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## Something That Matters

Twenty years ago, I set out on a mission to solve the world's, well really, *humanity's* disconnection from mattering. I wasn't, and am still not, a researcher, a licensed therapist, a PhD, or university professor. But I do have a heightened sense of self- and social-awareness and am an exhaustingly empathic, for better or mostly worse. I have also found that with each new day on my journey of now 56 years, my tolerance for things that suck, are unfair, or unjust has diminished, and my honesty in the face of it is a bit more opinionated and outspoken.

In no way I am attempting to be a jerk, but at some point in time I think we can't be afraid to expect something better from ourselves and from one another. Lowering our expectations so that we are never disappointed is a recipe for apathy and discontent. Inspiring and empowering personal and social transformation breeds goodness and betterment for all.

This journey for me started from my own personal quest and need to find mattering, and that journey turned into a book in 2007 and then a nonprofit organization, keynotes all over the world, and four more books. As someone who achieved success, hit rock bottom, and found purpose and meaning and significance again, I wanted to help people and the world. The effort came from a place of sweetness and service.

But I also saw a pandemic spreading long before our beloved COVID pandemic. I called it, “The Human Pandemic.” I saw and learned stuff that caused me to wrestle internally and question what had happened. It was as if I was going through the stages of grieving . . . for humanity. Besides “You Matter” as our main message for our nonprofit organization, the motto was “It’s Time for a New Normal” long before COVID snatched it from us. Sadly, I still have thousands of business cards with that printed on them. There is no question that ignorance was so much more bliss for me, but there was no going back.

## Welcome Mondays

That first book I wrote was entitled *Every Monday Matters—52 Ways to Make a Difference*. My friends called it the “Idiot’s Guide to Being a Better Human.” The book provided 52 things people could do that were not about themselves, rather to contribute to the greater good and in doing so change the world and also find individual purpose.

I was playing the numbers game . . . what if we could get enough people doing these Mondays each week? What if on the same Monday a half million or more people opened up the book and took action? What if we could get schools, churches, companies involved? What if we could create a movement of people making a difference in the simplest of ways?

One of those Mondays in the book was “Don’t Flick Your Butts.” I hate litter and actually started a street team in LA to pick up trash in one period of my life. But part of being a semi-professional-trash-picker-upper is that you can’t unsee the grossness of it. Welcome, cigarette B.S. At the time, Americans smoked 300 billion cigarettes a year. Yes, that is with a “b.” Arguably even worse, they littered 100 billion of said butts each year.

Being the curious person I am, I decided to figure out the total distance of 100 billion connected cigarette butts. Let me just say the distance is so far it’s hard for our brains to comprehend it. But we can process the fact that this distance spanned 337 round trips from LA to NYC. Yes, that is a cigarette butt freeway built every year across our beautiful country with our cigarette butt litter. Environmental issues? Well, maybe for another time. But here is the point. . .

At first this pissed me off. How dare we do this to our planet? How dare anyone think it is okay to toss their butt in the gutter or wherever else they

throw them? But then, in my quest to live with a higher level of awareness, my views started to change. Instead, I tried to build compassion and empathy for those who littered their butts, because ultimately they don't know how much they matter. I came to the conclusion that 100 billion cigarette butts littered equals 100 billion acts of the unmaterring. So sad for so many reasons.

These were the signs of the pandemic. We weren't doing well when I wrote that first book and, frankly, we still aren't. Yes, I still have compassion, but I also think it is okay to say it like it is. And yes, there are beautiful heart-warming stories that happen every single day in the biggest and smallest of ways. They aren't great fodder for headline news, but I truly believe they happen invisibly at a frequency that is life giving. However, there is also just the opposite, and I notice it is the most hidden-in-plain sight of ways.

Just ponder this for a second. . .

Why don't people put their tray back on the stack of trays after going through security in the airport? The sign even tells them how to help.

