

# THE PARADOXICAL COMMANDMENTS

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[Note: This is the text that was used in presenting PowerPoint slides]

It is a great pleasure to be here speaking with you today. My topic is “Do It Anyway: The Paradoxical Commandments.” This is a special presentation that I have prepared just for you this evening. I hope you find it useful.

## *Deep happiness*

I believe that each of us can be and should be deeply happy every day. What do I mean by “deep happiness”? I mean the kind of happiness that touches your spirit and connects with your soul. It is hard to describe. Some people call it self-fulfillment, or self-actualization, or being centered. Others call it living their passion, or following their bliss. For people of faith, it is about finding God’s will for their lives, and then living that will.

Seeking deep happiness is not selfish. I am not suggesting that you try to be happy *instead* of others or *at the expense* of others. I am suggesting that you should be deeply happy so that you will be at your best, and will be able to help others to be deeply happy and at their best, as well. When we are deeply happy, we become more loving, more giving, more patient, more enthusiastic. We become a gift to others. So we should be deeply happy for their sake as well as ours.

Now— how do we become deeply happy? Well, we know that finding personal meaning is a key to being deeply happy. We know this from research and from personal experience.

## *Benefits to finding meaning*

There are many other benefits to finding meaning in one's life and work. Let’s talk about three of those benefits. First, meaning is an intrinsic

motivator. Second, finding meaning is good for mental health. Third, it is good for physical health and long life.

Finding personal meaning is an intrinsic motivator. People are intrinsically motivated when they do something because they want to, not because they have to. They are intrinsically motivated when their work is interesting, fun, fulfilling, or meaningful. People are extrinsically motivated when they are not motivated by the task itself, but by something they can get by doing the task. For example, students who study to get good grades because their parents will give them money, are extrinsically motivated. Students who study because they enjoy learning, are intrinsically motivated.

Research and common sense tell us that people who are intrinsically motivated are more productive, more innovative, more committed, and feel less stress than those who are extrinsically motivated. So intrinsically motivated people are less likely to burn out than those who are extrinsically motivated.

Extrinsic rewards will always be important. We need to take care of ourselves and our families, so we are concerned about salaries or wages, benefits, bonuses, and awards. That's normal. But we want more than that, and need more than that, if we are to be productive, innovative, committed, and energized. We need to be intrinsically motivated.

Dramatic testimony on the importance of intrinsic motivation came from Viktor Frankl in his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*. Frankl was a Jewish psychiatrist who was a prisoner in Nazi labor camps in World War II. His story is a painful story of suffering and death. Prisoners had to work hard each day, with little food, clothing, sleep, or medicine in an environment of constant brutality and fear. Many of them died.

Frankl observed that prisoners who had faith in the future, who still had a reason to live, were the ones who were most likely to survive. From this experience, he developed his theory of *logotherapy*, or meaning therapy, in which a patient is confronted with and reoriented toward the meaning of his life. Frankl concluded that "striving to find a meaning in one's life is the primary motivational force in man."

Another benefit of finding meaning in your life and work is that you will be mentally healthier. One study compared six types of life aspirations. Three were extrinsic—the aspiration to be wealthy, famous, and physically attractive. The other three were intrinsic—the aspiration to have meaningful personal relationships, to make contributions to the community, and to grow as individuals. The study showed that those who had intrinsic goals had a greater sense of well-being, more vitality, and higher self-esteem. They were more content—they felt better about who they are and displayed more evidence of psychological health.

Notice the difference between the goals. The extrinsic goals were about what one *has*. The intrinsic goals were about who one *is*. The research showed that people who were heavily focused on extrinsic rewards had poor mental health, while those with intrinsic goals had good mental health.

This makes sense. If your goals are extrinsic, reaching them depends on the decisions of others and whims of fate over which you have no control. By contrast, you have a lot of control regarding your intrinsic goals, because reaching them depends on your attitude, your values, and your work.

In addition to being mentally healthier, finding meaning in life may also help you to be physically healthier and to live a longer life. A number of years ago, five YMCAs on the West Coast of the United States developed a new total health and fitness program. The health assessment being used in the program had 12 optimum factors for a healthy lifestyle and a long life. The first nine optimum factors were about food and exercise and sleep. The last three factors were different. They were:

- very happy and very satisfied with my life
- have family/friends to get help from if needed; I talk frequently (weekly) with them
- believe in spirituality/religion, life directed by spiritual values, meet regularly with others of similar belief.

Being very happy, having friends and family, and believing in spirituality or religion, are three of the 12 factors that affect your physical health and longevity. Those three factors suggest that finding personal meaning and being happy will help you to be healthier and to live longer.

