

## CHAPTER 3

# The Waiting Room

Have you ever felt forgotten?

One time, during a doctor's visit, they forgot about me. They led me to a room, shut the door, and never came back. I'm currently writing this from there.

Doesn't life feel like that sometimes? It feels like we've been ushered into a waiting room and simply forgotten. Ever been there? Are you there now? On the journey to what's next you may find yourself in the waiting room.

Waiting is hard and dangerous. It's hard because we feel as though our life has been put on hold. No one likes being put on hold. It's the place of bad music and wasted time. It's dangerous because of what we decide to do, or to not do.

When we find ourselves in the waiting room, we have three paths to choose from.

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1. Waiting passively.
2. Waiting recklessly.
3. Waiting actively.

**Waiting passively** is when we conclude that life is completely out of our control and we can't do anything to move ourselves forward—kind of like being stuck in a doctor's office and thinking you can do nothing about it.

Waiting passively is the land of video games and stacks of pizza boxes. It's where we scroll through everyone else's highlight reel on social media, falling for the illusion that their lives are problem-free while we're stuck in the waiting room. It's a vicious cycle that starts to spiral downward quickly.

This is also the place where our excuses start to cement in our soul.

**Waiting recklessly** is when our frustration boils over and we leap toward the best available option. We're exhausted from being put on hold, so we hang up and move. I completely understand, but the stories of waiting recklessly are the ones I heard often as a pastor. This kind of waiting can create some deep scars.

Waiting recklessly sounds like, *I'm not getting any*

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*younger, so I may as well take a chance and walk down the aisle with them. After all, no one's perfect.*

*Or, Sure it's a lot of debt, but isn't this how you build your credit?*

It becomes the land of greatest regrets when we realize there can be worse things than waiting.

That's the bad news. The good news is there's another, better option.

**Waiting actively** is when we combine wisdom, patience, and an intentional plan to leverage this season. There actually is something we should be doing while we wait. It's not the land of passivity; it's not the land of being on hold. It's the land of wisdom.

Wisdom in the waiting room discerns the difference between waiting passively, recklessly, and actively. Think about these statements. Have you ever felt or said any of these?

"I've been forgotten." That's waiting passively.

"It's my turn *now*." That's waiting recklessly.

"I'm being prepared." That's waiting actively.

You haven't been forgotten. You are being prepared. Believing these statements will help you see the waiting room as a gift, not a curse. It will also help lead you to discover what's next.

## The Microwave versus the Crock-Pot

We all know things taste better when they simmer for a long time compared to taking a microwave approach. And yet all too often we want our lives to be microwaved so we can just move on.

The waiting room is where we simmer. It's where our greatest change takes place. It's the seasoning, the refining, the long nights of uncertainty, where our character is formed, our values are decided, our souls are shaped.

When we bust out of the waiting room by acting impulsively or recklessly, we forfeit the simmering change that could have been.

Waiting passively  
*squanders* the time.

Waiting recklessly  
*forces* the time.

Waiting actively  
*leverages* the time.

*Waiting passively squanders the time.*

*Waiting recklessly forces the time.*

*Waiting actively leverages the time.*

To *squander* means we don't take advantage of the growth opportunity the waiting room provides. To *force* means we decide it's time, and so we move the season from the slow cooker to the microwave. In other words, we're done. The impulse isn't all bad. *I don't want to be a victim. I don't want to be passive. Let's take some action.*

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Those are actually good things. But if we're not careful, we can miss the better option—*waiting actively*.

We aren't sitting quietly in the waiting room, just twiddling our thumbs as we wait to be invited into the exam room. We don't simply endure the process; we grow through the process. Our time in the waiting room does not have to be wasted time.

### What to Do in the Waiting Room

We all know stories (correction: we all *have* stories) of being so impatient that we decided to act. Now, I've mentioned a lot about the power of action. There's both wise action and the reckless kind. If we come storming out of the waiting room without a plan, we have the potential to recklessly wreck our lives. On the other hand, if we give up and remain passive, hope starts to fade.

As the old proverb says, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick."<sup>10</sup>

The waiting room is hard on our hearts. It feels like we're stuck in a nondescript room, no door handle on the inside, a television on the wall where we see everyone else moving swiftly through their lives. Life is one big smile as one dream after another comes true.

That television, by the way, is called Instagram. And

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be careful of what you see. Far too often, Instagram just shows the highlight reels without the drama.

