

Chapter 1

From Negative to Positive

*Being positive doesn't just make you better;
it makes everyone around you better.*

I'm not naturally a positive person. People think I am because of my books and talks, but the truth is that I have to work hard to be positive. It doesn't come naturally to me. In fact, I find it ironic that I would write a book like this—and that my life's work centers on the importance of positivity. It's true that we teach what we need to learn. I know that my quest to become a more positive person and better leader has made me a better teacher.

I grew up in Long Island, New York, in a Jewish-Italian family; with a lot of food and a lot of guilt; a lot of wine and a lot of whining. My parents were very loving but they were not the most positive people in the world. My dad was a New York City police officer who worked in undercover narcotics. He fought crime every day and wasn't a big fan of positivity. I remember waking up in the morning and saying, "Good morning, Dad." He would say in his thick New York accent, "What's so good about it?" My dad was Al Bundy before Al Bundy was Al Bundy.

By the age of 31, I was a fearful, negative, stressed-out, and miserable husband and father to two young children. My wife had had enough. She gave me an ultimatum: Change or our marriage was over. I knew she was right that I needed to change. I knew that I was allowing the stress of life and the fear

of not being able to provide for my family to get the best of me. I told my wife I would change and began researching ways I could be more positive. At the time, positive psychology was an emerging field, and I read everything I could about it. I began to practice positivity and write about the things I was doing. I met Ken Blanchard, who became my role model. I began taking “thank you” walks to practice gratitude, enjoy the outdoors, and feel grateful instead of stressed. This was a life-changing practice that not only energized me physically, emotionally, and spiritually, but also provided time for many profound insights and ideas to come to me.

One of these ideas was *The Energy Bus*. In case you haven’t read it, it’s about a guy named George who is miserable and negative. His team at work is in disarray and he has problems at home. George was easy for me to write about because he was based on me and my struggle with negativity and adversity. George wakes up one Monday morning to discover his car has a flat tire and he has to take the bus to work. On the bus, he meets Joy the bus driver, who, along with a cast of characters, teaches George the 10 rules for the *ride of his life*. Their advice not only helps him become a more positive person, but also a better father, husband, and leader at work. On one level, George demonstrates that positivity is a difference maker in business, education, life, and sports. On another level, George represents the fact that every one of us will have to overcome negativity, adversity, and challenges to ultimately define ourselves and our team’s success.

Since *The Energy Bus* was published in 2007, I’ve had the opportunity to work with many Fortune 500 companies, businesses, professional and college sports teams, hospitals, schools,

and nonprofits that have utilized the book. I've met many amazing positive leaders and have witnessed firsthand the power of positive leadership. I've seen how they have led, inspired, and transformed their teams and organizations. I've observed the impact they have had and the results they have achieved. I've also researched many positive leaders throughout history and learned about their paths to success. There is indeed a power associated with positive leadership, and my goal with this book is twofold. First, I aim to explain how and why positive leaders make a difference. Second, I intend to provide a simple framework filled with practical ideas that will help anyone become a positive leader. It's one of the most important things a person can do because one positive leader will inspire many others to become positive leaders as well. My daughter wrote her college admission essay last year and it said, "When I was young my mom struggled with her health and my dad struggled with himself. But over the years I watched my dad work to become a more positive person. Then he started writing and speaking about it and sharing his message with others. I saw people change for the better and I know that if he can change, and they can change, the world can change." Her words brought tears to my eyes because I realized that my one decision to be a positive leader not only impacted my life but also my marriage, my children, my team at work, and everyone around me. My hope is that you too will discover the power of positive leadership in your own life. I know that being a positive leader doesn't just make *you* better; it makes everyone around you better. You can start today!

