

**FOREWORD BY STEVE FORBES**

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From the author of the 4 million copy bestseller  
*The Ultimate Gift* comes . . .

# ULTIMATE PRODUCTIVITY

*New York Times*  
Best Selling  
Author

A CUSTOMIZED GUIDE  
TO DISCOVERING  
YOUR PERSONAL PATH  
TO SUCCESS

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unique talent.

**JIM STOVALL**

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# ULTIMATE PRODUCTIVITY

A CUSTOMIZED GUIDE TO  
DISCOVERING YOUR  
PERSONAL PATH TO  
SUCCESS

BY JIM STOVALL  
FOREWORD BY STEVE FORBES



THOMAS NELSON  
*Since 1798*

NASHVILLE DALLAS MEXICO CITY RIO DE JANEIRO BEIJING

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## DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to Dorothy Thompson whose hard work turns my words into books and to Rebeka Graham whose collaboration has made *Ultimate Productivity* more than just a book.

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# FOREWORD

## BY STEVE FORBES

I became aware of Jim Stovall in the late '90s, when we at Forbes were compiling a book that was subsequently released in 2000, entitled *Forbes Great Success Stories: Twelve Tales of Victory Wrested from Defeat*. That book contained Jim Stovall's story along with those of Donald Trump, Tom Monaghan, and others whose real-life adventures in capitalism point out what makes our system the best in the world.

I was then proud to endorse Jim's book *The Ultimate Gift*, which, at this writing, has sold 4 million copies around the world and has been made into a major motion picture from Twentieth Century Fox starring James Garner, Brian Dennehy, and Abigail Breslin.

I have been quoted as calling Jim Stovall one of the greatest men of our era—not solely for the things he has done, but for the fact that Jim Stovall has dissected his own success and put it on display for others to follow through his speeches, newspaper columns, and books such as the one you hold now.

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In *Ultimate Productivity*, Jim Stovall strikes at the heart of success and failure for all of us individually and as a society. Natural and human resources abound, but how we harness them to create our own personal success is determined by our ingenuity and productivity. In this book, you will learn how to maximize your own productivity by discovering and releasing your core strengths in the critical areas of motivation, communication, and implementation.

I believe if we will let Jim Stovall lead us through our own Ultimate Productivity Profile, we will all become better people and grow closer to our potential. In the final analysis, we cannot be judged in comparison to anyone or anything but only in the reflection of our individualized mirror that reveals our potential.

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## CHAPTER ONE

# THE BEGINNING: START WHERE YOU ARE

I am grateful to you and everyone who takes the time and makes the effort to buy and read one of my books. By virtue of the fact that you selected this book, I assume that there are aspects of your life that you would like to change, develop, or improve. If this is the case, read on. If this is not the case, and you are truly satisfied with every area of your personal and professional life, stop reading this book immediately and go get a refund.

This may be the third book you have read this month. On the other hand, it might be the first book you've read since high school. I have had an interesting relationship with books throughout my life. For the first half of my life, I don't know that I ever read an entire book cover to cover. I got through high school, and even college, reading as little as necessary to matriculate through the process.

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This seems ironic to me today, because when I had my eyesight and could read the words on a page as you are doing now, I never did it. Then, at age 29, I began my life as a totally blind person and, from that day to this thanks to books on tape from the Library for the Blind and a high speed tape recorder, I have actually read a book every day.

Having spent the last twenty years completing a full-length book each day, I have formed a unique relationship with books. They have become a major part of my life. I have read thousands of books for both entertainment and information. But I have also read a handful of books for transformation. These books have impacted me so deeply that they have changed who I am and how I live my life. My fervent hope is that this book will bring that kind of transformational experience to you.

Within these pages, you will have the opportunity to define your own success, create a life mission to achieve success, forge productivity on your own terms, and then begin to succeed by effectively utilizing motivation, communication, and implementation.