In fact, one of the best strategies to implement in a season of waiting is to cut way back on your time watching Instagram TV. You've been created to live *your* life, not someone else's life. One of the many dangers of the waiting room is that hope can fade and comparison can seep into your heart. I don't want that for you. Heck, *you* don't want that for you.

Instead, I want to give you a principle to hold on to during this season of waiting, along with some practical strategies I've implemented in my own life that I'm confident can help you.

First, I want you to write down this principle somewhere and refer to it often: *don't let what you don't know rob you of what you can do.*

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of what you can do.

To wait actively is to understand there are things we don't know. There are reasons for waiting that we can't see right now. The best things take time. It's not all on us. We can choose to be present while still being hopeful for the future.

I mentioned that waiting is hard. Isn't that one of the more ironic aspects of waiting? It's exhausting to do nothing.

And yet don't forget the message from A. L. Patterson:

- Start where you are.
- Use what you have.
- Do what you can.

When we use what we have and do what we can, it's amazing how much of a gift a season of waiting can be. You haven't been forgotten; you are being prepared. Here's how to cooperate with the process and grow in the process.

## Step #1: Build Your Network

*Your net worth largely depends on your network.* It's true—who you know is often more important than what you know. This is why building your personal network is one of the best decisions you can make while you search for what's next.

A network is simply the people in your circle of relationships. What I've discovered is that the person you need to meet is closer than you think. It's the "Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon" game. Apparently, we are just six people away from being able to ask Kevin about *Footloose*.

Because who you know is more important than what you know, coffee with someone you know is always better than sending your résumé to someone you don't. One of

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the best ways to know what's next is to talk to people you know.

Most of us, though, discount our network. Since we don't know the CEO of a big company, we tend to overlook the manager of a smaller company. And yet, if there's any truth to the theory of six degrees of separation (the real-life theory on which the Kevin Bacon game is based),<sup>11</sup> you're closer to the CEO than you may think.

The bigger problem, though, as it always is, happens to be insecurity. *Why would this person want to meet with me?*

Good news. You've come to the right place. Not only will most of the people you ask agree to meet with you, but they'll be grateful for the time spent with you. And I'm

What to do next is  
built largely on *who*  
you talk to next.

going to give you the perfect questions to ask to build your network.

Remember this: what to do next is built largely on *who* you talk to next.

If you want to build your net worth, you need to build your network. Here's how:

### **1. Write Down Every Name You Can Think Of in Your Personal Network**

This exercise is critical for starting right where we are. I don't want this to be a haphazard exercise. We're going to



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take fifteen minutes and do it right. Set your watch, alarm, or timer for fifteen minutes. Then write down every name you can think of in your network. If you can't think of a name, write, "I can't think of a name to write down." (Or write down "Kevin Bacon." You're just six degrees from him anyway.)

The goal is to keep writing. Don't stop. Quantity is far better than quality right now. Just write.

Who do you know? Write it down. If you're wondering whether you should write down a certain person's name, the answer is yes. The more names, the better. (Please understand that most people never do this. As a result, they never truly leverage their personal network.)

### **2. Rank the Names in Order of Priority**

After the fifteen minutes is up, I want you to take two next steps:

1. Circle the names you know the best.
2. Rank the names with great influence in your network, starting at #1—signifying the greatest influence.

"What's the difference?" you ask. Great question.

On the one hand, the names you circle are those you've

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known the longest or the best. On the other hand, there may be names in your network who have significant influence and who you don't know as well. I want you to create two separate lists so you can see where the circles and the rankings mesh. When someone in your relational circle has a significant influence, it's an indicator of where to start.

For example, you may come across someone who is exactly in your field of interest. You would want to put them high on the list compared to someone in a completely different field. Granted, that person can still be of value based on their life experience and their own network, and we'll eventually get to them.

Let me give you an example. David Salyers, the former vice president of marketing at Chick-fil-A, is someone I would circle because I've known him for more than twenty-five years. I would also rank him highly as a person of significant influence because of his career and network. And as I've often told David, I want to be like him when I grow up.

The best place to start building your network is where the circles and rankings combine. It's also one of the best ways to wait actively while you're in the waiting room.

### **3. Let the Contacting Begin**

We're now going to begin the networking process. You've developed an initial list and ranked them in terms of when

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you'll contact them—and now the work begins. Depending on your personality, this next step may seem a bit daunting. It's why I've written out your request for you. Obviously, you decide whether it takes the form of a text, email, phone call, and so forth. But here's what I want you to say:

*Hi, there. I'm in the process of determining my next career move, and I was wondering if you would have twenty minutes for me to hear more of your story. I know there's a lot I can learn from you and what you've done. Would you be willing to meet with me?*

Sure, not everyone will say yes, but who knows, maybe they will. What I do know is that most people like sharing their story. You're not asking for a job; you're asking for them to talk about themselves. And most people like talking about themselves. I want you to come with three specific questions:

1. Looking back, what were some of the most helpful strategies that got you to where you are now?
2. What do you know now that you wish you had known ten years ago?
3. What would you do if you were me?

