

EXTRAORDINARY RESULTS FOR LIFE



*Discover Your Path
to Be UN-ordinary*

JOE CONTRERA



AWP

INTRODUCTION

Change begins at the end of your comfort zone.

Roy T. Bennett

When I began writing this book, I shared some of the concepts and ideas with a number of customers, colleagues, and close friends. I even shared some of the content in my weekly leadership blogs. At the time, quite a few folks asked why I was writing a non-business book—a non-leadership-business book, to be specific—because most had come to expect that genre of book from me based on my leadership development programs and coaching.

When I asked why they classified the material as non-business, they said, “You’re writing about ego, humility, the human race, love, self-value, relationships, etc. How can that possibly be considered a business book?”

Here’s what I told them:

For more than forty years, I have worked with, worked for, coached, been coached by, led, been led by, mentored, been mentored by, humiliated, been humiliated by, idolized, been idolized by, betrayed, been betrayed by (and every other possible example you can think of) businesspeople and business leaders from every walk of life.

I have come to realize there is an immutable law when it comes to leaders:

You cannot be a rotten person and be a great leader.

I know folks who would adamantly disagree with that statement. That's fine. Everyone has their opinion about what makes a great leader. In my previous book, *Extraordinary Results: Mastering the Art of Leading, Coaching & Influencing Others*, I defined a leader as:

A person who influences others to do or to be their best.

Based on that definition, I find it extremely hard to accept that people can bring out the best in others when they are being the worst versions of themselves. It is an integrity issue, and integrity is a core component of being an extraordinary leader.

On the other hand, I have seen some really good people who were very poor leaders for a number of reasons:

1. They never wanted to be a leader in the first place.
2. They took the position because it was the next logical career step.
3. They never understood that being a leader was more about their people and less about them.
4. They were more enamored with the title and the trappings of being a leader rather than the reality of what it means to actually lead others.
5. Most commonly, more than half took a leadership position for the money.

There is a direct correlation between an individual's appetite for self-reflection and humility and their ability to lead. Unconscious, egocentric, entitled people simply show up in the workplace as unconscious, self-centered, entitled leaders or employees. We have all encountered a few of them along the way. I believe in today's society, these types of people are more the norm than the exception. Sadly, it seems they have become what is ordinary, common, and the standard of what you can expect from others.

It will be the *un*-ordinary who rise above because they are able to see and willing to take advantage of more opportunities in life.

Many of us were taught to respect folks in leadership positions. We are supposed to see them as above us and are expected to follow their lead. This is especially true in the political arena and institutions like universities and churches where hierarchies exist, but we all know leaders who have risen to extremely high levels and act like ignorant, narcissistic buffoons! They disrespect others because they are of the belief that they are the center of the universe.

Whether you are building a career path in leadership or not, whatever your personal and professional goals are, you cannot be a rotten person and be great, much less extraordinary, in achieving those goals.

THE PATH TO AN *UN*-ORDINARY JOURNEY BEGINS...

Self-awareness is the first step in becoming *un*-ordinary. When you can embrace a sense of humility, work to dissolve or minimize your ego, and push yourself outside of your comfort zones, you will then be able to visualize and pursue opportunities to not just be *un*-ordinary, but to live an extraordinary life! Whether you choose to be an extraordinary leader or just want to achieve extraordinary results in life, the pathway is the same—inward!

And that is what this book is all about!

If you choose to live an extraordinary life, you will discover an ever-changing, continual process of striving to step beyond your comfort zone in a multitude of areas as you move through life's various stages.

We live in an instantaneous “can’t wait, must have it now” culture that tells you this product, app, relationship, television show, vaccine, or government program is going to cure all of your woes and make you happy. We have been conditioned to search for and expect that a single book, event, guru, person, relationship, or YouTube Video will be the magic po-

tion that will instantaneously transform your average, everyday ordinary life into an extraordinary one.

