

A black silhouette of a person stands on a textured, light blue-grey surface. The surface is marked with several diagonal lines that create a grid-like pattern. The overall tone is monochromatic and industrial.

**THE SOUL OF A TRAINER**  
**YOU WERE BORN TO CHANGE THE WORLD**

**THOMAS PLUMMER**

**FOREWORD BY DAN JOHN**

## FOREWORD

It's easy to enjoy Thom Plummer. I enjoy his workshops; I enjoy his company, and I enjoy his writing.

I always feel like Thom is talking to me. Even if I am sitting in a room with 500 other people, Thom seems to be talking right to me. When he talks about the crazies, the lazies, and the daisies who inhabit the gyms and fitness clubs, I swear he is talking about Crazy Jerry and the other nut jobs at my old gym.

When he leans in and whispers to us in his prose poetry style about living a full and balanced life, I can feel his arm around my shoulders.

I found great joy in this little story:

*"I remember lost nights drinking wine around a table with friends until asked to leave (we have been kicked out of better places than this, we insist yet again), grabbing more wine and then talking, laughing, and giggling until we were out of wine or too tired to go on."*

As I read this, I wondered out loud: "Wasn't that with me?"

And, more to the point, we ran out of wine?

Thom has done wonders for those of us in the fitness industry. He reminds us, constantly, that those of us who coach and train don't have to be martyrs or monks when it comes to being fairly compensated.

Moreover, he firmly believes we should live in a balance. In this volume, you will find a wonderful give and take with some hero on social media:

The reader took offense with Thom's focus on making a living as a trainer. In what might be my favorite part of the book, Thom valiantly and brilliantly points out the reader's folly by explaining that compensation is both earned and expected...and that living with Mom might not be the way to go through life.

Thom, unlike our modern social media gurus, freely admits and accepts mistakes. I find this both refreshing and real. It also makes for honest, laugh-out-loud reading. Be careful reading this on an airplane as you will need to explain yourself to your neighbors and flight attendants.

He gives us an uncommon wisdom: Peace will come to you when you stop giving a damn about what others think of you. Thom isn't a 14-year-old girl crying over the lack of "likes" on her Facebook page. He doesn't need a thumbs up. Thom is here to tell you some things about life.

I'm thinking that my gravestone may have to be changed to this line from Thom:

*"I don't want to be perfect, but I am totally happy being wonderful."*

And, for the record, I will not quote Thom on this one, but I will give him full credit for the single best insight in the history of fitness:

*Number Nine on the Worst Ideas in Fitness:  
The guy who first invented moderation.*

*Moderation sucks.*

*Drink good wine and just do more pushups.*

But, this is why we love him. Right after he rails against moderation, he reminds us of this:

- *Sit quietly and read.*
- *Respect every human the same.*
- *Change the world around you for the better today.*

I spent much of my life teaching theology and religious studies and I'm not sure I can summarize our brief dance on Planet Earth any better...certainly not any clearer.

If all you read is his *Unwritten Rules of Fitness*, you will be a better spouse, parent, coach, trainer, and human person. Let Thom tell us this universal truth:

*"If you always do the right thing with your clients, do your best to get results, and concentrate on charging a fair price for what you know, you will win. No one goes broke doing the right thing."*

Thom Plummer. I feel better about humanity just saying his name.

Dan John

# PREFACE

My life has been spent on the road.

This over 40-year career has resulted in more than three million miles in the air, uncountable and often nasty hotels, airport bars only a raging alcoholic could remember, and an average of over 40 weeks a year on the road since the 1980s.

I wouldn't change a thing, not one second, not one miserable night sleeping on the floor in an airport during a snow storm drinking Jack Daniels with the road manager from Jefferson Starship, not one canceled flight, not one low-rent, end-of-the-day, one-star hotel, not one hangover, not one pint, and not one "stay up until 4:00 and then catch the 7:00 in the morning" flight home.

Why?

Because there have been over 300,000 people who have shown up to my workshops and they expected me to be there, to be alive, and help them get better in business and in their lives. These people have bought a few hundred thousand books, faithfully followed me on social media, and have trusted me over my entire career to always do the right thing for them in their businesses and, as I aged through the years, as a personal coach in their lives.

These loyal supporters had faith I could change their success, fix the major problems and issues in business and life, and simply be there as needed to make sure they didn't fail. This trust had to be met and has resulted in a long run. Every second was worth the adventure because almost all of them succeeded and made our industry a better place to work as we chase our passion.