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### **The Best Networking Question Ever**

After asking those first three questions, you'll finish with asking the best question I've ever heard when it comes to building your network: *Who do you know that I need to know?* (Shout-out to John Maxwell for teaching me this question.<sup>12</sup> It is flat-out networking gold and worth the price of this book!)

If we were having lunch together, this is when I would stand up, walk around the table, put my hand on your shoulder, and say, "Don't miss this. This question alone is one of the most important ways you'll discover what's next." (And aren't you glad we aren't having lunch together because everyone would wonder what's happening at the table over there where a strange man is putting his hand on the shoulder of that nice person.)

But seriously. On the other side of this question just might be your future.

You're not done yet though. I want you to ask one follow-up question: *Would you be willing to contact them on my behalf?*

They may say no, but I've found it's rare to get that response. People actually feel good when they are helping people, and you're asking for help.

To do this can make us feel very uncomfortable. I get it. I feel the same way.

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You know what else makes us uncomfortable? Not getting closer to what's next. You get to pick your discomfort.

As for me, I want to stay in the waiting room as long as it takes for me to grow, but I don't want to stay one second longer than I have to, which is why I'm committed to growing my personal network. It's why I keep reminding myself of this truth: *I'm one person away from the next big opportunity.*

My network largely determines my net worth. The greater my network, the greater my net worth. It's that simple, that uncomfortable, and that promising. Granted, our financial net worth doesn't determine our personal value. But our network does determine how close we move to our potential. In some ways, I wish that weren't true. I wish *what* we know was greater than *who* we know. Sometimes that's true. Yet in the real world, it's all about the network.

You're not running for class president; you're running toward your potential. In fact, you have a stewardship responsibility toward the rest of us. Something inside you needs to be released to the rest of us.

As I wrote in *Know What You're FOR*, it's not about being the best *in* the world; it's about being the best *for* the world. For this to happen, to put yourself in a position of greater influence, you're going to have to build your network. It's also a great strategy for fighting off worry and fear.

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It's waiting actively. It's action, and it requires work. As you make the calls, write the emails, and send the texts, you're moving forward. Not everyone will say yes, and some meetings won't initially lead anywhere, but the most important part is that you're moving. And honestly, that's part of the fun.

You're writing a story. Your one and only story.

You're not stuck in the worry zone. Life hasn't forgotten you. You're being prepared. There's no reason to wait around passively or recklessly. Instead, wait actively. It's why you're taking action—*this month*.

Our goal is that you'll build your network by three people over the next four weeks. That's pretty aggressive, so let's be clear what we mean by this. You're going to have the names of three people in your network who aren't currently there. This doesn't mean you've met with them yet, though that would be fantastic; it just means you are one step closer to meeting with them.

If you were to do this each month for one solid year, you would have thirty-six new names in your personal network. I guarantee you that doing this will help you discover what's next . . . and beyond.

And guess what? You now have a plan to help you get there. Here it is:

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1. Make a list.
2. Make the calls.
3. Set up the meetings.
4. Ask the questions.

Finally, and this is so important, follow up with a thank-you note. Personally, I like going further than that. If the meeting is particularly helpful and they have agreed to help me by reaching out to that person they know whom I need to know, well, a carton of Jeni's Splendid Ice Creams is in their future.

A generous thank you always helps build your network. It's amazing how rarely this happens. Circling back and saying thank you to those who helped you will create a lasting memory for them. It causes them to help you even more. Even if that weren't true, we should still circle back to say thanks.

But the reality is that gratitude is a win-win.

When you thank those you know for helping you, you're building your personal network with gratitude. And while a thank-you note is something I'm sure you've already thought of, let me give you one idea that hadn't occurred to me.

It's called "plus one." And yes, it's another idea I picked

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up from John Maxwell. At a three-day leadership event I attended, I heard him tell the story of a friend he'd meet for lunch who would always bring something of value—a book, an encouraging note and gift, and so forth. Every time John met with this friend, the friend was adding value to the friendship.

John calls this “plus one.” Bring a book, share a gift, write a note. Never let someone bring more value to you than you are bringing to them. Imagine what life would be like if this is how we all lived our lives. “Never let a friendship get out of balance,” John says. His point is that we must always seek to add value.