In short, there are many benefits to finding meaning in your life and work. Just remember that if you want to be deeply happy, the most fundamental question is not: Am I a success or a failure? The most fundamental question is not: Is my life hard or easy? The most fundamental question is not: Do people appreciate me? If you want to be deeply happy, the most fundamental question is: *Is my life meaningful?* If you can answer yes to that question, you can be deeply happy.

*Where do you find meaning?*

If it is so important to find personal meaning, the next question is: Where do you find it? What are the most important sources of personal meaning?

I have surveyed about 3,500 people over the past five years. I ask people to fill out a survey form that lists about 30 different potential sources of meaning, and I ask people to rate those sources of meaning on a scale of 1 to 10. I have surveyed university students, community and business leaders, Rotarians, YMCA staff members, and Army officers. Many of the surveys have been conducted in Hawaii, but others have been conducted across the United States.

I do not have any random samples, so I can't extrapolate to larger populations. But the results of all the different groups have been remarkably similar, and the results are consistent with other research in this field.

Let me tell you about the survey results. Almost every group I have surveyed has given the highest average rating to the same source of meaning—“my family.” The rating is always a 9.0 or higher. The six sources of meaning that always get high average ratings are: My family, giving and receiving love, intimate relationships, doing my personal best, living my values, and a sense of accomplishment. These are all wonderful sources of personal meaning.

One of the most interesting things to me is that all the groups I have surveyed so far have given low average ratings to our culture's symbols of success—power, wealth, fame, and winning. They usually get a 3, 4, 5, or 6. I call these “symbols of success.” People aren't necessarily against these symbols of success, it's just that they aren't important sources of meaning. They don't provide a lot of happiness.

People have asked me— are there some really fundamental sources of meaning? I would say yes. There are at least four fundamental, universal sources of meaning. These are sources of meaning that can be found in the world's great religions and spiritual teachings, as well as our own life experience. You won't be surprised. Here they are: Love people, help people, live ethically, and don't be too attached to material things.

There may be a causal link between these four principles. If you love people, you will want to help them. And if you are loving and helping people, you will want to treat them ethically. And if you are busy loving and helping people and treating them ethically, you are probably more focused on people and aren't too attached to material things.

If I had to narrow down the sources of meaning even further, to only two things, I would pick these two: (1) focus on others, and (2) become part of something larger than yourself. Focusing on others includes loving people, helping people, and treating them right. Becoming part of something larger than yourself is about joining with others in a family, a group, an organization, a community, a movement, or a cause that makes a bigger difference than you can make alone.

If I were asked to narrow it down to just one source of meaning, I would say love, in all its dimensions. But if you ever feel down, or disconnected from meaning, there is a simple source of meaning that is always available: Go help somebody. Just go and help somebody. That will get you out of yourself and focused on others. That will give you the immediate meaning that comes from helping others.

I think what is so wonderful is that all of these sources of meaning are available to us every day. Every day, we can love people, help people, and treat them ethically. Every day, we can focus on others and be part of something larger than ourselves. Every day, we can go and help people. So meaning is always available to us, and that is a tremendous advantage. Remember— meaning is a key to being deeply happy, it's an intrinsic motivator, it's good for mental health, and it's good for physical health and longevity.

## *The Paradoxical Commandments*

The good thing about focusing on meaning is that we can always find it, even when the world is difficult. We can find it, no matter what is happening in the world around us. That's the message of the Paradoxical Commandments, which I wrote and published in 1968, when I was 19, a sophomore in college. The commandments were part of a book I wrote for student leaders. Here is what I wrote:

1. People are illogical, unreasonable, and self-centered. Love them anyway.
2. If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish ulterior motives. Do good anyway.
3. If you are successful, you will win false friends and true enemies. Succeed anyway.
4. The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway.
5. Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable. Be honest and frank anyway.
6. The biggest men and women with the biggest ideas can be shot down by the smallest men and women with the smallest minds. Think big anyway.
7. People favor underdogs but follow only top dogs. Fight for a few underdogs anyway.
8. What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight. Build anyway.
9. People really need help but may attack you if you do help them. Help people anyway.

And finally:

10. Give the world the best you have and you'll get kicked in the teeth.  
Give the world the best you have anyway.

The Paradoxical Commandments are guidelines for finding personal meaning in the face of adversity. That's why the first phrase in each commandment is about adversity, or difficulty, or disappointment. People are illogical, unreasonable, and self-centered. The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow. People really need help, but may attack you if you do help them. Those things are difficult.