As an author, columnist, and speaker in the field of personal development, I have been exposed to many success systems, theories, and philosophies. They all have a certain

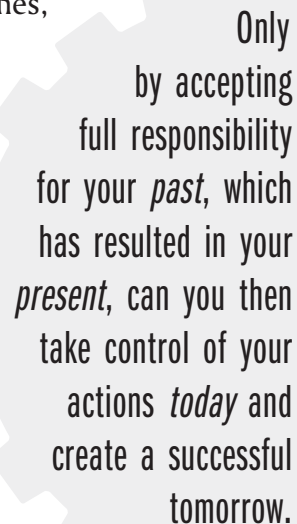
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degree of validity. But I feel, in many ways, the current state-of-the-art in the field of success and achievement is lacking a critical component.

There are many books or systems that will teach you to set a goal, create milestones, pursue your passion, and make changes in your world. These are important steps, but unless you have the practical tools to achieve and succeed at your fingertips, you don't have a chance.

Let's assume that I wanted to be a champion golfer. Even if this *goal* was firmly established in my mind, and I pursued it with passion and exhibited the highest degree of determination, I would be doomed to failure without practical, realistic instruction. And even if I did seek advice from the best golfer in the world—even Tiger Woods himself—I still wouldn't have a chance unless his instructions were mechanically sound for and specific to *me*.

If Tiger Woods simply told me to hit the ball farther than anyone else, straight down the fairway, and never forget to



Only  
by accepting  
full responsibility  
for your *past*, which  
has resulted in your  
*present*, can you then  
take control of your  
actions *today* and  
create a successful  
tomorrow.

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make every putt inside of twenty feet—but then he left me to my own devices, my game would never improve, and my goal of being a champion golfer would go to my grave with me, as most people’s goals and passions do with them. But if my instruction included mastering motivation, communication, and implementation, as you are going to discover it through Ultimate Productivity, I would have the opportunity to succeed as a golfer.

Before you learn to master and apply these principles, it is vital for you to decide what changes you want to bring into your life. In order to make this kind of decision, you first need to establish where you are today and take full responsibility for your current state—in every area of your life. Only by accepting full responsibility for your past, which has resulted in your current condition, can you then take control of your actions today and create a successful tomorrow.


We live in a society full of people who love to blame their mediocrity on everyone and everything other than themselves. As a corporate and arena speaker, I have had the privilege of talking with literally millions of people. After some of these events, I often visit with members of my audience. Oftentimes, these people share with me that their lives are not where they want them to be. They are not pursuing their

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passions, nor reaching their goals. But they invariably hasten to add, “If you knew my family, you would know why I’m not succeeding.” Or, “I’m where I am today because my boss is an idiot, and the weather’s too hot, and the taxes are too high . . . and besides that, Jim, I’m a middle child.”

When it comes to failure, one excuse is about as good as another. In fact, the next time your life is not turning out the way you want it to, don’t blame anyone else, just use my world-famous Jim Stovall, one-size-fits-all, 100% money-back-guaranteed excuse for all situations. Here is how it works. Instead of blaming anyone or anything around you for your condition, simply locate the nearest mirror, look directly into it, and say these magic words: “I guess I really didn’t want it that bad.” This will work for you every time because unless or until you accept responsibility for the choices you have made in the past that have brought you to this place, you can never take control of your future.

Now, I can hear you thinking that I don’t understand your situation, your background, and the barriers you face. That’s true, and I certainly realize that bad things can happen to good people. But



The most destructive lies we ever tell are those we tell ourselves.

for every person you can show me who has been defeated by a given circumstance, I can show you others who have faced that same circumstance and have used it as a springboard to do greater and more significant things in their lives.

But before you determine where you want to go in the world, there is one critical navigational element. You must first establish exactly where you are. Maps, directions, and even global positioning devices can only help you reach your destination if your current position is established.