This is important for those of us who are struggling with the idea of asking someone for help, those who would rather give help than receive help. I get that.

By the way, do you know the hidden secret of why this is true for so many of us?

Hang with me because this may be a little offensive. It's not necessarily because we don't want to bother people. Honestly, it's pride. Yep, we're prideful. It takes humility to put ourselves in a vulnerable position and say, “I need help.”

Networking requires humility. Asking “who do you know that I need to know?” declares you need help.

This is why figuring out what's next can be so daunting. It strikes at the core of hidden pride, stirring it up.



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Before you send that email or make the request, pride is begging you to leave it alone. *Just settle! Embrace comfort! Stay put! But whatever you do, don't ask for help. We're fine!*

Say what you will, but deep down, pride is controlling the shots here. In fact, as you're reading this, pride is saying, *Oh, that's not true about me.*

Rarely, if ever, do good things happen when we listen to pride. It's why I read Ryan Holiday's book *Ego Is the Enemy* once a year.

My biggest enemy isn't the economy.

My biggest enemy isn't the ones who betrayed me.

My biggest enemy isn't the government.

My biggest enemy is the ego that lies within me.

Let's be honest. The reason you don't want to build your network isn't that you don't want to "bother" people; it's pride. Pride is your enemy, and it's standing in the way of your next.

Humble yourself. Ask for help. Then help those who help you.

If you're still struggling with this, think of it this way. What if networking is as much about you adding value as it is about receiving it? What if you were to become a "plus one" kind of friend who is also able to ask for help?

I can tell you what will happen. You'll be better off because you built your network, but the person who helped

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you will be better off because you are a “plus one” kind of person and friend.

But that’s enough talk. It’s time for action.

In his book *The Greatest Salesman in the World*, Og Mandino has included a great chapter on action. He writes, “My dreams are worthless, my plans are dust, my goals are impossible. All are of no value unless they are followed by action. I will act now.”<sup>13</sup> *I will act now.*

It’s time to build your network. Not tomorrow but today.

Or in the words of those great leadership experts, Van Halen, “Right now.”<sup>14</sup>

## Step #2: Create Optimal Options

The worst thing isn’t being unsure of what’s next; the worst thing is not being able to pursue what’s next when it arrives. This is yet another reason the waiting room can be a blessing, not a curse. It provides time to create options for our future.

It’s why waiting actively is a sign that you believe you’re being prepared for something bigger, something you can’t quite see or touch but are working toward by creating options for yourself.

To create optimal options is to do work now so you’ll have an opportunity to choose later. Here are a few examples:

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- Get your financial house in order. (We'll discuss this in a separate chapter.)
- Create more than one income stream.
- Work a side-hustle.
- Build your personal network. (Have you started on this month's goal yet?)
- Focus on your physical and emotional health.

When you're debt-free, you have options.

When you have multiple income streams, you have options.

When you have a larger personal network, you have options.

When you are a healthier version of you, you have options.

Too often, we go looking for answers without any options. Creating options is far easier said than done. But as I've said before, we didn't sign up for easy; we signed up for worthwhile. You're digging ditches in a drought, knowing the rain will come someday.

Wendy and I found an optimal option when we discovered Mike Michalowicz's book *Profit First*. I first heard about Mike on the *Business Made Simple* podcast with Donald Miller. Mike described the reasons many businesses are unprofitable, even if the business generates a lot of revenue.

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Wendy and I decided this wasn't going to be true about our business. We went to work creating optimal options by meeting with our amazing accountant, Belinda Randall, giving her Mike's book and asking her to listen to his interview on Donald's podcast.

Implementing Mike's simple system has been a massive blessing for our business, and our marriage. Structuring our cash flow within this system has greatly reduced the arguments that can happen in a marriage when you're feeling the stress of a cash-strapped business.

What Mike taught us to do was to capture the rain in the ditches we were digging. So many businesses, and especially entrepreneurs, work incredibly hard at digging ditches to capture the revenue rain, only to see it evaporate in costs.

This is the power of creating optimal options and why it's so important as you move toward what's next.

The more ditches you dig, the more rain you'll capture.

The more options you have, the better answers you'll find.

### **A Terrible Question to Ask**

For decades now, we've been asking teens a terrible question: *What are you going to major in?* This is a terrible question because of *when* it's asked. How can they possibly know the answer? They haven't lived long enough to

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discover their true strengths and talents. What they're interested in is only half the battle. They need more life experience to send them on the path.