But each statement about adversity is followed by a positive commandment: Love people anyway. Do good anyway. Help people anyway.

The paradox is this: Even when things are tough—even when the world is crazy—we can still find personal meaning and deep happiness. We do that by facing the worst in the world with the best in ourselves.

The fact is that, as individuals, we can't control the external world. We can't control the world economy, and the rate of population growth. We can't control the weather, or natural disasters like fires and floods. We can't control when terrorists may strike or wars may break out. We can't control what political leaders will decide to do, or which government regulations will be issued. We can't control which companies will grow, and which companies will fail. We can't control which jobs will be downsized and which jobs will open up. We can work hard, and prepare, and seize opportunities—we have to do that. We can join with others, and try to influence the external world—we ought to do that, too. But there are lots of things in our external world we just can't control.

What we *can* control is our inner lives. You and I get to decide who we are going to be and how we are going to live. And we can live our most cherished values, and we can stay close to our families and friends, and we can do what we know is right and good and true—no matter what. *No matter what*. And the good news is that that is where people have been finding a lot of personal meaning for a long, long time.

Some people see the Paradoxical Commandments as a personal declaration of independence. It's a declaration of independence from all the external factors that we don't control. Whatever the world does to us, we can still find meaning and be deeply happy.

Other people look at the Paradoxical Commandments as a “no excuses” policy. Sure, some people may be illogical, unreasonable, and self-centered. So what? That’s no excuse. You have to love them anyway. You don’t want to limit your life by limiting your love. And maybe the good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow. So what? That’s no excuse. You don’t rush out and do bad. You have to do good anyway. That’s your character. That’s your spirit. That’s where you will find the meaning.

I think that if you do what is right, and good, and true, things will usually work out for you, and you will often receive recognition and praise. But what if you don’t? What if you put your heart and mind into a project or program, and it fails? What if you do a brilliant job, and nobody notices? The answer is: So what? *So what?* You still have to be who you have to be. You still have to do what you have to do. You still have to live your faith, and live your most cherished values, and stay close to your family and friends, and do what you know is right and good and true, because that’s where you’re going to find the most meaning. That’s where you’re going to find the deep happiness. And you don’t want to give that up— *don’t* ever give that up, especially not when times are tough. Certainly not then.

### *The origin of the Paradoxical Commandments*

Let me tell you about the origin of the Paradoxical Commandments. I was active in student government when I was in high school. I was student body president at my school in Honolulu, and I became involved in speaking, writing, and training high school student leaders. During my college years, I wrote three booklets, and gave about 150 speeches in eight different states at high schools, state student council conventions, and student leadership workshops.

I wrote the Paradoxical Commandments in 1968, when I was a college sophomore. The Paradoxical Commandments were part of the first booklet I wrote for student leaders, entitled *The Silent Revolution: Dynamic Leadership in the Student Council*. The booklet was published by Harvard Student Agencies and later by the National Association of Secondary School Principals. About 25-30,000 copies were sold between 1968 and 1972.

By the time I got to college in 1966, the confrontations on campuses had already begun at Berkeley and Columbia. I lived through chaos and

confrontation at Harvard, especially during my last two years there. It was a time of conflict and confrontation, but also a time of hope and idealism.

I saw a lot of idealistic young people go out into the world to do what they thought was right, and good, and true, only to come back a short time later, discouraged, or embittered, because they didn't achieve the change they wanted, or nobody seemed to appreciate what they were trying to do.

I wanted change, too, but in my writing and speaking during the sixties, I encouraged students to work with each other, and work through the system, to achieve change. I didn't say it would be easy. I had two messages for them. First, I told them that if they were going to change the world, they had to really love people, because love is one of the only motivations that is strong enough to keep you with the people and the process until the goal is finally achieved. Second, I told them that if they went out into the world and did what they thought was right and good and true, they would get a lot of meaning and satisfaction. If people appreciated them that would be great, but if people didn't appreciate them, that was okay. I told them that if you have the meaning, you don't need the glory.

I laid down the Paradoxical Commandments as a challenge to them. The challenge is to always do what is right and good and true, no matter what. You have to keep striving, because if you don't, many of the things that need to be done in our world will never get done. Making the world a better place can't depend on applause.

#### *Comments on each of the commandments*

I'd like to say a few words about each of the commandments. The first commandment is: *People are illogical, unreasonable, and self-centered. Love them anyway.* This commandment is very important to me. It's about the kind of unconditional love that we need to hold our families and communities together. It's not about approval or agreement—love is deeper than that. You can love people you don't agree with, or whose behavior you don't approve of. When you are able to love people anyway, you get to know people who can enrich your life and your understanding of the world. You shouldn't limit your life by limiting your love.

