



## Shift Happens

*Parents can only give good advice  
or put them on the right paths,  
but the final forming of a person's  
character lies in their own hands.*

Anne Frank

Robert Livingston  
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## Introduction

The title I have chosen comes from the short video, *Shift Happens*. *Shift Happens* was originally titled, *Did You Know?* It first started out as a PowerPoint presentation for a faculty meeting in August 2006 at Arapahoe High School in Centennial, Colorado. The presentation "went viral" on the Web in February 2007. Today the old and new versions of the online presentation have been seen by at least 15 million people.

After watching it there will little doubt in your mind that the world is changing and changing quickly. Technological change is a given. The world is increasingly become more global, not only in economic trade, but also in education and culture.

The traditional approach in getting an education, finding a job and establishing a career may no longer work, or at least not achieve the historical successes. Parents must examine their role in helping their children adapt to this changing world. They must be willing to re-examine their approach, be willing to change and most importantly get involved. Just like my five year-old cell phone, the model is not broken; it is just a little outdated.

*The End of the Beginning* I wrote for the grade 12 graduates. *Shift Happens* I wrote for their parents. I strongly recommend you read both. Discuss the material with your children. I feel that by getting the conversation started, it will help you both put plans in place when they graduate.

I have three sons either at or finished university. As a parent, I have done some things right and I have done some things wrong. I want to share these experiences with you. Lastly, I will offer some advice on what you can do to help your children get started. My experiences, my observations and my suggestions I hope get you thinking and talking.

My agenda is no more than that.



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## Chapter 1: *The End of the Beginning*

*The End of the Beginning* I wrote for grade 12 graduates as they head off to a post secondary education, whether it is inside or outside the classroom.

### Introduction

I posed three questions for the student to reflect upon:

- > What do you see as your biggest concern?
- > What do you see as your biggest challenge?
- > What do you see as your biggest opportunity?

### My Core Philosophies

In this chapter I discuss my core philosophies in my approach to life:

- > Understand Who You Are
- > Commitment to Personal Growth
- > Maintain Your Perspective

### The Changing Environment

In this chapter I discuss how academic programs and employment opportunities have changed over the last 40 years. Marks are no longer the sole determinant to getting into many academic programs. I discuss the University of Western Ontario medical school application process as an example of the changes that are taking place.

### My Years at University

In this chapter I discuss my university experiences; what I did right and what I would do differently. I believe parents can best help their children by sharing with them their experiences – both good and bad. Sharing with them our mistakes is a very powerful learning tool which will help them in their academic walk and later in their career choice.

### Getting Started

I made the following recommendations for the students to take control of their personal growth:

- > Establish your personal values
- > Develop your personal skills

### The Cocoon and the Butterfly

This story provides a great picture of the challenges the students face as they head out the door from high school. They must begin to take control of the process if they are to successfully take this next important step in their lives. Parents must recognize this and begin to release their control over their children.

## Chapter 2: My Core Philosophies

*Only by centering on timeless principles and then living them can we enjoy sustained moral, physical, social and financial wellness.*

Stephen Covey

### Outline

- > Understand Who You Are
- > Commit to Personal Growth
- > Maintain Your Perspective

My approach to life centres on my core philosophies.

### 2.1 Understand Who You Are

It all starts with understanding who you are. What are your beliefs, your core philosophies, your core values, and your skills? Your values are so important in establishing who you are and who you will become. Integrity must be at the top of the list but there are other values I feel must also be included – empathy, being a team player, respect, forgiveness and self-control just to mention a few. Take the time to establish your values because you will want to work for, work with, and ultimately, have people work for you who have these same values.

### 2.2 Commit to Personal Growth

A commitment to personal growth starts with discovering your passion. It has been researched that 80% of the time passion will dovetail with competence. Not always (my golf game being a good example), but most of the time. I feel very strongly that when passion and competence come together you have the ideal job in life – a professional hobby. Don't be deceived by the word "hobby", as something that comes easily or not taken seriously. Let's look at a well known example in the hockey world – Sidney Crosby. "Sid the Kid" is passionate about hockey and is obviously very good at it. His passion met his competence; he turned the result into a professional hobby. I feel I have been able to do the same in my current career.

### 2.3 Maintain Your Perspective

Part of maintaining your perspective requires you to have a clear understanding of who you are and where you want to go in your life. This requires you to establish your dreams and create plans to bring them to reality. Remember: "A dream without a plan will remain but a dream." Dreams are not accomplished quickly and there will be bumps along the way. If you commit to personal growth; exercise discipline; practice patience; maintain your sense of humour; you will be surprised what you can accomplish.

## Chapter 3: The Times They Are A-Changin'

Before I share my own personal experiences at university, I want to share with you some of the academic changes I have seen take place in the last forty years:

- > Nearly all programs have become more competitive
- > Marks have increased dramatically
- > The academic world has become more global
- > Programs have become more expensive
- > Universities have introduced co-op programs
- > Admission criteria for many programs looks beyond the marks

The following two examples clearly show how the academic landscape has changed.

In 1971 a close friend of mine applied to the Queen's Commerce Program and got in with a 64% average. Today, needless to say my friend would not even bother to fill out an application. Basically you need a 90% average to be considered as a candidate for the program. But high marks don't necessarily guarantee admission. The 90% gets you through door one, but there is a second door to get through, namely the personal statement. Who you are and what have you done outside the classroom is examined closely. Marks are no longer the sole determinant of entry into the program.

A second example would be the University of Western Ontario Medical School. Thirty years ago, there were many applicants for a limited number of spots. For the most part, applicants were accepted into the program primarily based upon their marks. Today, that has changed.

My eldest son Michael applied to and was accepted at Western in 2007. That year the school received over 2,700 applicants for 147 spots. Of the 2,700, 450 were selected for interviews. Thus over 80% did not even make the first cut. At the White Coat Ceremony where the incoming class is inducted into the program, the dean shared with us that of the 450 interviewed, nearly all of them were excellent candidates. So what made the difference? Not marks. The program now looks closely at the candidate's ability to communicate. This change in emphasis was made to the admission process a number of years ago.

## Chapter 4: My Experiences as a Parent

### Outline

- > The Role of a Parent
- > What Did I do Right?
- > What Would I Do Differently?

### 4.1 The Role of a Parent

*If you raise your children to feel that they can accomplish any goal or task they decide upon, you will have succeeded as a parent and you will have given your children the greatest of all blessings*

Brian Tracy

Brian Tracy states so clearly the role of a parent. When my children graduated from high school, I felt it was our role (my wife and mine) to help them negotiate a “soft landing” into early adulthood. What do I mean by a soft landing?

I define a soft landing as follows. I want my children by age 25 (give or take a few years), to be largely independent in managing their lives. This includes taking control and being responsible for their finances, their academic programs and ultimately their career choice.

Our plan is to give up control in these areas in as orderly a fashion as can be managed. We are negotiating our exit as “parents in control” to “friends on call.” We want to be in a position where we can still give advice to our kids, but for the most part, only if requested.

I believe this should be the goal of parents. The challenge is to come up with plans to accomplish this goal. I know it is easier said than done and we must remember each situation is unique. In chapter 6, I will discuss some recommendations to help bring this goal into fruition.

### 4.2 What Did I Do Right?

Here are some of the areas I helped my children:

- > Finances
- > Due Diligence
- > Expand Their Comfort Zone

#### Finances

I established a financial plan for them before they entered university. This involved putting together a budget, which included the expenses we would pay for and a payment schedule. While we have paid for all their undergraduate university expenses, I made sure they understood the costs involved.

A good story to share.

Most, if not all parents want their children to have a cell phone. It gives us peace of mind knowing they have one. Unfortunately a simple, no frills cell phone plan doesn't seem to work for the kids. No, they need a Blackberry, with all the bells and whistles, which can cost well over a \$100 a month.

Before my kids went to university, we went down to the local bank branch and got a VISA card in my name, with a second card in my son's name. We also set up a \$500 limit for the card. We then talked about getting a cell phone with the understanding that the monthly bill would go through the VISA card for which he would be responsible. I would provide a \$50 per month subsidy.

The lesson learned?

It might seem a bit complicated but it was well worth the effort. My children now understand the cost of having a cell phone. If they want the full package, they pay for the incremental costs.