It's why I think our educational system has failed the next generation in many ways.

It's astonishing how college students can graduate and yet be financially illiterate. Not to mention, saddled with massive amounts of student loan debt.

I'm all for education. I'm not for financially strapped college graduates who will never recover from the debt, and never have options to pursue their best next.

The goal of college should be to create optimal options upon graduation. That's why, if I were the president of the Henderson University Bulldogs, the freshman year curriculum would focus on three overarching subjects: financial freedom, working internships, and discovering talents and strengths.

Freshman year at ole Henderson U. would be much more practical than what's happening at most universities. Most freshman years are simply the thirteenth year of high school, a Greek-life party accompanied by that enormously pressure-inducing question about your major.

No wonder the average college student changes their major two times, often three. The pressure of trying to figure out what to do with the rest of your life is enormous,

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especially at eighteen, nineteen, and twenty years of age. But here's the secret for the rest of us: we're still trying to figure that out too.

We often take on the same pressure of the "rest of your life" dilemma. As a result, our next step seems like a Rubik's Cube, with limited time to figure it out.

A better question for students would be, "Over the next couple of years, how can you discover what your major could be?"

There's a similar question for the rest of us, especially those of us in the waiting room: *In this season of waiting, how can we discover what our next step should be?*

This leads to one of the key principles in finding your best next step: *the better options you create, the better answers you'll find.*

Again, the worst thing isn't being unsure of what's next; the worst thing is when what's next arrives and you're not able to pursue it. To create optimal options is to work to give yourself the opportunity to choose.

### Side-Hustles

It's why, when people ask me if they should leave their job, I ask them about their options. And yes, sometimes

we find ourselves without a job. If that's the case, return to the section above about *building your network*. It's the single biggest strategy to implement when we don't have the luxury of time.

I'm a big advocate of side-hustles as one of the best ways to figure out what to do next. Working a side job when you have a full-time job is no easy task, but it does help you create optimal options by exploring rather than simply guessing.

For example, I'm often approached by people who ask if they should become a Chick-fil-A operator. My answer is, "I don't know, but I know how you can find out. Apply for a part-time job at your local Chick-fil-A."

There's nothing like real-time data to help you determine whether you love the business. If you don't like your part-time job there, you're not going to enjoy your career there. That's the beauty of a side-hustle—you get paid while exploring whether this may be your best next.

After my advisory board meeting I mentioned in chapter 1, I knew I needed to pour fuel on some current options to see if they would turn into optimal ones. I had to "pay attention to where the momentum is."

There was momentum with the *Know What You're FOR* book because it was scheduled to come out later that fall. I asked a friend who has published multiple books to

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have lunch with me. (See, I don't just tell you to leverage and build your network; I do it too.)

It was a lunch with Tim Irwin that changed this rookie author's life. "Books sell speeches, and speeches sell books," Tim told me. "You've got to hit the road."

Instantly, I found another side-hustle. Two actually. The first side-hustle was to pursue the idea of a business breakfast tour. Since I was a pastor, I asked my pastor friends if they would host a business breakfast tour stop as a way for their church to serve their local business community. I asked twenty-five people. All said yes.

Then I needed to figure out a way to pay for this. Enter my second side-hustle—finding a book tour sponsor. After a couple of rejections, I found a yes from Michele Velcheck and Solid Source Realty—for which I will be forever grateful.

Books sell speeches, and speeches sell books. They also create optimal options because one night on this book tour, I called Wendy and said, "I think I've found what's next."

There were other side-hustles. I launched a couple of new online courses to see if one would resonate. I worked to grow my email list. I leveraged and served my personal network, like I challenged you to do.



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All of this wasn't random work. Wendy and I were creating optimal options. We knew there would always be some sort of risk in leaving, so we went to work shrinking that gap. We were digging ditches, not knowing when it would rain, but fully expecting that someday it would.

It's why side-hustles are one of the best ways to leverage the waiting room. Remember, waiting actively is the goal. You haven't been forgotten. You're being prepared for something better.

In some ways, creating optimal options is like shadowboxing. The term *shadowboxing* refers to being in the boxing ring all by yourself, throwing punches at no one. You see it either as a waste of time—after all, there's no championship belt for the shadowboxing champ—or as a training camp to prepare you for the big showdown: you versus fear and doubt.

Even if you can't articulate it completely, see it clearly, or understand it fully, you must acquire the inner belief that the best is yet to come. Better days are ahead. You're in the ring for a reason. You're in the waiting room for a season.