When I was growing up, we visited my grandparents most summers. They ran a general merchandise store in a small town in Nebraska. I found

my grandfather difficult to love. He seemed to be very reserved, or aloof, self-absorbed, almost cold. He didn't say very much, and rarely laughed or smiled. But as the years went by, I began to notice things about Grandpa. He let us play with the adding machine, and he taught us how to use the cash register. He let us help out at the store, and he took us to lunch with him. Later, I learned how he and grandma had supported their customers during the depression of the 1930s. They extended lines of credit to families who no longer had enough money to pay for their food and clothes. Most of these lines of credit were never paid back. Grandpa and Grandma took a loss.

The summer after my graduation from high school, I visited Grandpa and Grandma. It was the sixties, and I had a short beard and I was wearing sandals. Grandpa did not agree with my ideas, and he didn't approve of my beard or sandals. But he accepted me. And that is when I realized that I could accept *him*. We were different, but love is deeper than agreement or approval. We could love each other anyway.

The second commandment is: *If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish ulterior motives. Do good anyway.* There are many cynics in the world who find it hard to believe that someone would just go out and do something good. So they make accusations of selfish ulterior motives. But that shouldn't stop us from doing good things. There are so many good things that need doing.

Master Sergeant Hugh O'Reilly was in Osaka, Japan, with the U.S. Army Wolfhounds after World War II. The devastation of the war was evident everywhere. One day, he visited an orphanage located near his unit, and found that the children did not have enough food, clothing, shelter, or medicine. He told the other soldiers what he had seen, and started taking up a collection. The soldiers donated money, and also food, clothing, and medicine. For more than 50 years, the Wolfhounds have continued to support the orphanage. The Wolfhounds have been like family members to thousands of children over the years.

Before Hugh O'Reilly passed away, I asked him once if anyone had ever accused him of selfish ulterior motives. He said yes, a few people had accused him of helping because he had an illegitimate child in the orphanage. He said: "They were wrong about that. Actually, they were wrong to think that any of us had an ulterior motive. It was just the right thing to do, so we did it."

The third commandment is: *If you are successful, you will win false friends and true enemies. Succeed anyway.* It's too bad, but when you are successful, you will become a target for people who want to take advantage of your success for their own benefit. They become false friends. The best thing you can do is to stay close to your true friends, the people who are your friends whether you are successful or not. And then there are those who resent your success, and become your true enemies. The best thing you can do is to not take it personally. The people who are attacking you may not even know you, they just resent you. There may be opportunities to get to know them, and become friends, but if not, don't worry. Keep succeeding anyway.

The fourth commandment is: *The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway.* The best reason for doing good is because that is who you are—that is your character, your spirit. You do good because it is the right thing to do, and it is meaningful. It's nice if others know, but even if they don't know or they know but later they forget, the fact is that *you* know. This is your life, not somebody else's. If you know, that is enough.

One of the stories I read when I was in school was about a young Egyptian foreman who was supervising the laying of the foundation for one of the pharaoh's pyramids, thousands of years ago. The foreman was out in the sun, encouraging, watching, and correcting the work. Whenever he found that the massive stones did not fit perfectly, he would have them realigned until they were just right.

Another foreman watched him, and finally came over to give him some advice. "The foundation will all be under the ground. Nobody will see it," he said, shaking his head. "Don't worry about it. Nobody will know."

"*I will know,*" the young foreman replied. "*I will know.*" When you do what is right and good and true, you will know, and you will remember. That will give you all the personal meaning you will need.

If you can find personal meaning *without* the world's applause, you are free. You are free to do what is right, without worrying about whether other people know or remember. What is important is not whether anyone knows or remembers. What matters is how you live. Who you are and how you live are more important than who remembers what you did.

The fifth commandment is: *Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable. Be honest and frank anyway.* Each of us should be polite and tactful when we speak. There are some things that should only be said gently, and some things that should never be said at all. But we need to be honest and frank with each other about most things so that we can get to know each other. We need to know each other so we can help each other. We need to know each other so we can build strong, trusting relationships with each other. I don't know how we will be able to help and trust others unless we are honest and frank with each other. That may make us vulnerable, but it is worth it.