### **Due Diligence**

I encouraged my sons to investigate universities outside of the traditional ones. The annual university symposium held at the Toronto Convention Centre is an excellent starting point. In the case of my eldest son Michael it opened up an opportunity at McMaster, a university he had not even considered. My second son Ted visited Queen's and Waterloo to investigate their engineering programs. He ultimately selected the co-op engineering program at Waterloo. My third son Blair chose Laurier, in their business program. At the end of first year he applied, and was accepted, into the co-op business program.

We must remember each student has unique skills and desires. By having an open mind and doing the due diligence, this usually will result in the best outcome.

### **Expand Their Comfort Zone**

While my sons were still in high school a friend of mine suggested I buy a series of lectures by Jim Rohn called *The Art of Exceptional Living*. This was my first introduction to the concept of personal growth. Produced in the early 1990s, his message is timeless. Common sense, insightful thinking and some humour thrown in, make it a must hear. I wish someone had introduced me to something like this forty years ago. I have now come to realize how important personal growth is, especially in the academic and work environment we live in today.

I encouraged my children to take courses outside their regular academic programs. I made it clear from the start that we would underwrite any expenses that were incurred. All three have taken advantage of this opportunity.

We also encouraged our children to become involved in activities outside the classrooms. For instance, all three have become involved with charity work while at university. This is where they really learn what life is all about. Life is so much more than what you learn in the classroom. The true leverage, enjoyment and ultimate

fulfillment in life comes from activities outside the classroom. These activities help build life-time friendships and help provide guidance in discovering their passion.

A good story to share.

My eldest son Michael early in university decided he wanted to become a doctor. There is a program at Sick Kids Hospital in Toronto which hires about 600 students for the summer. They do research work at the hospital and gain valuable experience. Michael applied to the program and was offered a position.

The lesson learned?

I think this experience played an important part in helping Michael to get into medical school.

### **4.3 What Would I Do Differently?**

Here are some of the things I would do differently:

- > Controlling My Children
- > Accountability
- > Staying Involved

#### **Controlling My Children**

I have to be honest. There were times I tried to control my children. For the most part I did it because I thought my actions were in their best interests. As a parent I must remember a very basic principle when it comes to dealing with my children, it is their life not mine. We all want what is best for our children, but at some point we have to let go.

A good story to share.

My third son Blair last summer worked at an accounting firm in Toronto. While he liked the people and the pay (and the home cooking), he hated the work. He was bored. The company liked him and asked him back for his first co-op term. Despite my advice (and pressure), Blair turned down the job. He applied for jobs that he thought would better challenge him and more importantly interest him. He got a less lucrative job in marketing that hopefully in the long run will provide him greater personal growth.

The lesson learned?

Blair was right and I was wrong. Despite our best intentions, parents sometimes have to back off and have faith in our children's decisions.

## **Accountability**

Children must be accountable to their parents, especially if the parents are underwriting their university expenses. This has to be explained at the very beginning. Don't chase accountability, request it from the start.

I never really sat down with my children at the end of the academic year to review their marks and talk to them about their course selection for the next year. I had some idea of their marks but I think a formal review should be done.

A friend shared with me the following story. His parents paid for all his university expenses with the understanding that if he failed a course, he was responsible for the costs involved to retake the course. Funny, my friend only failed one course while at university.

## **Staying Involved**

It is easy to forget how stressful the first year at university can be. Of course, everyone puts on a brave face. The parents say this is all part of growing up. The kids, in most cases, are relieved to be away from their parents. Let me share a secret with you. My kids never turned down a free meal at the Keg. Make sure you keep in touch with them, especially in their first year at university.

There will be so many issues going on in their lives. New roommate, course selection, social life, dating, finances and so on. There is a fine line between interfering and showing you care. Stay in touch with your children. Show you care.

I won't give myself a failing grade in this area, but I could have done a better job.

## Chapter 5: Getting Started

### Outline

- > Encourage Your Children to Establish Their Personal Values
- > Encourage Your Children to Develop Their Personal Skills

### 5.1 Personal Values

Help your children establish their personal values encouraging them to:

- > Create a Personal Mission Statement
- > Discover Their Passion
- > Take Some Risk
- > Expand Their Comfort Zone

#### Create a Personal Mission Statement

I have come to realize a permission statement is fundamental if you want to take control of your life. It is your blueprint for the life you are going to lead. To be effective it must be in writing. This is not an easy task but if you do it, I believe you will be off to the races.