Do you believe that? If so, you need to answer the following question: *What optimal options am I creating financially, relationally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually?*

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What optimal options am I creating  
financially, relationally, physically,  
emotionally, and spiritually?

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Make a list and get to work. You're waiting actively.

### Step #3: Find Your Muse

One of the more perplexing aspects of the waiting room is dealing with uncertainty about what we're waiting for.

Have you ever been asked, "What do you want to do?" and been frustrated because your answer is, "I'm not sure"? I get it. I've been there too.

It's why, if you don't know what to do, you need to find your who. Find someone who inspires you and follow where their path is going. Find your muse.

A muse is defined as someone who serves as an artist's inspiration. Whether you know it or not, you're an artist. You're painting on the canvas of your one and only life. Every great artist needs great inspiration. But here's the thing I've realized about inspiration. There's a difference between getting inspired and remaining inspired. Getting inspired requires a moment; remaining inspired requires a plan.

There's certainly nothing wrong with getting inspired, but it's usually like a boy band. Short-lived. Remaining

inspired is the Beatles—a long, long shelf life.

If you're going to find what's next, you're going to need to remain inspired. And that's where a muse comes in. I'm not saying you copy them; I'm saying you *emulate* them.

Sometimes it's hard to articulate exactly what you want to do, especially if you've never done it before. There are times when you need to find a guide, someone who is where you want to be, to help provide a course to follow. In other words, find your muse. For example, I have several muses who help me remain inspired. Here are a few of them.

Shortly after I had been given the charge from my personal advisory board to start thinking about what's next, I had the opportunity to visit Michael Hyatt. He reached out to me to help coach him and his team on the training I do for public speaking.

Sidenote: It's uncanny how often this happens. When you start moving toward what's next, things start moving toward you. As a person of faith, I don't believe this is a coincidence. In any case, this meeting with Michael Hyatt happened out of the blue. He posted a question on Twitter, asking his followers

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remaining inspired  
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who they would recommend as a speaking coach. Many people suggested me. He reached out, and a few weeks later, I found myself meeting with him at the Michael Hyatt offices.

I had been an admirer of Michael for some time. When I went to his headquarters that day in Franklin, Tennessee, I saw a picture of what I wanted someday—a thriving, passionate team that served leaders with fantastic and helpful content. And yet Michael owned the business; the business didn't own him.

He walked to work. He had a sustainable, thriving pace. He loved his work, but it didn't crowd out the most important part of his life—his relationships. He was truly living out a life principle I've tried to emulate: *our lives move to a better place when we move at a sustainable pace.*

I drove away with that picture in mind. There are times when pictures are better than words. You see it, even though you can't quite describe it. When I've had a bad day, when things don't go according to plan, that picture is still there in my mind. I walk to it. It's an anchor.

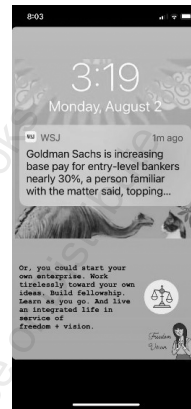
There's something about what I saw that day that draws me forward. I remember telling Wendy when I returned home from being with Michael and his team, "I don't know exactly what we're moving toward, but I think I saw it today."

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Jeni Britton Bauer is another example. I've already mentioned Jeni's Splendid Ice Creams, and I'm sure I'll mention them a time or two before we're done. Observing Jeni's persistence and passion through inevitable ups and downs has helped me keep going.

An example is the day she posted the following screenshot on Instagram. She received a news alert about job openings at Goldman Sachs, and on the bottom left side, she wrote a message to her followers.

I was having a particularly hard day that day. And on those hard days, I have a tendency to think about security. It sounded like this:



- A normal nine-to-five job would be way less stressful.
- What if this doesn't work?
- I wonder if so-and-so is hiring.

And then I saw this post from Jeni. It guided me back, reminding me that I was exactly where I needed to be. I was on the right path. Sure, social media has its issues, but in this case, Jeni leveraged her social media to keep me on the path.

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And then there's John Maxwell. John's ability to move seamlessly through the business, church, school, government, and other fields is a path I want to follow. One of John's hopes before his life here comes to an end is to see a country transformed by values-based leadership. Those three words—*a country transformed*—kicked my butt. (As a former pastor, I can't use the other word for *butt*, even though it's in the Bible. After all, my mom is going to read this book.)

"A country transformed" is a vision worth adopting. "Needing health insurance" is massively important and needed. In America now, it's actually required by law. But ultimately, it can't be the sole determining factor when it comes to the vision for my life.

It's why John is such a helpful muse. I saw things in him that resonated with me, that drew me forward.

I'm no Michael, Jeni, or John. That's not the point. The point is that sometimes you need a picture, a persona, a muse, an image, of what you're striving for. This will look different for everyone. It should. Who might that be for you?

If you can't completely describe with words what's next, can you find a picture of someone doing what you would like to do? It doesn't have to be a perfect match, just enough for the inspiration to rise above the inevitable challenges that will try to block your way.

## The Waiting Room

It's a great strategy when you're in the waiting room: *when you don't know what to do, find a who that inspires you.*

It's why the three greatest muses of my life are Wendy, Jesse, and Cole. My overarching, grandest next is to finish life exceedingly well. To do that, I've got to get better. Each day, I pray that Wendy gets a better husband today. (Not a new one! The same one, only better.) Each day, I pray that Jesse and Cole get a better dad today.

Back to my earlier point about remaining inspired, this pushes me forward. I want to finish well, and they are my muses to get there.

I want to be the best version of me I can possibly be, so I surround myself with influences, examples, and stories that will help me finish life well. That doesn't start years from now; it is implemented every day.

Again, if you don't know what to do, find a who that inspires you. Walk their path until you find your own. It's usually a blessed path to follow.

### Step #4: Developing a Personal Advisory Board

One of the most helpful decisions I've ever made is developing a personal advisory board. I picked up this idea from author Jim Collins. He was being interviewed about his

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book *Good to Great* when I heard him say something that changed my life: “If Coca-Cola has a board of advisors, you should too.”<sup>15</sup>

I loved this idea for two reasons. First, I’m an Atlanta native, and we’re bound by law to love Coca-Cola. More importantly, it made me ask the question, “Is Coca-Cola more interested in making the right decisions with sugar water than I am with my one shot at life?”

I immediately went to work. Like many of you, I wasn’t quite sure where to look, so I began to take my clues again from Coca-Cola.

What qualifications are they looking for in board members?

What are their decision-making criteria?

What is their process for how long someone stays on the board?

How do they run their meetings?

As far as I can tell, Coke doesn’t publish this information, so I decided to make it up as it related to my board. Before I share this with you, though, I have to point out one of the most pivotal principles in helping us know what’s next.

It comes from a passage in the Bible, and no matter



what your opinion is about that, this is a principle we can leverage or crash against: “Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.”<sup>16</sup>

This is one of the greatest pieces of advice you and I will ever receive when it comes to finding what’s next: *the better counsel I have, the better answers I’ll find.*

Once again, this is an example of waiting actively. Putting yourself on the other side of very wise people whom you would like to emulate and asking them great questions will catapult you closer to what’s next. I guarantee it.

Whenever I talk about my personal advisory board, I’m often asked, “Where did you find them and what do you do in the meetings?”

The following is my approach to finding board members, determining what we talk about, and planning what a typical board meeting looks like. I’m not suggesting you follow this path exactly, but I am suggesting this is one of the best decisions you’ll ever make to find what’s next.

Before I go there, don’t forget *why* we’re doing this. We aren’t meeting to meet; we’re meeting to make the wisest decision possible, which is why my advisors were involved in every key decision in my life over the last fifteen years, especially when it came to finding what was next for Wendy and me.

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### **The Who**

There were three key indicators of the kind of people I wanted on my personal advisory board: (1) older, (2) wiser, and (3) experienced.

First, they weren't exceptionally older than me, though I often told them they were. While it's certainly true that we can learn a lot from young leaders, I wanted someone who had their own scars and battles, which I could leverage and learn from. Plus, I wanted their advice on marriage, finances, health, parenting, and issues far beyond work.

Second, I personally had seen the wisdom in their lives. As I often told them, "I want to grow up and be like each of you one day. I want our kids to be like yours, our marriage to be healthy like yours, our finances to follow the same principles." When we're able to glean wisdom from someone who is farther ahead of us, it's such a gift.

Finally, I wanted someone with a track record of experience. It's worth noting that none of my four board members worked in the same field, nor were they working in my career field at the time. I preferred it that way because it gave me a broader perspective.

Sidenote: I limited my board to four people. I don't have a specific reason, but three seemed too few and adding another voice seemed a bit too much for me.

### The Agenda

I'd bring four basic questions to most of the meetings:

1. What am I excited about?
2. What am I worried, anxious, or angry about?
3. What one area do I need the most help with?
4. What would you do if you were me?

We'd typically follow this flow, though the board sometimes decided ahead of time what we should talk about.