I was at a university in the Midwestern United States in the sixties, serving as a staff member at a summer workshop for high school student leaders. I was their youngest staff member, so they asked me to give a speech to the students. When the night came, I stood up and told the students what I really thought about their student councils. I decided to be honest and frank with them. I told them that too many of their student councils were self-congratulatory cliques, focused only on themselves. I told them that too many of them did not seem to care about the rest of the student body—the students who elected them. I urged them to reach out, and listen to their fellow students, and work through the system to find ways to make things better for them. I basically told them that they were frauds, but they didn't have to be. They could make a difference in the quality of education and the quality of life at their schools.

The students knew I was being honest and frank. They were excited, and came down to talk with me after my speech. We talked about how we could really make a difference in our schools. After we finished talking, I started to walk back to my room. Suddenly, I was surrounded by four men. One of them was the director of the workshop. He told me I was fired. They marched me back to my room, and told me to pack my things. They wouldn't let me talk to anyone. When I was packed, they took me to the parking lot, put me in a car, drove me 20 miles from the campus, and dropped me off at a bus stop in the middle of a field.

My honesty and frankness was appreciated by the students, but not by the adults. My honesty and frankness made me vulnerable, and I paid the price. But I had no regrets. The students and I had shared some important

ideas. It was one of the most exciting moments of my life. I was glad that I had been honest and frank anyway.

The sixth commandment is: *The biggest men and women with the biggest ideas can be shot down by the smallest men and women with the smallest minds. Think big anyway.*

The world needs big people with big ideas, or we will never make the world a better place. To me, big men and women are people with big ideas, dreamers who are willing to work hard to make their dreams come true. By small men and women, I mean people who can't see how the world could be better. They are satisfied with things as they are, and don't want them to change—even if the change would be positive. They will often try to shoot down the big ideas that other people have. If you have a big idea and it gets shot down, just pick it up, dust it off, and get going again. Think big anyway. Small ideas don't bring out our best. Big ideas do.

Will Hartzell is a friend of mine who discovered that contaminated drinking water kills more than 5 million people every year. He decided to do something about it. Everyone told him that his big idea would never get off the ground. But he and his colleagues developed a solar water pasteurizer, and began to install these pasteurizers in countries around the world. One of their first projects was at a hospital in Tanzania. The hospital did not have clean water, so the patients ran the risk of getting sick from the water while they were at the hospital.

After the equipment was installed at the hospital, Will Hartzell watched the patients and their families as they came to get clean water. One woman was in the hospital because her child was very ill. After she filled her water bottle, she turned and looked at Will, and said something. Will didn't understand what the woman said, so he asked the nurse. The nurse said, "Thank you. Thank you for giving my child the chance to live." That was when Will knew that he was going to keep going, no matter what anybody said. Today, 12 years later, Will and his colleagues have installed 2,500 solar water pasteurizers in 56 countries, and 200,000 people no longer have to fear illness or death from drinking contaminated drinking water. Will's big idea is making a really big difference.

The seventh commandment is: *People favor underdogs but follow only top dogs. Fight for a few underdogs anyway.* Almost every new idea

starts out as the idea of just one person or a small group of people. Not every underdog is right, but some are, and if we support them, then their new ideas can be adopted and benefit everybody. Consider helping underdogs who are in your family or community or organization— people with ideas, but no power, who have something to say, and need to be heard, but won't be heard unless we step in and support them and allow them to make a contribution. That may take courage, but it can give us another source of meaning.

The eighth commandment is: *What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight. Build anyway.* There have been many tragedies over the years, and the last few years have been especially sad, with so many lives lost and so many lifesavings reduced or destroyed by the downward spiral of the world economy. But we have to keep building. The joy is in the building. That's where we find the meaning. And even if what we build is destroyed overnight, we still have the memories. We can hold people and events and accomplishments close in our hearts and minds.

One of my wife's favorite memories is an afternoon she spent at the beach with our daughter Kristina when our daughter was four years old. Instead of building a sand castle, they built a turtle in the sand. Gradually, the waves got higher and came further up the beach. After they finished making the turtle, a big wave came up and swept over the turtle. "Bye-bye, turtle," our daughter said, as it disappeared under the wave. She turned to my wife and said, "He went back into the ocean."

When we build a sand sculpture at the beach with our children or friends, we find pleasure in creating something, and being together. The joy does not depend on how long the sand sculpture lasts. The joy, the meaning, the satisfaction are in the building.

From 1974 to 1981, the state of Hawaii worked on the development of ocean thermal energy conversion, or OTEC, as a renewable energy source from the ocean. OTEC uses the temperature difference between deep, cold water and warm surface water to drive a heat engine. I became the Ocean Resources Manager for the state, and was very involved in OTEC development. Everything moved forward very well until 1980, when the federal government proposed to provide money to build a 40-megawatt OTEC pilot plant.