Why are people okay with spilling milk and sugar on the self-serve counter at Starbucks and leaving their mess behind when all they needed to do is grab a napkin and wipe everything in that conveniently placed hole over the hidden garbage can?

Why do people double-park their car and take up two spaces?

Why do people abuse their animals or their children or spouses?

I could go on and on with this list of things we see each and every day that sadly show how poorly we human sometimes. And please try to find me an answer for any of the above questions that makes the actions seem positive, constructive, and the way to be a better human or company or society. I'm sorry, but at some point in time we can't say, "Well my parents did it, so that's what I learned." Or, "That's what my friends do." We can no longer rationalize our way out of our bad behaviors for other people and ourselves; rather we need to own our actions and who we've become and start looking in the mirror for the answers.

## **Right and Wrong**

All of this has led me to this place where I believe there is an actual right and wrong. Sure this might be a gray area, but it is often black and white as well. I know many people would disagree with me here and I can hear

their “Who are you to judge. . .” statements already. If you happen to be one of those people, then please help me understand how there can be anything not wrong about someone kicking their dog in the dog park? What is right about leaving your spilled popcorn and trash in the cup holder at the theatre? And, please know that the “it gives someone the opportunity to have a job and clean it up” excuse is absolute B.S. And what is not wrong about the person who embezzled money or people who park in the handicapped parking space to go play two hours of tennis? Yes, I believe people are doing the best they can with their current state of awareness, but that is not a get out of jail free card for wrong behavior and cause and effect is real.

We do wrong things because we have lost touch with what it means to be human. We play things off as someone else’s problem to solve. Or even worse, we don’t even take a second to consider anyone else in the first place. We blast our backyard stereo system all day and into the late night and early morning on Saturday because that’s what we want to do, and if the neighbors don’t like it . . . well, they can move. We beat up opposing sports fans at baseball games as if we play for or own the team we are cheering for. We chase referees of our children’s sports team off the field in fear for their life. We bully the crap of out each other on social media.

These are the cracks in the walls of humanity I first noticed nearly two decades ago—a complete lack of civility and accountability. A complete disengagement with the endless potential we have as humans to create the most beautiful fabric of humanity that exceeds even our own wildest expectations.

## **Made to Make**

The reason this book is entitled *Make It Matter* is because you, me, we make things every single day of our life . . . for our entire life. First off, and regardless of any spiritual or religious beliefs, each of was made. We were made. It is believed that each of us had a 1 in 400 trillion chance of being born. Yet, here we are. And we are matter. Yes, you can insert the vector artwork of the atom here.

So, made of matter, then how are we going to make it matter? Maybe this will help:

**Make**—the ability to, to create.

**It**—Decisions, beliefs, actions, your entire life.

**Matter**—Purposeful, meaningful, constructive, significant.

At Every Monday Matters, we create programs to help people make it matter. We have served over 4 million K-2 students in all 50 states and 6 countries. We help companies create work cultures where people can make it matter at work. And, we help our elderly population continue to make it matter in the final chapter of their life through our Senior Living program.

All the work we do is based on The Mattering Mindset™ framework, and I wrote this book to help you navigate this transformational framework so that you can make it matter in life and at work. If you are a husband, this book is for you. If you are a manager at work, this book is for you. If you are a soon-to-be college graduate, this book is for you.

We get one life to live and that life is built upon moments. And these moments are not meant to be taken for granted. Our job is to make them matter . . . and we can.

## **The Foundation of Mattering**

I spend a lot of time pondering people and their stories. I actually love people, even though you might already think differently. In fact, I created and lead a workshop called “Your Story Matters” (more on this in Chapter 9) that helps people embrace who they are, how they got there, and where they want to go. I wholeheartedly believe that every person has a story that matters and can teach a master class on something.

I think about the employee who stares at her computer screen, watching the cursor blink in the empty document or slide deck. Another proposal. Another presentation. Another meeting about meetings. She is successful by every external measure (good salary, nice office, respected by

her peers) yet totally hollow inside. The question that haunts her in the quiet moments echoes: Does any of this actually matter?