The idea that external factors are your path to nirvana is being pressed into your neuropaths through the constant bombardment of ads. This is why they speak of ads in the number of impressions. The emergence of clickbait and personalized ads in social media has infiltrated every nook, space, and cranny of your tired, over-stimulated brain. You cannot even put gas in your car without being hounded that all you need to be satisfied is a greasy rotisserie hot-dog that has been rolling around in circles on a grill for twelve hours, a Coke, and a smile.

Add in binge-watching Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon Prime along with the catastrophic reporting of even a half-inch of snow, and you will understand the uphill battle to un-ordinary yourself from a culture that breeds conformity. Your ability to disconnect, unhook, and disengage from being ordinary is a never-ending, ongoing process that begins the second you are conceived and ends the second you take your last breath.

A PROCESS, NOT A DESTINATION

The truth is that leading and living an extraordinary life doesn't happen overnight. Consider, for example, lottery winners who are now poor and unhappy. Or read the memoirs of broken Hollywood actors whose lives behind the facades and the fame were filled with various forms of addiction, escapism, and misery.

Living an extraordinary life doesn't happen instantaneously, and neither is it a place where you arrive.

My life has been a process of constantly unfolding over time. When I was ready, the teacher appeared, the event that transformed me (albeit painful) occurred, and I moved a bit closer to living the life I wanted.

I find, as with most things, that the simpler the idea, the more truth it holds.

If you are an unhappy, dissatisfied person at home and in life, you will be an unhappy, dissatisfied person in the workplace. Unhappy people wreak havoc in the workplace because they are unwilling to accept 100 percent of the responsibility for the results they are creating in their lives.

Why? Because they don't or won't possess the level of self-awareness required to take ownership of their issues. Instead, they deflect and project their problems, inadequacies, and overall unhappiness onto everyone around them. All this happens because deep down within themselves, they are unhappy. They just don't or won't own it.

The fact that most people spend a minimum of 25 percent of their time at work, interacting with more people than they do at home, creates an incredible opportunity to transform the workplace into their very own giant 3D IMAX screen. Here, they can project their garbage on a whole lot more people, issues, and circumstances. In fact, right now, you are probably thinking of the many folks at work who spin endlessly in a circle of toxic gossip, complaining, and misery. Of course, if the work screen isn't big enough to hold their discontentment, they can project their junk onto the government, churches, other countries, races, and religions. One's discontentment and/or fear is at the core of every type of "ism"—racism, sexism, fascism, etc.

We all experience unhappy people every single day. Whether it is at home with our immediate and extended families, our friends, at church, on social media, in the news, and everywhere we go, they are there. In the workplace, this discontentment shows up in poor morale, low engagement, diminished productivity, silos, cliques, social and racial bias, turnover, absenteeism, and favoritism. The cost to the bottom-line is staggering. In life, these unhappy people show up in broken relationships, addictions, crime, the cancel culture, videotaping themselves making a disturbance on an airplane and then posting it on social media, etc.

"So, Joe, what kind of book is this?"

It is a business book, a leadership book, a partial autobiography, a drama, a love story, and a mystery. It is part fiction, part non-fiction, and based

on and inspired by real-life events, although names may have been changed to protect the guilty and the innocent.

It was written for you if you are willing to look inward and lean in so far that you can never go back.

Why? Because this is how you gain focus and clarity on what you want, where you want to go, and what is preventing you from getting there.

This book is all about *you* discovering *your* path out of the ordinary and into the extraordinary for the rest of your life! The end goal is to live a life you can say without any doubt is extraordinary, so you can one day leave this world knowing you achieved more than you ever could have imagined possible!

It is an ongoing process that requires a commitment *for life*...your life!

Let's begin...

PART I





CHAPTER 1

THE CHALLENGE TO BE UN-ORDINARY

*Can you remember who you were, before the
world told you who you should be?*

Charles Bukowski

My favorite movie of all time is the 1990 film, *Awakenings*, starring Robin Williams and Robert DeNiro. It is an extraordinary, true story based on the memoirs of Oliver Sacks, a British-born neurologist who discovers a group of post encephalitis patients in a New York hospital. For the most part, they have fallen asleep, transformed from human beings into lifeless statues as an after effect of having the disease. All of them are stone-like, seemingly without thought or emotions. At one point in the movie, Sacks—played by Robin Williams—asks the doctor who found them originally about a particular male patient, “What goes on inside his mind? Is he thinking?”

“Of course not,” the neurologist replies.

“Why not?” says Williams.

“Because the implications would be unthinkable!”

The movie takes a turn when Sacks experiments on Leonard Lowe (De Niro) with a drug used to treat Parkinsonian patients called L-DOPA.

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The results are nothing short of extraordinary as Leonard awakens and starts to slowly return to a somewhat normal life...for now. Of course, they experiment with other patients, and overnight, the entire group awakens. It is the summer of 1969, which came to be known as “the Awakening.”

Eventually, the efficacy of the drug begins to diminish, and Leonard slowly returns to his previous stone-like state. Only now, Sacks knows there is a person, awake, deep down inside of this stone-like figure. The impact of Leonard’s awakening on Sacks is an awakening in and of itself.

TIME TO WAKE UP

There are so many different messages and lessons to be learned from this film. For me, one of the greatest takeaways is how each non-afflicted person in the film had been lulled asleep. Life had become ordinary, repetitive, and common. They were sleepwalking through work and through life.

It wasn’t until those who had been afflicted with the disease woke up, that those around them were awakened. Sometimes we need those who have the least to remind us of what we need the most.

The unaffected were awakened to the fact that we take so much for granted, such as our relationships, health, partners, children, and all that we have, such as our ability to walk, think, talk, love, and express ourselves.

Why is it almost always a tragedy in our lives or in the lives of others that must happen for most of us to wake up?

WHAT WE WERE TAUGHT INSTEAD

Most of us were not conditioned to believe that we can live or achieve an extraordinary life. In fact, I think many of us were taught the opposite—to play it safe and seek what was comfortable or ordinary while conforming to the cultural mores.

We were told that pain was bad, and we must avoid it at all costs, even if it meant denying the reality of a situation. We learned to run and hide from pain and suffering, seeking solace or relief in some temporary form of distraction.

We forget or do not accept that our greatest lessons in life would be the remnants left over once we moved through the pain to the other side.

When I was twenty-two years old, my then eighty-four-year-old Sicilian grandmother sat me down to teach me what she believed was an extraordinary life. Not the birds and the bees, mind you, but what steps I needed to take to be extremely happy.

She said, “A-Joey, you go-a to-a da school, get an-a education. Then-a you-a graduate, get-a good-a job, find-a nice-a girl, get-a married, and-a make-a da babies!”

While Grandma’s dream might be perfect for somebody, that wasn’t me. It wasn’t my path nor my dream. We all know folks who followed someone else’s path instead of walking their own and are now unfulfilled or miserable.

We all know folks who played it safe and ended up as Thoreau stated, “leading lives of quiet desperation.” They get comfortable, settle in, and sleepwalk their way through life.

You can live an extraordinary life. You just have to get perfectly clear on what that looks like for you, not for anyone else. To do that, let’s define the word so we can weave it more intricately into our lives.

DEFINING EXTRAORDINARY

To understand the meaning of a word, it is important to first understand the root of its origination. “Extra” literally means “outside.” “Ordinary” means “order” and “what is common, comfortable, or known.”

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When we describe something as “ordinary,” we perceive its value to be no longer new or exciting. The newness wears off and it becomes common.

Think of the first time you drove that new car—the smell and the way it handled. You noticed all the little idiosyncrasies, and it was exciting. Then remember what happened when you received the first ding or chip in the windshield. At first, you were angry, and then you cared a little less after each and every ding thereafter. Slowly, it just became another car that you drove for a while. It became ordinary until the next one.