Because of our hard work, three major firms proposed to build the plant in Hawaii— General Electric, TRW, and Lockheed. Then the political tide changed. President Reagan was elected in 1980, and when he took office in 1981, he cancelled the program. The private companies were not willing to risk investing the money on their own, so the plant was never built. What we had spent years building was gone, almost overnight. While I wish the plant had been built, I cherish my memories of what we accomplished. I have no regrets about the thousands of hours I spent on OTEC development. We owed it to ourselves to give the opportunity our best effort. It was meaningful work, a source of real joy. And it is still a good idea. We need to keep building, anyway.

The ninth commandment is: *People really need help but may attack you if you do help them. Help people anyway.* When I was in college, I took a part-time job as a driver for an elderly man. He was a very intelligent man, and his mind was alive, but his body was no longer working very well. It was my job to take him to the park, or to dinner, or wherever he wanted to go. I helped him out of the car, and up over the curb, and up every step. What was hard to accept was that he always seemed to be upset with me. Later, it occurred to me that he was not upset with me— he was upset with life. He was upset that he couldn't get out of the car on his own, or walk on his own, or climb steps on his own. When I realized that, his grumbling stopped bothering me. I continued to help him anyway.

One of the things I have learned is that people who need help, are often unhappy about the fact that they need help. They don't like their situation. So if you try to help someone, that person may attack you because he is unhappy about life, not because he is unhappy about you. Each of us has received help in our lives, and we should try to help others. We need to be thoughtful, and make sure we are providing the things that people really need, in a way that respects their dignity. But don't let their frustration with life stop you. Help them anyway.

The tenth and final commandment is: *Give the world the best you have, and you'll get kicked in the teeth. Give the world the best you have anyway.* It is true that sometimes, when you give the world your best, you may get a negative response. People may betray you, or fail you, or take advantage of you. But that is no reason to stop giving the world the best. There is no reason to hold back. If you're not giving the world your best, what world are you saving it for? This is the world we live in, these are the people whom we can

help. Each of us has talent and ability, and each of us is unique. We should make the maximum contribution we can make. We get the most meaning out of life when we give the world the best we have anyway.

*The commandments spread around the world*

Well, the Paradoxical Commandments were published in that little student council booklet in 1968, and about 25-30,000 copies were sold or distributed around the United States between 1968 and 1972. I went on with my life, and for 25 years, I didn't know what was happening to the Paradoxical Commandments. What I know now is that people were taking the Paradoxical Commandments out of that little booklet and putting them up on their walls and their refrigerator doors, and putting them into speeches and articles. They spread around the country and then around the world. Today, 41 years later, it is estimated that they have been used by millions of people all over the world.

They have been used by business leaders, government officials, military officers, non-profit leaders, religious leaders, university presidents, teachers, social workers, athletic coaches, and parents. I know that they have been used by Boy Scouts in the United States and Canada. They have been used by a student leadership group in South Africa. They were on a free speech website in Cambodia, and an Iranian website for news and culture. They were on the websites of Rotary Clubs in Malaysia, Hong Kong, and Alabama. They were used by Karl Menninger in a speech at the United Nations in 1981. They have been used by a leadership program at a university in Belgium, and were translated into Japanese and used in homilies by a Japanese Catholic priest in Tokyo. They were used by the former Prime Minister of Zimbabwe-Rhodesia. They have been used by a Family Council in Ohio, a Methodist Church in Kansas, and the Oklahoma Girls State program. They have been in many books, including John C. Maxwell's book, *Becoming a Person of Influence*, and Stephen Covey's book, *The 8<sup>th</sup> Habit*.

Twelve years ago I learned that Mother Teresa had put the Paradoxical Commandments up on the wall of her children's home in Calcutta. That discovery changed my life. I began writing and speaking about the Paradoxical Commandments again, 30 years after I first published them.

As a result of my books and the publicity that they generated, I have been hearing from people all over the world. Every month, I get between 10,000 and 15,000 visitors to my website, from 80 or 90 countries. Many of them send me messages. They tell me how they have used the Paradoxical Commandments to raise their children, or get through a tough time at work, or establish their goals. They tell me they have carried the commandments around in their wallets or purses for twenty years. I set out to inspire people, and now they are inspiring me. I have become part of a growing network of kindred spirits, and I am deeply grateful.

*Why did the commandments spread around the world?*

Why have the Paradoxical Commandments traveled throughout the world for the past 40 years? I don't know, but I have asked people what they think, and I am willing to guess. First, they are a call to meaning, and people are hungry for meaning. They call people to live a meaningful life regardless of the whims of fate and twists of fortune that affect each of us. They remind people what life is really about— about loving, and doing good, and building, and thinking big, and fighting for underdogs, and helping others.

Second, they are about fundamental values that cut across different ideologies and philosophies and theologies. They are about the things we have in common as human beings, instead of the doctrines that divide us.

Third, they are short, easy to read, easy to copy, easy to put on a wall or inside a notebook, easy to send to a friend or post on a website. They are a kind of checklist, a simple, quick reminder of how we need to live and who we need to be.

Fourth, they aren't questions or issues— they are commandments, written in the imperative voice. They're not wishy-washy. They don't say: Think about the possibility of maybe considering doing something. No— they say "Do it!" And no excuses— "Do it anyway!"

*Taking action*

The Paradoxical Commandments are about taking action to make the world a better place. It's about doing it anyway. There are so many problems to solve and opportunities to seize. The Paradoxical Life is about getting past your problems or excuses or your current situation, and moving forward to

make a difference. The world can be difficult, but we still need to take action. When we take action, we don't need to focus on getting power, wealth, or fame. We need to focus on doing what is meaningful-- loving people, helping people, and doing what we know is right and good and true. If we do that, each of our actions will be complete, because each action will bring its own meaning.

When you understand that people have many needs, you have only three basic options. First, you can do nothing, and ignore the needs of others— an option that is a moral failure. Second, you can take advantage of people's weaknesses, cynically exploit their needs, and seek personal gain at their expense— an option that is an even worse moral failure. Or third, you can do the right thing, and try to meet people's needs. This is the only moral option.

If you try to do what's right, and you feel you have failed, you may become discouraged, and be tempted to ignore the needs of others, or exploit the needs of others. But there is no moral justification for falling into the two immoral options, just because things are not going well. You need to do what is right and good and true anyway. You need to keep trying to meet people's needs.

Sometimes, people will tell me that they are trying to help others, but others don't appreciate them, so why should they continue? I tell them they should continue to help others, because that is what all of us should try to do. That's the third option— the only moral option. In that sense, it is not about them, it is about us. It is not about how much *they* care, it is about how much *we* care.

Certainly, it is normal to want to be appreciated, and we should do our best to appreciate others. But it is hard to find meaning and deep happiness if you crave applause. When you crave applause, you are focused on yourself instead of others. You are focused on whether you get the recognition, the thank you letter, the public praise. Focus instead on the meaning you get when you help others. That meaning will always be yours, whether anyone applauds or not. And that meaning will be enough to keep you going.

The Paradoxical Commandments are about getting past your excuses and making a difference anyway. When you live the Paradoxical Life, you will have a positive impact on people, organizations, and communities. You

will have a positive impact because you are focused on helping others and doing what's right. You will just pitch in to help, without worrying about who gets the credit. You will live your values and follow your heart, and do the work you were born to do, even if it does not lead to power, wealth, or fame. Making the world a better place can't depend on applause. The world will become a better place when people focus on meaning, and are out in front, addressing real needs and solving real problems, without worrying about personal recognition or applause.

You are more likely to change the world if you are spiritually liberated and personally committed. You need to be liberated from the events you can't control, and you need to be liberated from your personal excuses. And you need to be personally committed to loving and helping others, and doing what is right and good and true. The meaning does not come from withdrawing from life, but from living a fully committed, fully engaged life.

Fortunately, what needs to be done in the world is clear. People need food, clothing, shelter, healthcare, education, and jobs. They want loving relationships with family and friends. They want dignity and peace. What is so sad is that most of these needs can be met, but we aren't meeting them. It doesn't have to be this way. There are no laws of science that are preventing us from dramatically improving the world for all of us. There is no shortage of intelligence or resources. The roadblocks are in our heads and hearts. There are historical animosities, as well as political, economic, cultural, and religious differences between people within and between countries. Many of these differences run deep and are hard to overcome. We know that attitudes are hard to change, but they *can* change. It takes education, negotiation, and the building of mutual understanding and trust. But it can be done, and it is worth doing. Our future on this planet may depend on it.

Some people don't try to make a difference because they think they cannot make a big enough difference. But you shouldn't worry about how big a difference you make. Often, we can't know in advance what the impacts of our efforts will be. Sometimes, even a small gesture can make a difference in another person's life.

Paul Katz tells the story of Gavin, a 12-year-old boy who was in Paul's summer wilderness program at the YMCA. At the end of the summer camp, Paul found a hawk feather by the side of the trail. To him, the feather

symbolized strength, grace, and natural beauty. In a simple but serious ceremony on the last morning of the camp, Paul congratulated Gavin on his participation in the camp, and presented the feather to him. Twenty years later, he met Gavin again. Gavin was now six feet tall, and was in his early thirties. He told Paul that the summer wilderness program had been a turning point in his life. And he still had the hawk feather. It had meant so much to him that he had kept it with him all those years. Paul learned that an action that seems small to us, can have a big impact on somebody else.

I think about the writing of the Paradoxical Commandments in the same way. I wrote them as part of a book designed to help a comparatively small number of high school student leaders in the United States. I didn't know if the commandments, or anything else I wrote in that book, would help anyone. It turned out that they have helped millions of people all over the world. I had no idea that was going to happen. I am still surprised.

Don't think that you have too little to offer. Each of us has talent and ability, and each of us can make a difference, no matter what our disadvantages or weaknesses or disabilities might be. A good example is Larry Selman, known as "the collector of Bedford Street." Larry lives in New York City. He is mentally challenged. He has a low IQ, but he has a big heart. Every day, he goes out on the street and asks people to donate to charity. He collects money for non-profit organizations that fight cancer, or AIDS, or help the homeless. He raises thousands of dollars each year. The point is simple: if Larry can make a difference, any of us can make a difference.

I wrote the Paradoxical Commandments to encourage people to undertake positive change. Each of us should be champions of positive change. We can start at home and at work. Are there issues or problems that affect your family, or your colleagues at work? You can become a public citizen and a volunteer, working on issues that affect your neighborhood, or community, or city, or province. The opportunities to make a difference may be right in front of you.

Last week I watched a show on CNN that portrayed the work of ten individuals from different countries who had been selected as CNN Heroes. Each of them was making a positive difference. One man was drilling wells and purifying drinking water for people in Africa. Another was providing wheelchairs for children in Iraq. One established an orphanage; one provided

a safe home for women who had been brutalized in Zimbabwe; one was handing out food to the homeless in New York City; one was providing education to extremely poor children in the Philippines. Each one faced a problem that seemed so big that it was hard to imagine that their projects or programs could really make a difference. But they decided to *do it anyway*. They became public citizens, and they are indeed changing the world for the better.

I am a Rotarian, and I am very proud to be associated with 1.2 million Rotarians in 160 countries working together in service to humanity. I am especially proud of what Rotary has done to eradicate polio. The polio eradication program was launched by Rotary International in 1985, at a time in which polio was common throughout the world. Since then, Rotarians and their partner agencies have immunized more than two billion children, and reduced polio from 350,000 cases in 1988 to fewer than 2,000 in 2002. It is estimated that more than four million children who might have contracted polio have been saved from the disease. The effort to eradicate polio is not over, but the effort is down to just a few remaining countries.

I think it is pretty simple. The world will change when more people see the needs around them, and decide to help. Those heroes will attract other heroes, and they will attract resources, and the impact can grow. These heroes will understand that the problems we face are very large, but they will not be discouraged. They will step up, and do what they can, *anyway*.

When you live the Paradoxical Life, you want to make sure that future generations will understand and live the Paradoxical Life also. You become concerned about raising the next generation. This can be done by teaching young people about the Paradoxical Life, and involving them in projects and activities that make a difference. We can help them to understand the meaning that comes from loving and helping others, and doing what is right and good and true. We demonstrate through our own lives the benefits of focusing on meaning. We can be examples of deep happiness, intrinsic motivation, good mental health, and good physical health and longevity.

What I am suggesting is not easy. Some of our goals should be so big that we cannot reach them during our lives. As Gandhi is quoted as saying, "Satisfaction lies in the effort, not in the attainment. Full effort is full victory."

One of my favorite movies is *Man of La Mancha*, which came out many years ago, starring Peter O'Toole and Sophia Loren. The story line in the movie is that Cervantes, the author of *Don Quixote*, is arrested by the Inquisition and taken to prison, where he tells the story of *Don Quixote* and the other prisoners help him act it out. Cervantes said something in that movie that really struck me. He said that he had seen people dying with a question on their lips. The question was not, why am I dying? The question was, why did I live? That's a terrible question to be asking yourself as you breathe your last breath!

There are a lot of benefits to living a Paradoxical Life, but let me leave you with this one. If you live the Paradoxical Life, and focus on finding meaning by loving and helping others, then, when you look back at the end of your life, you won't have a lot of regrets. You may not have any. You'll look back on a life filled with meaning. Even more important, you will not wonder why you have lived. You will know. *You'll know*. And that may be the greatest blessing of all.

Thank you!