Then there's the guy at my local grocery store who restocks the shelves each morning, most likely wondering if anyone even notices that the labels are perfectly faced off. Heck, he might even wonder if anyone would notice if he didn't show up for work tomorrow. Yes, he is collecting his paycheck, but might also feel invisible, replaceable, and insignificant, thereby questioning whether he contributes anything meaningful to the world.

At the same time, there is the middle school teacher, who isn't making much money, her classroom is overcrowded, and she often works nights and weekends just to catch up. Yet she bounces out of bed each morning with energy and purpose. When former students visit her years later to tell her how she'd changed their lives, she knows with absolute certainty that her work matters.

Of course, these are just three examples of three different potential realities. No judging or suggesting that one gig matters any more than the other or that matting can't be found in all of these . . . or none. The important point to consider is what made the difference for each of these three individuals? Why do some people feel deeply significant while others, despite apparent success, feel empty? Why do some jobs, relationships, and contributions feel meaningful while others feel like mere busy work?

## **The Universal Hunger**

In all of my travels over the past two decades, having keynoted in front of hundreds of thousands of people, worked with countless leaders and top companies, and even with children in schools, elderly in senior living communities, and men and women in prison, I have had the privilege of meeting so many people and hearing so many stories. Yes, we are all unique and surely have our differences, but I promise you that we all share a fundamental truth: we all want to matter, and we all have the capacity to make things matter. Our work is to make that a reality, hence the writing of this book.

Whether we're conscious of it or not, every human being carries within them a deep hunger for significance. We want to know that our lives count, that our presence makes a difference, that what we create has value beyond

ourselves. This isn't vanity or ego, rather a fundamental human need as basic as food, shelter, and belonging. Viktor Frankl, the renowned psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor, discovered that "life is not primarily a quest for pleasure," as Freud believed, or "a quest for power," as Alfred Adler taught, but "a quest for meaning." His research, born from the most extreme circumstances imaginable, revealed that "striving to find meaning in one's life is the primary motivational force in man."

Modern psychology has confirmed Frankl's insights, demonstrating that mattering is highly correlated with meaningfulness of work, life satisfaction, and psychological well-being. That people with greater perceptions of meaning respond more positively to psychotherapy and are better able to cope with life's challenges. Research has also established that when people judge their lives as meaningful, a sense of mattering consistently emerges as a significant precursor of these judgments.

This hunger shows up everywhere. In the workplace, it's the difference between employees who are merely present and those who are genuinely engaged. In relationships, it's what separates superficial connections from bonds that transform us. In our communities, it's the force that turns neighbors into allies and strangers into friends.

Yet despite this universal need, millions of people wake up each day feeling like their lives don't matter. They go through the motions (working, consuming, scrolling, sleeping) without ever experiencing the deep satisfaction that comes from knowing they've contributed something meaningful to the world.

Additionally, we can't ignore the dark side of this desire to matter, as often times our need to matter gets hijacked by the worst in us. We can be led to believe that we matter because we are wealthy or have power. We might believe we have found mattering in a gang or a terrorist group. We might even believe we have found mattering as a Republican or a Democrat. Let us be clear, none of this has anything to do with mattering or making it matter. Mattering isn't material or egotistical. Mattering isn't destructive. Mattering isn't found in identity crisis or labels.

But we must be mindful that there are two forces at work here. One is our desire to find mattering because we don't currently feel it. The other is realign people who believe they matter but for all the wrong reasons. No small task, but worth it.

## The Creator in All of Us

“I am not creative” is something I have heard countless times through this journey. I get it, because our model of creativity is the painter, musician, inventor, performance artist, or writer. But this statement is simply not accurate for any human being. We are all creators, and everything we create has the potential to matter.