When we label something as extraordinary, it is beyond what we know, believe, do, understand, possess, experience, or feel. Unfortunately, we see the extraordinariness of others more than we see it in ourselves. We idolize folks who are extremely athletic, talented, beautiful, wealthy, handsome, smart, and/or attractive. We label them as being extraordinary or living an extraordinary life.

When we turn the mirror inward and see ourselves, we rarely—if ever—label ourselves as extraordinary. If we do and speak it outwardly, we are seen as arrogant or delusional. We have learned that others can deem us worthy of being extraordinary, but we cannot deem ourselves worthy of this label.

The truth is, when it comes to ourselves, we all have an opportunity to live an extraordinary life if we are willing to go outside of what is comfortable, common, and known to us. This means living an extraordinary life is extremely personal.

IT'S YOUR BUSINESS AND IT'S PERSONAL

Your thoughts and beliefs are very personal to you. Even though you may share your beliefs with others, no one can experience it exactly the way you do. No one can be inside your head, which means that no one will ever fully experience, understand, or comprehend your world. No one gets you better than you.

THE CHALLENGE TO BE UN-ORDINARY

Sure, you can compare yourself to others, but that takes away the mystery and uniqueness that makes each and every one of us *extraordinary*!

You make “extraordinary” your own by being self-aware enough to know when you are moving outside of *your* common, *your* ordinary, *your* comfortable. This mindset requires that you constantly change.

Ironically, most people fear change, so they do the exact opposite. They seek out what gives them a sense of safety, albeit a false sense. They seek a sense of belonging instead of standing alone. We refer to this as *herd mentality*.

When your need to belong supersedes your need to be extraordinary, you limit your ability to lead an extraordinary life. You stall, stop, coast, and blend in. You lose your individuality, and worse, you lose what is so unique about you. You lose your brilliance, your genius, and your extraordinary.

No one I know was ever praised or recognized for being extraordinarily common. The history books are not filled with common people. It is the extraordinary people whom we want to write about and remember.

These are the folks who risked, going outside what they knew or what others believed to be true and known. They pushed their envelope and embraced their need to go beyond, coupling it with their willingness to embrace change to move forward toward their purpose—their calling in life.

It is, was, and continues to be the road not taken:

*Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

Robert Frost

STILL WANT TO BE EXTRAORDINARY?

At this point, you have three possible options. You might think about committing to one of these pathways:

Path A: Stay put and do nothing, even though it might be unfulfilling or somewhat uncomfortable. It's not *so* uncomfortable that you want to change, but just uncomfortable enough to keep you there (wherever it is that you've stalled). It sometimes feels like a constant dull ache that is telling you that something isn't quite right, something is missing, or you're missing the mark. You have a solid justification (rational or not) as to why you need to stay where you are. You're fine!

This isn't why you picked up this book, is it? You definitely have a choice to put down the book and go back to normal, or you can keep reading.

Path B: You take a baby step forward and put your toe in the water. Not even the big toe, just the little pinky toe. You're not sure where this is going to take you, but you're willing to look. You've mapped out your emergency exits just in case you want to bail or it begins to get a little too uncomfortable. Yes, they are probably similar to the other exits you've had in place in other similar situations, but you tell yourself, "Well, at least I'm willing to try!"

I don't think this is why you picked up this book either. You're not all the way in, but you're kind of, mostly, sort of in. Better than Path A, so keep reading!

Path C: You throw caution to the wind. You jump in headfirst. You lean in so far that you can't go back! You embrace the idea that you are destined for this path. You realize you will bump into some obstacles—your beliefs, what you know, what you do, what you have been taught, and what you have learned through life's lessons—but you commit to being open to altering all of those things. You are all in! By simply choosing this path, the path less taken, you have taken your first step toward achieving your unique and very personal extraordinary life!

It is time to...

DECIDE!