This book is a collection of posts that became a way to laugh at what we do, to make a quick business point, or to teach a life lesson after a call with a particularly stressed-out client. The coaching business is one of the most important ways to make a living. You change lives; you do it every day, and now you can make some serious money doing it. Until just the last few years, coaching was mostly a labor of love because there sure as hell was no money in the profession in the early days.

I created the modern training business in the mid-90s. It was more accident than power of the mind, but it worked as a business concept. The days in the early era of the training business, where you could work your ass off and maybe do \$300,000 a year in your little gym—if you were really good—became a place today where some of the best, and sometimes not the best, can do over two million dollars in the same spaces.

The business model has evolved through the years, but fundamentally it still works. Today there are successful gyms in over 30 countries using the business platform I created and teach in our workshops. Coaches are living their dreams because their businesses make enough money to create a living for those who choose to dedicate their lives to changing the world.

Thank you to every single student who ever attended a workshop or purchased a book.

Your faith and trust kept me going for longer than I ever planned or believed I could.

I hope you enjoy this book as much as I did creating it.

Thomas Plummer

January 2018

# INTRODUCTION

You were born to change the world.

Few people in your life will have the right perspective to tell you this, because few will ever be in a situation to touch as many people as you will.

Most of your friends and your support group would laugh you out of the room if you had the nerve to openly admit this is what you believe about yourself, that you are passionate about a career few others understand and many mock. It is hard for them to grasp that you are living your dream and wearing funny clothes every day, while they toil away in an office or driving a truck, doing work that matters little to them or to the universe.

Your mother might say she believes you were born to change the world, but she is also the one who still cries in the closet because you never became a famous doctor and secretly wonders why you only own one nice outfit, yet you have 50 tee shirts. Someday, she hopes, you will grow up, get a real job, and be like your older brother, who hates his career and envies your willingness to live your dream.

The reality is no one but you has to believe you were born to change lives. If you believe being a fitness professional is your life's work, then you were born to change the world by making those around you healthier, happier, and more functional in life because of your help, guidance, and willingness to care.

In our business, we often get so busy, we mentally lose sight of what we are getting done in the world. Your day starts at dawn; you slap down food as best you can, standing at the kitchen counter while the rest of your house is asleep, and then you're off to work starting with your first client before most of the city is awake.

Most of you will still be standing in the same gym smiling and sweating at 9:00 o'clock that night. One-on-ones, small groups, teams of 20, athletes, wannabe athletes, old people, professionals, spoiled housewives, and even the occasional superstar are all part of a coach's day, but this endless stream often dulls the perspective that you have the strength and talent to make whomever is in your face for that session a better person.

Because a trainer cared, an older lady was able to pick up and hug her granddaughter.

Because a trainer cared, a guy got promoted when he gained confidence in his body.

Because a trainer cared, a couple had sex for the first time in a long time and felt good about taking off their clothes in the light.

Because a trainer cared, a woman rode a bike with her daughter for a half an hour, wearing a bigger smile than the kid.

When you are tired, hungry, and have had enough of your clients this week, remember that because a trainer cared, the world is a much better place, and because you care, you are helping change the world one client at a time. Make it a good week and take pride in giving a damn about what you do and whom you touch.

You exist to change lives. That is the soul of a trainer, and that is the mission of a professional coach.

You are not here to build wealth, although if you are a true master coach, that will happen. You are not here as a simple employee paying your dues while learning your craft, although this is where many of you will begin. If you're a true professional, you are not there wasting a few years of your life waiting to grow up and get a real job, although sadly, too many coaches with immense potential leave the industry too soon because they never figured out what it takes to survive such a tough business. You are there every day to change the lives of those around you; this is a heavy responsibility few others can understand.

We often think of other careers as the ones that matter, but few have the potential to affect so many lives as deeply as a master coach. Schoolteachers do noble work, but only touch a small handful of children a year. Police and firemen are dedicated professionals doing often dangerous work with little respect, yet they too only touch relatively few people. Perhaps medical professionals are the only ones who reach as many people as a coach can during a typical week. We may dress funny, and we can certainly take credit for inventing the meal eaten standing up and served in plastic bowls, yet the world is a better place because people like you choose to help others live better lives.

You cannot reach your potential as a master coach without understanding the foundational fact that what you do matters, and what you do makes a difference in the world around us. If you understand this, you are on the right path to build a long and profitable career as a true fitness professional.

It takes years to become a master coach, and while many new trainers often use the term, few have earned the title because reaching that elite status takes more work than most are willing to put into their careers. "Master coach" has many definitions, but perhaps one of the strongest is when you finally reach the point when you understand you don't know everything, and never will.