By putting it in writing, you accomplish the following:

- > It requires you to ask yourself some tough questions requiring honest answers
- > It allows you to flush out your core philosophies, values and skills
- > It provides a benchmark that you can measure yourself by
- > It provides clarity and accountability
- > It provides a simple to understand statement of who you are, which you can share with others

I encourage you to help your children write down their personal mission statement.

Their personal mission statement should include the following:

- > Their core philosophies
- > Their core values
- > Their dreams
- > Their plans
- > What do are their strongest skills?
- > What are their weakest skills?
- > What do they like doing?
- > What don't they like doing?
- > What makes them unique?

By doing this simple, yet challenging exercise, and I believe you will help them not only become more successful in life; they will also enjoy it a lot more. Albert Einstein

knew this when he said: "Success is not the key to happiness. Happiness is the key to success."

### **Discover Their Passion**

I know discovering your passion is easier said than done. The best way to help your children discover their passion is to encourage them to have an open mind to change and be willing to take some risk. There is no better time to do this than when they are young.

I recently spoke at a conference where one of the speakers commented that your passion cannot be to simply make money. I thought it was an extremely insightful comment. Many of us can and have made this mistake. We want our children to have the same lifestyle as we do and in some cases this is not feasible.

Here are some suggestions to help your children discover their passion:

- > Suggest they get involved in activities outside the classroom
- > Get them to talk to people in careers that interest them
- > Suggest they get involved in some sort of charity work
- > Help them plan their summer jobs – put experience ahead of money

A good story to share.

A good friend of mine entered the Queen's Commerce program in 1970. His parents had "coached" him to enter business but his heart was not 100% sold on their advice. In second year he applied and became a part time news reporter for the local radio station. In year three he moved into broadcasting the local hockey team's games and by fourth year he was working almost 20 hours a week at the station in addition to his full-time university classes. When he graduated, he joined the station as a full-time employee and five years later transferred to Toronto to work at The Sports Network in its early days.

The lesson learned?

He discovered his passion and turned it into a job he truly enjoys. Taking some risk, planning, patience and part-time work experience all played important parts in the ultimate outcome.

### **Take Some Risk**

They will not likely find their passion without taking some risk. I am not sure how it is done today, but the scoring in figure skating competitions used to have compulsory and free skating marks. Life is the same – there are compulsory and free skating marks. For most of us, a university education (and getting good marks) is an important compulsory part. But life is so much more than what you learn in the classroom. The true leverage, enjoyment and ultimate fulfillment in life comes from the free skating. Free skating allows you to find your passion.

One key point in taking risk – you and they must not be afraid of failure. And they will fail! I will tell you some of my greatest accomplishments have occurred when I have successfully worked through my failures.

At a commencement address Robert Pritchard said it well, "Try everything once, and if you don't like it, don't do it again."

### **Expand Their Comfort Zone**

I left this suggestion last because I feel it is the most important. Staying in your existing comfort zone comes with risk. It is human nature for most of us not to like change, but change is an important part of life.

A good way to help your children expand their comfort zone is for parents to start doing less for them so they can do more. If you fully manage their finances for instance, they will never learn how to manage them on their own. An anonymous quote best illustrates this point, "Some parents could do more for their children by not doing so much for them."

I recommend you help them expand their comfort zone. I am not talking about radical surgery but rather small incremental "sorties" like a military campaign. Not all sorties will produce fruit, but with the right attitude they will provide learning experiences.

Fred Smith, author of the bestselling book, *Breakfast with Fred* wrote the following about being in your comfort zone:

*Something in human nature tempts us to stay where we're comfortable. We try to find a plateau, a resting place, where we have comfortable stress and adequate finances. Where we have comfortable associations with people, without the intimidation of meeting new people and entering strange situations. Of course, all of us need to plateau for a time. We climb and then plateau for assimilation. But once we've assimilated what we have learned, we climb again. It's unfortunate when we've done our last climb. When we have made our last climb, we are old, whether forty or eighty.*

## **5.2 Personal Skills**

Help your children improve their personal skills.

Encourage them to:

- > Start a Personal Growth Library
- > Develop a Mentor Network
- > Manage Their Own Finances

### **Start a Personal Growth Library**

For most of us, our academic education has taken place inside the classroom. Encourage your children in this next phase of their life to begin their education

outside the classroom. When we want to get in physical shape we go the gym. I recommend when you want to broaden your education; get a “knowledge” gym membership.

Here are some materials outside the classroom I would recommend:

- > Books
- > Ezines
- > Teaching CDs
- > Speeches

In *The End of the Beginning*, I offer some recommendations for each category.

### **Develop a Mentor Network**

When we are young, we think of mentorship as coaching from wise knowledgeable, grey hairs that are much older (and supposedly wiser) than us. It is good to have mentors like that but something that is not talked about is having mentors your own age. Vertical and horizontal mentorship are both important. Encourage your kids to do both.

### **Manage Their Own Finances**

One of my favourite expressions is: “Dreams cost nothing, implementation gets expensive.” At some point in their lives your children are going to have to take responsibility for their finances. Why not encourage both of you to start this project today? I feel from personal experience, this one of the most important areas to begin your children’s soft landing.

I would encourage parents to take the time to draw up an annual budget. Enter the expenses – tuition, room and board and a monthly allowance. Set up a payment schedule. Let your children begin to take responsibility for paying the bills. And most importantly, sit down with your children to go over and make sure both sides are on the same page regarding the budget. And then stick to. Tough love may be required. In second year I asked the boys to prepare a preliminary budget which we then negotiated.

All this takes time and patience but it is well worth it. Remember the goal – a soft landing by age 25. This is an important part of the process.

A mistake I made was that I wanted to pay for everything so my children could enjoy their time at university. Upon reflection this was a mistake. They should have “some skin in the game.” Paying for everything is not going to teach them much. Encourage them to become a teaching assistant, a tour guide, a parking attendant, etc. Earning some money to pay for part of their expenses will give them a better understanding of how to manage their finances.

## Chapter 6: The Cocoon and the Butterfly

A final story to share.

A man found a cocoon of a butterfly, and he brought it home.

One day, a small opening appeared in the cocoon. The man sat and watched the cocoon for several hours as the butterfly struggled to force its body through that little hole.

Then it seemed to stop making progress. It appeared as if the butterfly had gotten as far as it could, and it could go no farther.

The man decided to help the butterfly in its struggle. He took a pair of scissors and snipped off the remaining bit of the cocoon... and the butterfly emerged easily.

As the butterfly emerged, the man was surprised. It had a swollen body and small, shriveled wings. He continued to watch the butterfly expecting that, at any moment, the wings would dry out, enlarge, and expand to support the swollen body. He knew that in time the body would contract, and the butterfly would be able to fly... but neither happened!

In fact, the butterfly spent the rest of its life crawling around with a swollen body and shriveled wings. What the man, in his kindness and haste, did not understand was that the restricting cocoon and the struggle were required for the butterfly to be able to fly.

The butterfly must push its way through the tiny opening to force the fluid from its body and wings. Only by struggling through the opening can the butterfly's wings be ready for flight once it emerges from the cocoon.

Sometimes struggles are exactly what we need in our life. If our Higher Power allowed us to go through life without any obstacles, it would cripple us. We would not be as strong as what we could have been...and we could never fly.

This story provides a great picture the role parents must follow as their kids head off to their post secondary education. We must allow them to start to take responsibility for themselves. This means, we must slowly start to withdraw controlling their finances, their course selections and ultimately their career selection to mention a few. For most of us, this is a challenge. We love our children and we want what is best for them.

I recommend you stand back and let them discover their passion. They will make mistakes, but given the right attitude, they can learn from them. Let them know you are always there as a friend on call.

*Now this is not the end.  
It is not even the beginning of the end.  
But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.*

## About the Author



Bob Livingston is a senior vice-president with McLean Budden in Toronto involved in their private client wealth management practice, managing portfolios for individual investors. Bob has spent over 35 years on Bay Street, both on the sell-side and buy-side.

In his current role, Bob has made many presentations on wealth management. In early 2008, Bob became involved in presenting to high school graduates, university students and young business people. Bob's presentations focus on the importance of personal growth and draw upon Bob's experiences as well as material written by John Maxwell, Jim Rohn, Stephen Covey and others. These gentlemen are leaders in the field of personal growth.