Maybe you solve problems that potentially helped someone. Maybe you cook incredible meals that bring people together. Maybe you raise children with love and intention. Maybe you volunteer your time to support your community. Maybe you work on a team at work. Maybe you offer comfort to someone who is suffering.

Every conversation you have, every email you send, every interaction you engage in is an act of creation. You’re constantly making things (moments, connections, experiences, solutions) and each of these has the potential to matter deeply. The question isn’t whether you’re a creator. You already are. The question is whether what you create matters.

## Introducing The Mattering Mindset

Over the past two decades, I’ve studied individuals and organizations that have cracked the code on creating meaning and significance. What I’ve found is that those who consistently create things that matter share a common framework for how they see themselves, others, and their work in the world. We call this framework “The Mattering Mindset.”

The Mattering Mindset framework is an operating system for mattering. It is literally how we operationalize mattering into individuals and ecosystem such as schools, companies, communities, and even walking groups or families. At the core of this framework is the idea of mattering. That everything begins with mattering. It is our universal desire, the fuel for our lives, and how we build legacies.

Mattering is then broken into three interconnected perspectives:

- **I Matter**—The recognition that you have inherent worth and unique value to contribute. This isn’t about ego or self-importance; it’s about taking responsibility for your own significance and cherishing who you are and who you hope to become.

- **You Matter**—The commitment to seeing and affirming the value in others. The knowing that our words, thoughts, and actions are powerful and we get to choose how to use them. When we help others recognize their own capacity to matter, we create a ripple effect that transforms entire communities.
- **We Matter**—The understanding that our individual significance is amplified when we work together toward something bigger than ourselves. This is where personal purpose connects to collective impact. And, we are all better for it.

These three perspectives aren't just feel-good concepts. They're practical lenses that change how we make decisions, approach relationships, and show up in our work.

When we operate from The Mattering Mindset, we naturally begin to embrace and embody values that matter: hope, kindness, understanding, empathy, compassion, and love, for example. These values change the way we see the world and people. As Wayne Dyer said, "If you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change."

Let's apply this concept to those three job examples I gave earlier. When our corporate person began to understand that her work in corporate strategy could actually serve something bigger than quarterly profits, she started asking different questions in meetings. Instead of "How can we increase market share?" she began asking, "How can we create value that genuinely helps our customers solve their problems?" That shift in perspective transformed not just her work but her entire relationship with her career.

When our local shelf stocker realized that his role in the grocery store was actually about creating a welcoming space where people could gather what they needed to nourish their families, his interactions with customers changed completely. He started seeing himself not as someone who just stocked shelves, but as someone who contributed to the daily rhythms that kept his community fed and healthy.

And, of course, our middle school teacher bounced out of bed each morning because she already had absolute certainty that her work matters. Now these people understand what drove our middle school teacher: when we operate from The Mattering Mindset, we make different decisions, and those decisions create different outcomes.

## **Mattering Is Contagious**

Here's the remarkable thing about mattering: it's contagious. When you begin to embody the truth that you matter, others around you start to recognize their own worth. When you help others see that they matter, they begin to help others do the same. And when communities of people embrace the truth that "We Matter," they become unstoppable forces for positive change.

This book is about starting that ripple effect in your own life and watching it spread to everyone you touch. It's about moving from the hollow pursuit of success to the fulfilling creation of significance. It's about transforming not just your own experience, but contributing to the kind of world where everyone has the opportunity to matter.

This book offers both the framework and the tools you need to build a life that matters. You'll discover how to recognize your own significance, help others recognize theirs, and create collective impact that extends far beyond what you could achieve alone. More importantly, you'll learn to see that the capacity to matter isn't reserved for a chosen few. It's available to everyone, including you, right now, exactly where you are.

The world needs what you have to offer. The question isn't whether you're capable of creating something that matters—you absolutely are. The question is whether you're ready to begin.

Your journey toward a life that matters starts with a single recognition: You Matter. What you create matters. And the world is waiting for your contribution.