We'd meet once every six weeks, though we had times when we had longer gaps and times when we met more frequently than that. Also, at least once a year, Wendy came to the meeting. I wanted the board to hear if there were any gaps in what I was telling them. I wanted them to hear how Wendy was doing, what she was thinking, and how she was processing our life and upcoming decisions.

If you're married, I can't recommend this enough. It's healthy to process what's happening in your life with folks you trust and admire. Were there times I felt like I was on the hot seat? Absolutely. Are there times the CEO at Coca-Cola will feel like they're on the hot seat in front of the board? I imagine so. But good, healthy conflict can lead to good, healthy decisions.

Let me tell you why I keep bringing up the Coca-Cola

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board analogy and comparing it to my little advisory board idea. Coke doesn't have a choice. They are required to have a board. You aren't.

Most people who've asked me about developing a personal advisory board never do it. Can I push you a bit on this point? My hunch is that you won't either. I'm not trying to offend you; I'm trying to challenge you. The reason you probably won't do this isn't because you disagree with the idea; it's because it's not urgent. To paraphrase Stephen Covey's teaching about time management, "It's important, but it's not urgent."<sup>17</sup>

I understand. Initially, it's hard to see the value of this when the urgent cries out for attention. Every time the urgent tried to box out the importance of time with my advisory board, a voice inside me said, *Oh, so you think sugar water is more important than stewarding your one shot at life?* That inner question helped make time for the important.

It's also how I decided to leverage the fear and uncertainty that come with finding what's next. I knew I couldn't make the best decision by myself.

Ultimately, especially when it came to what's next, I wanted a green light from each of them regarding our decision to leave and pursue this new season. I don't think Wendy and I would have moved forward without that, at least not in the timeline that we did.

## The Waiting Room

All that being said, the most frequent question I get when I talk about my personal advisory board is, “Where do you find these people?”

I rarely have a good answer, though I do have a principle I’ve heard over the years, which has proven true: *when the student is ready, the teacher will appear*. In other words, are you ready if four potential board members were to walk into your life?

Have you written a description of who and what you’re looking for? (If not, borrow mine.)

Look around at the circles of influence in your life. Tell them about this idea and then ask them, “Would you consider being a board member for the next twelve months? We’ll meet six times for an hour each time, and I’ll pay for breakfast, lunch, or dinner.”

Sure, it may take a while to get four people to agree, but don’t forget, you’re moving forward. You’re taking action. You’re surrounding yourself with wise advisors. You’re waiting actively, not passively or recklessly.

And when you get a green light from wise advisors, it’s one of the best ways for you to know what’s next. Remember, *“plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.”*

When the student  
is ready, the teacher  
will appear.

## What to Do Next

A few days before our final day at Gwinnett Church, Lauren Espy (a longtime friend and Gwinnett's program director) and the team threw a farewell party. They set up a photo booth with confetti, and my personal advisory board members were kind enough to be there—Scotland Wright and his wife, Peggy; David McDaniel; Rocky Butler; and Keith Eigel and his wife, Leigh. These folks loved and cared for us. They listened to our ups and downs, fears and frustrations, hopes and dreams. They commiserated but always challenged. They gave me a strength I couldn't have found all by myself. They reminded me that work isn't the most important part of life. They helped me stay on track. They helped me move closer to what would come next.



## The Waiting Room

They look pretty happy in this picture—maybe they were celebrating not having to deal with me anymore. Sadly for them I guess, I informed them that they're stuck with me.

What you may not see in this picture, though, is the work—the work it took in the waiting room to get to this point.

What you probably don't see in this picture are the times I said to them, "How much longer is this going to take?"

What you can't see in this picture are the times they let me just talk out loud—processing, getting it all out—which in and of itself is such a gift.

I don't show you this photo to pat myself on the back. I show this to you in hopes of giving you a picture of what can happen when you wait actively. When you're waiting, *don't wish the time away; work the time away*. Implement these four steps: (1) build your network, (2) create optimal options, (3) find your muse, and (4) develop a personal advisory board.

**When you're waiting,  
don't wish the time away;  
work the time away.**

Remember, you haven't been forgotten; you are being prepared. Yes, there will be days when you feel the opposite, which is why you need

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to surround yourself with people who will remind you of the truth. They will point you to a moment in the not-too-distant future. They'll give you confidence in yourself. Most of all, they'll steer you to a path and remind you of one of the best ways to find what's next: Just. Keep. Walking.

Keep moving forward. Keep digging ditches. Even while you wait. Especially as you wait, knowing all the while that the rain is coming.