. Obviously travel can be one of those things that can become for us, if we're not careful, an excuse, and not a phony excuse, but a real excuse for why we get off track.

I think we have to be, again, intentional. The key word in *plan*. We usually know when we're going out on the road. Obviously our travel is not a big surprise. We usually have it planned for weeks. We have to be intentional about planning that time. There are three things I plan for when I'm traveling.

Number one, I plan for *exercise*. I take my workout clothes with me. I check ahead to make sure that at the hotel there's going to be a gym or some way for me to work out. Now there are also times when I think taking my workout clothes is too big of a hassle. I'll just make that my day off, that day I'm on the road, and I'll make it up on the weekend. Again, I'm planning for that. It's not a surprise or something that catches me by surprise.

The second thing I plan for is *how I'm going to eat* when I'm there because it's really easy to mess up your diet if you're not careful about this. I find that I can actually eat better on the road because I have more options on the road. It's more tempting for me now that I'm working out of the house to indulge in something I shouldn't than it is when I'm out there on the road, and I go into a restaurant, and I have to tell a waiter what I want.

I'm very specific. I see the menu as a palette. It's something to choose from, but it doesn't mean I have to have what is prescribed there. For example, if I order broccoli, and they're going to steam it or cook it in a lot of butter or something else that creates a lot of fat, then I just tell them no. I just want it steamed. I don't want anything else on it. I order fish this way all the time. Again, it takes some planning. It takes some courage. It takes being intentional.

The third thing I plan for when I travel is *margin*. I don't want to be getting up so early in the morning that I miss my quiet time and my time of personal development, so I set aside that time, and I make sure that my meetings happen later in the morning. Not too late, but again I want to protect that time

so I don't get behind on my own personal development, my own spiritual growth. Like most things, it just requires a little planning.

Let me leave you with this question: ***In what area do you want to take your life to the next level?*** Let me just challenge you to just answer that question for yourself. What area do you want to take your life to the next level? If you'd like to comment on that, you can go to my blog at MichaelHyatt.com/020 as in episode 20.

A few announcements. I'll be in Fort Worth, Texas next week speaking at the Cendera Funding lecture series that they're sponsoring called *Business with Purpose*. I'm going to be doing two sessions: "The Five Marks of Authentic Leadership," which I've done a podcast on here, and then "Platform: Get Noticed in a Noisy World." I'll be talking on the content from my book, and also I think I've done a couple of episodes here on this podcast related to that.

You can find out more by going to MichaelHyatt.com/fortworth2012. There's a link in the show notes if you're interested. If you're interested in having me speak for your event, check out my speaking page at MichaelHyatt.com/speaking.

Well, that's about it for this episode of *This Is Your Life*. I'd also be very grateful if you would rate my podcast on iTunes. That helps tremendously with keeping my podcast visible so people who have never heard of it can discover it. If you'd like to comment on this episode, please go to michaelhyatt.com, go to the show notes for this episode, and scroll down to the comments section. I would love, love, love to hear from you. Comment, question, or whatever.

Until next time, remember: Your life is a gift. Now go make it count!