Becoming a master coach is about the journey, and never about arriving at a single destination. There are master coaches in the field, such as Dan John, Mike Boyle, Gray Cook, Greg Rose, Alwyn Cosgrove, or Janet Alexander, and the next-generation masters, such as Charlie Weingroff, Justin Grinnell, Rick Mayo, and Ali Gilbert, who just seem to get better with age. They never fail to amaze those around them with their never-ending search to be better, learn more, and keep growing.

Your goal is not to worry about the title, but to concentrate on becoming the best you can be over time. It's an adventure that will not end as long as you choose to grow and progress.

This long process toward becoming a master coach is about lifelong learning and studying the lessons from those who have gone before you.

This book is about those lessons, but you probably won't find these anywhere else in your search. There aren't any training tips here, no ideal workouts, or ways to coach a better swing.

The ideas and concepts in this book are about how to create a fulfilling career, sustainable over time, doing work that matters, and being able to make a decent living in the process.

Being a fitness professional is one of those rare careers where if you have the passion and want the dream badly enough, you can make it happen. You can be the coach who, at the end of his days, looks back and says, "I made a difference, and my clients and those around me are better today. I did my job as a true professional."

Working in fitness used to be something you did until you moved on and got a real job. The average fit pro usually lasted less than eight years and was gone. But that is changing. People now realize fitness can be a life's work, and they can spend the rest of a working career doing what they love. The day you declare to yourself and everyone in your life that this is it, this is my choice, and this is what I am going to do until you pry that last kettlebell out of my cold dead fingers will be the best day of your life.

The challenge is to keep moving forward and up so there will be enough money to pay for your family and your life. Increasing your business skill set, advancing your knowledge, and trying different aspects of the fitness world all combine to keep you funded and mentally growing, which is vital to stay alive in this field.

Many people waste their entire lives searching for a perfect place in life. Maybe you have already found yours, but you just haven't yet told the world you are exactly where the universe thinks you should be.

Knowing what you want, who you are, and where you are going makes for a very happy person in life. I hope that is you living a life in fitness.

Thomas Plummer

FITNESS PROFESSIONALS  
ONLY HAVE TWO SPEEDS

# FITNESS PROFESSIONALS ONLY HAVE TWO SPEEDS

Fitness professionals only have two speeds in their internal motors: full on, flat out and all in, or destroyed on the couch, drooling like an old bulldog, and often not smelling much better.

Fitness professionals, as well as many other driven people attempting to create a career and a life, are always worn out physically, and most importantly mentally, because they never learn how to rest both body and soul.

Working 60 hours or more a week, slamming down a few beers on Saturday night, and then lying in a heap on the couch all of Sunday, hoping it's raining so the kids will nap with you all day is not rest. That is just not working. Knowing the difference will improve your life.

There is no true rest for your weary soul and body without combining mindlessness and mindfulness into your disciplined routines of life.

“Mindless” means to disengage completely from your life for a few hours at a time. No phones, no work all week then do a race all weekend, no clients, no marketing books, no “Let me check my email,” no texts...just a few hours out of sight and out of mind.

“Mindfulness” means to rest with intensity focused on where you are and what you are doing. If you take the kids to the park, you are all about them for a few hours. You play, run, hide and seek, roll in the grass, and never once try to parent with a phone in your hand, not-so-secretly trying to check your messages.

“Mindfulness” means you are present in your life, committed to the moment at hand, without the need to let your mind attempt to be in many places at once, such as responding to an endless stream of texts constantly taking you away from where you are in the moment.

Think about being mindful this way:

You are holding your child, who is slumped in your lap enjoying the nearness of you.

These moments are gone in a few brief years, never to be recaptured.

During those moments, ones that may make up your last thoughts 50 years from now as you lie dying, is there any text in the world more important?

Is there really any call that should interrupt a walk on the beach with the one you love, the one you committed to for life, and with whom because you have so few moments of togetherness, your relationship is strained?

You and your significant person, you and the kids, you and friends, or just you, mindfully aware of the hike, the café, the view, or just sitting with a cup of tea, focused on nothing but simply enjoying a few focused minutes outside of yourself, letting mind and soul heal.

You are tired because you never learned that planning rest is as important as planning work. Resting your body and soul isn't something you do after you have completely torn apart each one; mindless and mindful rest is something you do to prevent you from destroying yourself at an early age.

We used to think there was something noble in life and business to work ourselves to death building a career. Then a generation of "successful" people woke up and realized they now had money, but little else of their lives was left. Chasing the dream over time ended up killing the dreams that are important.

Can you have it all?

Can you chase endless dreams at the expense of all other things in life?

Yes...and probably no.

Balance is an outdated concept, at least the way the term was defined by too many people who probably never created anything of value. "Balance" was defined as everything in life being equal at all times.

Your family, your job, your commitment to the community, and your faith all lived in balance with the idea that if you put too much energy into one, you would damage or lose the others. Everything equal every day.

There is nothing of value in the world that was not created by someone who pushed the edges, challenged how things were done, and went all in to change the world. It's hard to change the world around you unless you are focused to the point where you just can't breathe another day without finishing the dream.

Going all in—surging—can be coupled with backing off and creating a life that matters. Surging means all in. Backing off means to take the time to heal and rest. Surging means telling the family that for a few weeks, "I am going to go completely insane. I am going to 'surge' and I can only carry you, a friend or two, and hold my job if I want to get this done. I have to give up most everything else.

"After the surge, I will return to normal, or as best I can to appear that way, and we will take that vacation, resume the beach time, go to a few parties, and have a life again. But not for these weeks when I am going to give everything I have to write that book, or create that new company, or somehow figure out what it takes to move my life forward in a big leap."

Surging means nothing more than total concentration, followed by a period of normal existence in a crazy world. Surging means that for an extended time, you force yourself out of balance into a mindset where getting it done is the most important thing for a defined period of time.

When we are not in a full-on surge, we taper work with rest. We find mindless things to clear our minds, but we stay mindful of the moment we are in, knowing that moment may never come again.

Working hard in life is a good thing. Resting hard is a better thing.

Done together, you can own the world, but no one needs yet another tired, worn-out, cranky, recently divorced person who never learned that a little planned soul preservation might have saved a marriage, business, and family.

## WHY DID YOU BECOME A COACH?

Simple question, hard answer.

You most likely started down one of several paths. You might have been a former athlete and this is your life. You love fitness and always wanted to be part of it, or you are motivated by the need to help people and this is your vehicle.

The reality in this profession is that it doesn't matter how you got in—it only matters that you find a reason to keep doing what you are doing.

We get in for a variety of reasons, but we only stay for one. If you don't commit to changing the world around you each day, you will fail. There are better ways to make money. There are endless jobs with better hours. There are jobs that are more respected than what we do.

But there are very few jobs where the potential to change lives is greater.

If you stay, you stay to change lives.

If you are smart, you can make a lot of money doing this. But the essence of what you do every day is to get up, lead clients to a better life than they would have without you, and then go home, quietly happy knowing that what you do matters to a lot of people and not many do it better than you.

At the end of your days, it won't matter why you chose this profession.

It deeply matters why you stay. Remember why you do what you do.

The world is a much better place because you are a professional coach.

## WE FORGET THE POWER OF A SOFT WHISPER

You sit in a bar listening to a friend, offering words of advice late at night over a quiet glass. Twenty years later, he thanks you for setting him on course...and you never even knew he really listened.

You spend five minutes talking your kid through a failure he feels is going to destroy his young life and you become his role model. Twenty years from now, at a family event, he thanks you and quotes back your exact words.

You smile at the kid in the coffee shop, use his name, and say “Thank you,” and turn a stressed-out employee into a newly energized person ready for another 100 customers.

The old homeless guy on the corner just sits and stares. He no longer has the strength to even ask for money. You slip him a five-dollar bill and a sandwich and whisper, “Here, sir, I hope this helps.” You walk away and don’t notice he has tears in his eyes, because for just a little while you have given him hope.

Your boss goes ballistic. Projects are behind; people didn’t show for work, and everything seems out of control. You whisper privately, “I can get this done, boss, don’t worry about it.” A year later, you get a promotion you didn’t know was available because that whisper set you aside from everyone else on the team.

Your spouse is melting down from “too much kid” and you quietly whisper, “Go sit outside and have a glass of wine. I will take them for ice cream.” Later that night, your person falls asleep in your arms and you have no idea what the heck just happened, but you cuddle and smile.

There is power in every word you speak.

Think carefully about what you say and take ownership of everything you speak. Words, and the tone in which they are delivered, are remembered forever.

Your words can change a life, can heal a wound, can turn a bad day into a smile, and can define how you are viewed by others.

You are your words. Your personal strength is always determined by your willingness to speak the truth, and your willingness to lend that strength to others.

There is power in a soft whisper.

## THE MORE CONNECTED YOU BECOME, THE MORE ISOLATED YOU CAN END UP

We seek to become more connected, but the reality is, you can have thousands of “friends” and not really know anyone.

In our jobs, we have hundreds of contacts and clients, but if we needed to borrow \$100, we are down to that small circle of friends who could fill a booth at a favorite bar.

We know everyone, but are close to so few.

We get insecure when we post on social media and no one responds, so we desperately test our friends by asking them to give us a connecting word or post an emoji in the hope they are still there.

We don't understand Facebook is content-driven and if our content sucks, very few of our friends or followers will see our posts. Insecurity and the constant need to connect drives the almost drug-addicted sensation of an “I need instant likes or I am worthless” response.

Ten years ago, taking your own picture would have been considered an act of pure ego. We are now overwhelmed by an endless stream of selfies, ranging from a good time with friends at an event to “check out my ass, don't you think it's beautiful?”

If we can't get validation within, we seek it from without, through posting pictures to an open public and hoping someone thinks you look hot posing naked in front of a mirror.

We are now trained to respond so instantly to the beep of a device that we ignore our kids, our friends, and our family.

We can't turn it off for an hour to eat dinner.

We can't go to bed without having our little friend within reach.

We can't have a face-to-face conversation with anyone, because when the damn phone beeps, whoever is on the other end becomes more important than the live human in front of us.

We have also lost our ability to make good decisions.

Phone calls to discuss problems are now reduced to texts.

What took thought to answer now takes a quick thumb and a few characters.

It beeped, and the beeping device always demands an answer.

We sacrificed almost everything good in life to become the most connected generation, and we have lost our friends, our ability to think, our ability to communicate, and our ability to validate ourselves from within.

We are more connected than ever and have nothing much but an increased sense of loneliness to show for it.

## FIVE MISTAKES EVERY PROFESSIONAL MAKES AT LEAST ONCE IN A CAREER

*Number One*—You think lowering your price will attract more clients.

Lowering your price just lowers your credibility.

Every single money person in the world knows it is impossible to be the cheapest and be the best at the same time.

*Number Two*—Your training methodology overcomes your common sense.

Hurting people by pushing them through a workout designed for an athlete because you aren't smart enough to understand not everyone wants to compete at a national level is bad business and bad coaching.

*Number Three*—You go through that pure period in your life when even your own mother hates for you to come to dinner. Lead by example, quietly believing in your lifestyle, but leave the preaching to the television evangelists.

*Number Four*—You become one-dimensional, where you know or care about nothing beside fitness and training. It is okay to have a life; your goal should always be to become a fully functional, well-rounded human being.

*Number Five*—In your heart, you want to be involved in fitness for life, but you give up your dream to take a job in the “real world” because someone else believes it is time for you to grow up. Being a coach and helping people become better because they work with you is a noble thing. You can do forever if you believe in your passion.

We all make these mistakes.

Knowing you can overcome them is the power you need to succeed.

## TODAY, I ONLY SEE BEAUTIFUL

Today, I only see beautiful.

I refuse to see petty and mean.

I will not get caught up in your political madness.

I will not judge and will not be mean.

Your “my way or you are wrong” obsession won’t bother me.

Today, I will be at peace in the knowledge that being me is enough,  
and your effort to dominate my life won’t affect a single moment of my existence.

Today, I experienced personal freedom for the first time in my life.

Today, I only see beautiful.

And there isn’t a damn thing you can do about it.

# YOU ARE NEVER WHERE YOU ARE SUPPOSED TO BE

You are sitting at your desk, thinking about your next workout.

You are at the gym, thinking about what you left on your desk.

You are with your kids, checking your phone for texts.

You are out with friends, checking the pictures your kids sent.

You go to dinner with your spouse and talk about how little time you have together, wasting the entire evening of being together.

You go to a race over the weekend, but you are so busy taking and posting pictures of the race, you forget to enjoy the experience.

You rent a movie, but don't see what you are watching, because you are face down on your phone or arguing with your spouse about not spending time together.

You never have time to call old friends because you are too busy at work, thinking about your workout and texting acquaintances.

You are everywhere you should be...but never anywhere you could be.

You waste your life outside the moment because you never learned how to focus your energy on where you are and what you are doing.

Just once this week, try being where you are, focused on what you are doing... with the distraction of your phone off for a few hours.

You have a wonderful life, with good friends and the perfect family.

Too bad you are never there to enjoy any of it.

**This was an introductory excerpt from**  
Section One of Thomas Plummer's  
*The Soul of a Trainer*

The book is 394 pages, 7x9 format, paperback.

It is also available as an ebook,  
as well as an audiobook read by Thom Plummer.

For more information on this book, please visit  
[https://www.otpbooks.com/product/thomas\\_plummer\\_trainer\\_book/](https://www.otpbooks.com/product/thomas_plummer_trainer_book/)