In early 2009 Bob began to write papers on his presentations and to date has written about a dozen papers on wealth management and personal growth.

When asked why he does it, Bob's answer is simple. "It expands my comfort zone, it gives me a way of giving back to the community, and most importantly, I am having fun doing it."

## Articles Written

### *Wealth Management*

#### ***It Starts With a Decision***

Taking control of one's finances is a decision, followed by a plan, implemented by discipline and nurtured by patience. And it takes time. It is that simple. Bob discusses wealth management at the 101 level. He concludes with the simple example of how giving up a café latte a day for 20 years can turn into \$55,000.

#### ***Acquiring Your Wealth to Fulfill Your Dreams***

Acquiring your wealth starts with defining your dreams, followed by taking control of your personal situation and then creating plans to fulfill the dreams. The plans must be executed with discipline and nurtured with patience. Bob discusses some of the common mistakes and concludes with five recommendations.

#### ***Managing Your Wealth to Fulfill Your Dreams***

Managing your wealth starts with defining your dreams, followed by taking control of your personal situation and then creating plans to fulfill the dreams. The plans must be executed with discipline and nurtured with patience. Bob discusses some of the common mistakes and concludes with five recommendations.

### ***Giving Away Your Wealth to Fulfill Your Dreams***

Giving away your wealth starts with defining your dreams. As we approach the end of our life, assuming there is a well financed retirement in place, the only two options for our wealth is to leave it to our family or the community we live in. Bob discusses the difference between success and significance regarding wealth management. Success is about how we acquire and manage our wealth. Significance is how we give it away. Planning plays an extremely important part in this process.

## ***Personal Growth***

### ***13:22***

Bob discusses the important role grandparents play in being a mentor for their grandchildren. He discusses the importance of preparing a personal mission statement or what he calls "a blueprint for life." Grandparents who are: "a little bit parent, a little bit teacher, and a little bit best friend" can be so helpful in these roles.

### ***A Tale of Two Cities***

Bob discusses the two different cities children can end up in: a city called *Responsibility* and a city called *Entitlement*. He discusses the important role parents play in which city their children choose. He provides some recommendations on how parents can better raise their children to become responsible adults and avoid becoming an entitled one. And when children ask for their first cell phone, take a look at chapter 6.

### ***A New Day Has Come***

Bob has come to realize the importance of preparing a personal mission statement. A personal mission statement discusses who you are: your core philosophies, your core values; your skills; your likes and dislikes; and what makes you unique. He outlines the necessary steps to put one together and shares his own.

### ***The End of the Beginning***

Bob discusses some of the changes he has seen take place in the education system over the last 35 years. Marks are still important, but in today's world, more than marks are required. He strongly believes personal growth has become a very important part of the process and most students have not been taught it. Unlike his generation, plans and better communication are needed to have success in today's environment.

### ***Shift Happens***

Bob discusses some of the changes he has seen take place in the education system in the last 35 years. He shares with the reader his experiences as a parent: what he did right, what he would do differently; as his children headed off to university. He concludes with some recommendations for parents to help their children in this next and very important phase in their life.

### ***Discover Your Passion***

Bob starts off with the premise that you want to find a job (if possible) that you are passionate about. He talks about the benefits, the roadblocks and the risks of finding that kind of job. He concludes with some recommendations on how to enhance your personal growth: establish your personal values and develop your personal skills. A must read for young adults.

### ***The Times They Are A-Changin'***

Bob discusses his 35 years on Bay Street: his career path, his experiences, and the lessons he learned. He discusses the changing environment in the job market: "the low hanging fruit is either gone or has been relocated." He concludes with some recommendations to help the reader get started.

### ***Three Coins from the Fountain***

Bob contemplates if he could go back 35 years and start his career all over again, what three core philosophies would he take back with him? He uses the analogy that there are coins of knowledge called Wisdom and Ignorance in the Trevi Foundation made famous in the 1954 movie *Three Coins in the Fountain*. What three coins of Wisdom would he select from the Fountain? What coin of Ignorance would he avoid? What has been Bob's biggest challenge in his career?

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