For example, if you want to be wealthy, then before you decide what “wealthy” means to you, you’d better establish your present financial position. If you want to lose weight, you’ve got to get on the scales today. To create the lifestyle of your dreams, in every area of your personal and professional existence, you’ve got to be totally honest with yourself and elicit the honest opinions of those around you.

This honest assessment is a difficult process, because we have a tendency to judge everyone else’s performance while judging our own intentions. It’s easy for us to smugly assert, without reservation, that the other guy was inexcusably late for his appointment. But when we find ourselves running behind schedule, it was simply that we missed every traffic light; we had to stop for gas; and who knew that there would be a

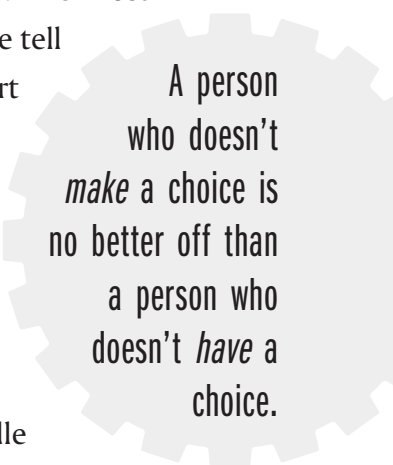
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traffic jam, a detour, and road construction en route to our destination?

If you're going to live the life of your dreams through Ultimate Productivity by mastering motivation, communication, and implementation, you're going to have to be totally honest with yourself about where you are. The most destructive lies we ever tell are those we tell ourselves, because after a while we start to believe these falsehoods and begin sharing them with the world as if they were true.

A convincing character played by one of my favorite actors, Jack Nicholson, in one of his best movies, uttered these famous words: "You can't handle the truth." While it's not easy and never fun, I want you to know that you can handle the truth, and it will be your first step toward making your life everything you want it to be.

As you accept responsibility for where you are and the choices you have made, you will begin to discover that while you have made some bad choices, in many cases you are mired in mediocrity because you have made no choice at all.



A person who doesn't *make* a choice is no better off than a person who doesn't *have* a choice.

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I believe that in this world there are a few people who make good choices, and they enjoy every reward they seek. There are a few people who make bad choices, and they live in places like Leavenworth and San Quentin. But then there are the vast majority of people who make neither good nor bad choices, but, instead, they make no choice at all. These are the people who neither make things happen nor watch things happen. They simply don't realize that anything happened.

I am reminded of a story about Irish immigrants coming to the United States during the earliest part of the twentieth century. One particular family saved for many years to get passage for the mother, father, and three children. Yet even with all of their diligent effort, they were only able to save enough to purchase a ticket in what was known as "steerage": a small, cramped area below deck, where they had to both sleep and pass the many days of the transatlantic voyage.

The family had brought some bread, cheese, and water to sustain them through the journey, but they rapidly consumed all of their rations with many days left in the voyage. From their squalid quarters below deck, they could see through the cracks between the planking onto the main deck above them. They could observe first-class passengers dressed in all

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THE BEGINNING: START WHERE YOU ARE

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of their finery, devouring a sumptuous banquet just a few feet away from where they were literally starving.

Finally, in desperation, the father crawled down the passageway, stepped up onto the main deck, and asked one of the stewards if he could have a few scraps or leftovers, lest his family starve to death below deck. The shocked steward replied, “Sir, this banquet is provided three times daily for all of our passengers. You and your family have been starving when you could have been feasting on the very best all along.”

Before you launch into your quest to make your life everything you want it to be through Ultimate Productivity, be sure you have set your sights high enough. A person who doesn't make a choice is no better off than a person who doesn't have a choice at all; but a person who accepts less than their true destiny is relegated to a life of mediocrity. When you have seen yourself in your mind's eye on top of the world, anything less will leave you wanting.

We have all had dreams and secret passions inside of us for many years. When we were teenagers or young adults, the world seemed pregnant with possibility. But somewhere between there and here, this thing we call reality set in, and we got so busy making a living that we forgot to create a life.

Your destiny awaits.

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NOTES: