

THE GIFT OF FAILURE



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ARI RASTEGAR



RASTEGAR®

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THE GIFT OF FAILURE

Turn My Missteps Into Your Epic Success

FIRST EDITION

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“Ari’s humility is only surpassed by his god-given superpowers, energy, and positivity. We all fail, but in ten years of talking to Ari almost daily, I’ve never seen anyone get back up so quickly. Ari’s ability to avoid and learn from speed bumps and turn them into wins is unparalleled and defines him as a friend, leader, and motivator.”

—JEFFREY F. DIMODICA, CFA, PRESIDENT & MANAGING
DIRECTOR OF STARWOOD PROPERTY TRUST

“Ari is one of my favorite people and business partners over many years in the business world. He brings exceptional vision, creativity, hard work, and integrity—a unique and incredibly successful combination.”

—ROBERT DONOHOE, CEO OF TEXAS
MEDICAL LIABILITY TRUST

“I first met Ari six years ago when he was barely old enough to shave. He made a presentation to the Board of the Louisiana District Attorney’s Retirement System, and because of his youth, I was hesitant to believe what I thought was the hype akin to that of an Old West medicine man. After that meeting, I met with him for over five hours in a closed room, head-to-head. I then realized that not only did he have a vision, but he had a work ethic that would catapult him to success. His business plan is a result of many long days, sleepless nights, and endless travel. He now doesn’t shave because he can, and people in real estate from around the country have taken notice of his ever-growing Rastegar Property empire. I should also mention that, above all, his family and friends are more important to him than wealth and worldly possessions. He is gifted with foresight that I’ve never experienced before. He says LUCK—I know better!”

—ANTHONY G. FALTERMAN, CHAIRMAN OF THE LOUISIANA
DISTRICT ATTORNEY’S RETIREMENT SYSTEM

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INTRODUCTION

“Fail early, fail often, but always fail forward.”

—JOHN C. MAXWELL

I hope you fail—and I hope you fail a lot.

That might sound harsh, but I mean it from the depths of my heart. I also want you to find success and fulfillment—and you need to fail in order to do that.

We tend to think everything is good or bad, but failure is amoral. It’s simply a universal experience. With perseverance and honest introspection, failure eventually leads to success—they are two sides of the same coin. Innovation inherently requires trial and error; nothing can be created without trying out new concepts. The error is the gift.

In his book, *Failing Forward*, the world-famous author John C. Maxwell says that regardless of how talented or brilliant you are, you *will* encounter failure—it’s just a matter of when.

Since failure is inevitable, the real question then becomes *How will you react to it?*

Reacting positively to failure is hard, but like everything, it's a learned skill. Even when you react positively, failure still hurts, but eventually the sting subsides and you grow stronger. Instead of letting failures paralyze us and cause setbacks, we need to acknowledge that they will come, and use them as stepping stones to move forward with confidence.

It has never been easy, but I've learned to use failure as fuel for personal growth, which then translated into business growth. Responding to failure so that it fuels you is a *must*—make it as such. Something magical happens when a *want* turns into a *must*. The universe conspires to make things happen.

Viewed in that light, failing is not just a good thing—it is a necessity.

I like the way Ernest Hemingway explained it: “The world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong at the broken places.” Find what is broken and fix it. More importantly, find out *why*. To add to that, Mark Zuckerberg said, “If things aren't breaking, then you're not moving fast enough. People learn by making mistakes.”

I humbly admit that I've failed more than I've succeeded. If you aren't doing the same, then you're not challenging yourself enough. If you are an entrepreneur like me, failure is expected. Sadly, we often pretend like it's not. We are taught to value reason above all, so we de-emotionalize work, and we are sur-

prised when things break or when we fail. We pretend it never happened instead of drilling down to learn the painful lessons.

As entrepreneurs, we can and should be emotional, although we hate to admit it. We expect our ideas to turn into products and systems that change the world for the better—that make others happier, healthier, and create value. We aspire to identify a problem, find a solution, and build a company offering that solution. We do this on behalf of our clients to make their lives easier, more convenient, or simply more enjoyable. We hunger for success to pay it forward. Aside from the glitz and glam you see on the surface, the road to success is fraught with limited visibility, blind curves, and catastrophic hazards. The success stories we hear often sound like they happened overnight, but those stories leave out many hasty decisions, inaccurate predictions, bumbled conversations, miscalculations, and constantly shifting landscapes that successful people encounter every day.

I failed more times than I could have ever imagined when I took my first swing at adult life. And I'm not talking about small, insignificant failures, either. I'm talking about the kind of failures that haunt you—those that completely alter the landscape of your career, personal relationships, shake you to the core, and make you question all that you thought was real. I can't say I particularly enjoy failing—I'm still working on “welcoming the failure” in my own life (it's tough!)—but failure can be life's greatest teacher if you let it.

Learning the lessons of failure first requires honest introspection, which is probably the hardest part, because you have to face yourself—your entire self. The lessons of failure

require you to analyze them in an objective way and dissect them enough to *make them* your educator. This step is mission critical. Have you ever wondered why we always give the best advice to our friends and loved ones, but seldom to ourselves? When we give advice to others, we depersonalize the problem, and think objectively. If you can do that for yourself, then you can extract the lesson and immediately implement it. Sure, you'll still make mistakes, but if you do it honestly, you won't make the *same* mistakes—you'll make bigger, tougher, and scarier ones. As Jim Rohn said, "Don't wish it was easier, wish you were better."

When you master this skill, failure will alchemize into a gift.

Entrepreneurs by nature are resourceful problem-solvers. Not all of us, however, are willing to examine our failures and look within. Many are quick to extract lessons when we see epic, life-changing, mind-blowing success. Yet when we fail, we try to forget about it and move on as quickly as possible. Why? Because failure is *painful*. Few people willingly tread the path of *more* resistance—it's too uncomfortable.

This is why failure is such a good instructor. When the most successful entrepreneurs encounter failure, we extract the lessons to avoid repeating them in the future. This ensures our business not only survives but prospers. When a problem surfaces (and they always do), it's Murphy's Law: "Anything that can go wrong will go wrong." Expect it. It's counterintuitive to not immediately react when issues arise. Most often we spring into action to address the problem, believing it will inch us closer to a solution. Unfortunately, that doesn't always work.

To be presumptuous, I'd say that approach is wrong.

Sometimes, you need to pause. Sometimes, not moving is the move. Sometimes, silence is the loudest thing you can say. Sometimes the problem you need to solve is not even the real problem. Pause, but don't react—*yet*. Spend time reflecting. Then, resolve, analyze, and when you're ready, respond with a well-considered solution to a well-defined problem. We should not be looking to be *right*—often there may be many right answers. Instead, we should be looking for the best solution to the real problem.

Books about how to build a billion-dollar business usually focus on aspects of the business itself—systems, management, organizational structure, and so on. That's all well and good, but the secret to success has nothing to do with that. In fact, success has little to do with the organization itself.

To me, the long-lasting, sustainable secret to success is *you*.

To build your business into an unstoppable force of nature, first, you must make *yourself* unstoppable.

With that mindset, you will grow into your greatest asset—and my deepest wish for this book is to show you what worked for me in the hopes that you can apply my lessons to your own life. In the pages that follow, I'm going to share with you my gifts from failure and what I changed in myself that eventually trickled down to all aspects of my life. I'm also going to provide guidance, actionable lessons, and essential takeaways that can translate into value.

When it comes to how to improve your business, you need to change your perspective. Instead of focusing on your business at each point of failure, I want you to start first focusing on yourself. The better you are, the better the business. In the world-famous book *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, author Stephen Covey refers to this as a *paradigm shift*. When you commit to making this shift, you will be a more effective person. You will be in control. Over time, it'll strengthen your personal integrity, cultivate compassion, and elevate your energy. Relationships will improve because you'll show up differently, not only in meetings with important clients or colleagues but also with your family and friends. By working on yourself, you will by default improve your business, because your business is an extension of you. Think of it like this: If you are a tree's roots, trunk, and branches, and your business is the leaves, the leaves rely on a healthy tree to thrive. The same idea resonates with all other aspects of life. By creating strong roots, trunk, and branches—by creating value in yourself—you create value in your employees, your clients, and thus, your company.

Sounds easy enough, right? *Wrong*. It is simple, but not easy. As far as I'm aware, nothing you get from doing something easy is worth it unless it was pure grace. The Lord knows I'm immensely grateful for how I've been blessed on my journey. Anything worth doing is hard—raising kids, building a business, going to the gym, eating healthy consistently—but it's worth it. Trade instant gratification for long-term success.

I know this mindset through personal experience building my own private real estate business, Rastegar Property Company. We've built a strong enterprise, wholly owned at a corporate level, from basically nothing. Now, with the help of some of

the greatest minds in real estate, technology, and entertainment, we're on our way to becoming a multibillion-dollar global firm. Behind every success, however, I first faced a profound failure. But every time something went wrong, instead of looking at what needed to change in my business, I looked to see what I could change in myself, because what's happening externally reflects what's happening internally. Fear, insecurity, avoidance—it all shows up in your face, your body language, and radiates outward into your life. It's important to take responsibility for *everything*.

The more I failed, the more I worked on myself. What started with a few minutes of daily meditation snowballed into a massive commitment to health and wellness. And do you know what happened? I saw more success. It positively affected my business, and as a pleasant surprise, bled into my personal life as a father and a husband, which are two of the most important roles in my life.

At times, things were uncomfortable; but learn how to be comfortable with being uncomfortable, because that's where most growth originates. They don't call them "growing pains" for nothing. Clichés are clichés for a reason. Growth and comfort cannot coexist. I despise when people say, "It's just business, it's not personal." There is nothing more personal than business, especially if it's your own.

Everything I present in the following chapters I do, and they have a direct impact on how I run my life. There is no separation between personal life and business life. Everything is intertwined. That's why whatever you do to improve yourself will naturally translate to improving your business.

I view the lessons in this book and my own process as training for life. All the “success” I’ve had in business directly correlates to the behaviors, habits, and goals you’re about to learn. As a real estate developer, I know that if the foundation is bad, nothing else will matter. Make your foundation solid, deep, and wide. If you don’t have a solid foundation, it doesn’t matter how good the walls are or the interior design, you’re just putting “lipstick on a pig”—a common real estate term used to describe light renovations and mediocre upgrades. Compared to what we do at Rastegar, this is the path of least resistance. We take existing properties down to the studs, re-imagine them and create value by delivering a superior product, or we simply build the asset from the ground up, the right way.

This book isn’t me on a soapbox, either. I have a lot to learn and am more aware of that today than ever. Mine for the jewels, apply what works for you, and discard the rest. If a few of the lessons I have learned will help you self-develop, then they are worth sharing. Use what works for you.

READ THIS BOOK IF...

“I start early and I stay late, day after day. It took me 17 years and 114 days to become an overnight success.”

—LIONEL “LEO” MESSI

This is a self-development book for entrepreneurs or anyone aspiring to reach a level of success that is unfathomable to most, in any industry. Everything in this book is a layer of personal development that will positively impact your business, regardless of your field.

This is not a book for employees seeking a promotion. It is not a book for those who want to be average, either. I don't do average or mediocre. This book is for the dreamers with extraordinary dreams. The world needs more dreamers, movers, and shakers—now more than ever. We need you to share your dreams with the world. You're reading this book because you have a calling. Listen for it and *GO*. As Steve Jobs said, “They [dreamers] push the human race forward, and while some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius, because the ones who are crazy enough to think they can change the world, are the ones who do.”

Everyone needs help in achieving larger-than-life goals. The greatest performers, entertainers, and competitors of any genre all have coaches and mentors—that's where this book comes in. Nothing great was ever accomplished alone. Success and fulfillment are team sports.

Although this book will explain relatively simple concepts to implement, they will not be easy. *Everything is hard*. The sooner you accept that, the better. Stop wasting time complaining, and use that energy for something constructive, like taking massive action.

Thomas Edison once said, “Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work.” In my case, opportunity showed up in lululemon workout gear. If you're relying on opportunities to come your way, you'll wait forever. Only by putting yourself out there, doing the hard work, and taking action to achieve your dreams will you increase your chances of getting *lucky*. Thomas Jefferson got it right when he said, “The harder I work, the more luck

I have.” Pablo Picasso had a similar perspective: “Inspiration exists, but it has to find you working.”

As you read this book, you will begin to look at your own failures and deferred dreams. You may even feel *more* like a failure. This will change once you take total responsibility for your life. You have more control than you assume. Don’t be a victim. In fact, you are not a victim. Life is not happening *to* you. It has been and always will be happening *for* you. I truly believe that, and my own life is proof.

If you’re not taking responsibility for yourself, this book is not for you. It’s time to take responsibility for your decisions and your actions (or lack thereof)—past, present, and future. If you don’t, then you are not in control, and your business will reflect that. If you’re not in control, that means something else is, whether that’s other people or a detrimental state of mind. Do not be a pawn in someone else’s game, including your own self-doubts (the worst enemy of all).

If you feel like a pawn right now, don’t fret—remember that a pawn can take down a king.

MY STORY, THUS FAR

“No man ever achieved worth-while success who did not, at one time or other, find himself with at least one foot hanging well over the brink of failure.”

—NAPOLEON HILL

I come from a paternal bloodline of highly educated and respected individuals who originate from a province of Iran

called Taleghan. My mother's family is German, although she was born in Hawaii. Pretty much everyone on my father's side of the family has a master's or a PhD and either work as lawyers, doctors, or scientists. My grandfather, Dr. Hossein Rastegar, and my attorney father, Sheida Rastegar, were my childhood heroes. My grandfather not only worked as a medical doctor and psychiatrist, but he was also an incredible athlete. He competed in the Iranian National Games in cycling and several other track and field events, where he won seven gold medals. He was a true renaissance man.

Then came the 1979 Iranian Revolution, which changed everything overnight. My uncles, my aunt, and my father were studying in Austin, Texas, at the time, so they immediately lost their visas and had to start over. I'm not sure anyone recovers from that trauma. My family was close to the Shah (*King* in Farsi), and since we were not Muslim, my grandparents had to flee to Turkey to seek asylum. Through the grace of God, a donkey, and frostbite, they survived. My family eventually reunited in Austin, but they lost their possessions in the process, including their homes, land, bank accounts, and priceless heirlooms. Fortunately, they never lost their mindset, culture, or family values. The Rastegar Creed, as my father says, is "Courage." This is the plight of many Iranian Americans who experienced this heartbreak but then found safety, love, and prosperity in our great country. My heart goes out to them and to all who share a similar story.

Growing up in a family that valued education above all, I initially wanted to be a doctor like my grandfather, but he inspired me to be a businessman. We'd walk the streets of Austin and Dallas, and he would point at skyscrapers and

tell me to “buy all of them one day.” He once said, “I want you to be wealthy. America is the best place in the world right now to create massive wealth, which you can then use to help others.” He believed real estate was the best opportunity, and he wanted me to be successful enough so that one day I could buy back the land in Iran that my family had lost—which I fully intend on doing.

When I was growing up, my family didn’t have the money to go on many trips, so I spent a lot of time reading. My dad always said I couldn’t stop reading even if I tried. Throughout this book, I pay homage to the great thinkers, philosophers, and authors by extracting key takeaways from their wisdom, so you can benefit without spending the time or money reading the originals. For the bookworms out there, you’ll find my “further reading” list of recommended books in the appendix.

Despite my family’s seemingly endless brainpower, I wasn’t particularly gifted or special in any way. I was blessed to be born in the United States, especially in Austin. But otherwise, I faced a lot of adversity growing up. My parents divorced when I was two years old—young enough not to understand, but old enough to remember. Due to the trauma from the divorce, I developed a severe speech impediment that I spent seven brutal years correcting. Hours turned to days of reading in front of the mirror, trying desperately to enunciate words properly. I had an awful lisp (and I’m still wondering which cruel person put an “S” in the word *lisp*). To make matters worse, growing up I was neither a stellar student nor a star athlete.

My *Baba* (father in Farsi) taught me something priceless,

however. He taught me how to think for myself and to listen to my inner voice. Despite the struggles of feeling less than average, I first started setting goals for myself in high school; one of my earliest was to become an “ultra-successful, high achiever” (whatever that meant!). All I knew is that I yearned to be better—it was a *must*. I had no idea how I was going to get there at the age of sixteen, but I kept it top of mind.

By the time I was ready for college, I found myself extraordinarily unprepared, and ended up attending two different community colleges. Ultimately, I transferred to Texas A&M University, graduating with honors and earning an English degree. Even though I went to law school, I was rejected from all the schools I applied to but one: St. Mary’s University School of Law in San Antonio, Texas. I felt like a failure being rejected from many of the schools I wanted to attend, but that failure led to the *right* school for me. It was a blessing to attend such a prestigious school, which opened the door for me to start (the first iteration of) my real estate company by using a \$3,000 loan and the remainder of my scholarship money. So, when I say I built my business from modest means and grit, I mean it. And if I did it, you can do it better.

For me, one thing was for certain: I was determined to make my life matter for others by helping solve problems that move the world forward. To be successful, I needed to build myself into the highest skyscraper—but the taller the building, the deeper you must dig to build the foundation. That is physics. So deep I went, and the deeper I dug, the higher my skyscraper grew. The deeper you go, the harder it is. Be ready.

After a few stepping-stones early in my career on Wall Street,

I launched Rastegar in 2015. We've successfully participated in projects in thirty-eight cities, twelve states, and seven different asset classes, including apartments, self-storage, master plan communities, retail, and office. Our collective team of more than a hundred people operates either internally or as consultants and contractors. I'm proud to say that we are a private company that never sold ownership at the corporate level. This affords us the privilege to roll out a revolutionary proprietary profit-sharing program for our loyal staff.

I believe the main reason our company experienced healthy, sustainable success is that I focused on fixing myself first and sharing my failures and the lessons with our entire team. I did this without shame and without sugarcoating. We are not after perfection; we seek excellence.

That should be your focus, too, and you certainly don't have to do it alone. In fact, it is not possible. *I stand on the shoulders of giants*. I credit a lot of my growth and success to the hundreds of people I've had the great honor to learn from throughout my life, whether through mentorship, books (mostly books), seminars, conferences, YouTube clips, podcasts, policymakers, and life coaches.

Without a doubt, my most important teachers were the many failures I've encountered along the way—one of which still haunts me to this day (more on that later). At the time, it was my failure of all failures. In hindsight, however, it was an inflection point that pushed me to continuously learn, evolve, and grow. The marathon continues.

This book is broken down into three parts. In Part I, we'll

dig deep into your mental wellbeing. To build a skyscraper, you need a solid, deep foundation. In Part 2, we'll focus on the external, looking out and up as we start to physically build upon that foundation. Finally, in Part 3, we'll look beyond the physical skyscraper you've built and focus on the transcendental.

Each chapter centers around a personal failure of mine, how I overcame it by focusing on myself, and how the results then transformed not only me as a person, but everything I touched, whether that was my business, my family life, or my personal relationships. Learn from my failures, apply the lessons to your own life, and reap the benefits. Stop worrying about your business as a *business* and start focusing on yourself. When you focus on yourself, you too can transform lead into gold, like the great alchemists of the past. It's in your hands.

If a traumatized, below-average child of divorced immigrant parents with a severe speech impediment could do it, so can you. I expect you to surpass all my achievements. That's my greatest hope and the reason I wrote this for you.

YOU HAVE GREATNESS WITHIN YOU

Steve Jobs loved to point out that the things we value today—like the smartphone in your pocket—were created by regular people just like you and me. These creators weren't more talented than us. They weren't more intelligent. They were simply tapping into their greatness and had the courage to put their ideas out into the world.

But as Les Brown once said, “You cannot expect to achieve

new goals or move beyond your present circumstances unless you change.” So, if you’re ready to break through barriers, to quit limiting yourself, to unlearn bad mental data, and to achieve your wildest entrepreneurial dreams, then you’ve picked up the right book.

You have greatness within you. You might not believe that, yet. You might doubt yourself due to experiences that might have “proven” otherwise, but I assure you, it is there.

We’ll start with how the biggest failure of my life turned into one of my most precious gifts.



CHAPTER 1

TOO GOOD TO
BE TRUE

“Success is most often achieved by those who don’t know that failure is inevitable.”

—COCO CHANEL

I got my first taste of working in law as a young teenager.

John Hampton Read II is one of my dad’s dearest friends and a famous attorney whom I worked for as a thirteen-year-old. I performed an epic amount of legal grunt work, but most of the time I was taking out the garbage, opening mail, and carrying his briefcase. He also let me borrow his classic Corvette from time to time against my father’s advice, so at least there was that.

After I finished law school in 2008, I started working as an attorney for my uncle, doing whatever I could to add value to his law firm. Unexpectedly, two clients walked into our office and changed the entire trajectory of my career. Just like

that, fate reared its head, and in 2009, I inadvertently found myself launching a global entertainment company.

Now mind you, I knew nothing about the entertainment industry. I also didn't have any experience launching a business—let alone running one. But as it goes with such ventures, failures occurred, experience was gained, and lessons were learned.

The biggest lesson I learned early in my career is that launching a business has less to do with the business, and way more with who you are as a person.

In February 2010, my wrestling coach from middle school, Michael Gloria Chiarelli (whom I knew simply as “Coach”), was in Dallas with his childhood friend, Anthony Orso, who is one of the top real estate finance people on the planet. They happened to be in town for a Dallas Cowboys game and were hosting a dinner for some of the executives and a few star players. I grew up with Michael's godson, Joey Marzuola, who remains one of my best friends almost thirty years later. Coach came from a wealthy New York family. His father was a famous Venetian plaster painter whose clients included celebrities, political figures, and billionaires.

Since they were in Dallas, and Coach knew I was obsessed with real estate, he wanted to introduce me to Anthony—but it was going to be a tough introduction. Anthony was the managing director at Credit Suisse and responsible for over \$400 billion in global real estate lending. Coach initially invited another childhood friend of mine, Major Miller, to dinner,

but when he reminded Coach I was in town, the seats were all filled. Major then graciously gave me his seat at the table, which I gladly accepted. I later learned I was the only person Coach ever introduced to Anthony for business purposes, despite hundreds, if not thousands, of other requests. As they say, Coach vouched for me, from one Italian to another.

Over dinner, Coach urged me to tell Anthony the story about how I helped an event promoter avoid litigation with a local nightclub for backing out of a deal to host an NBA All-Star party for LeBron James and Drake (who may be a superstar now, but few had heard of him at the time). Instead of suing, I suggested they let me help them move their event to another location. After calling my various contacts in Dallas, I found them another suitable venue. I even helped them restructure their pricing plan and made sure everything was good to go from a legal standpoint.

“Wow, Ari.” Coach laughed. “Nicely done. You’ve always been a go-getter”—this, coming from a guy who was always light on compliments, unless unequivocally merited.

Going over the details of my story with Anthony was how we bonded. Impressed with what he heard, he came up with an idea on the spot. “What if we started a global entertainment company?” he asked. While the real estate industry was still slowly recovering from the Great Recession, Anthony was interested in exploring other ways to make money. Luckily, the 2011 Super Bowl was scheduled to take place in Dallas the following year; what better way to entertain his affluent clients than inviting them to lavish parties organized by his own company?

He was willing to take a chance on me, and that was all I ever prayed for. Naturally, I jumped at the opportunity to align myself with him. I still think a critical reason he took a chance on me was because of his eldest son, Stephen Orso, who wanted to work on this as much as I did. Working with Anthony was a solid opportunity to progress toward my high school goal of becoming a high achiever. I looked up to him, and I still do. I soon discovered, proximity to your heroes is magic. Proximity has power.

By the time we finished dinner, Capital A Entertainment was born—*he* was the Capital, and I was the *A*. My only condition was that I brought two of my childhood friends, Major Miller and Luis Ortiz, to come help. He agreed. So, we moved to Manhattan.

Our team set our eyes on throwing two parties the week of Super Bowl XLV in February 2011—one on Friday and one on Saturday—which gave us a little less than a year to organize. We dove right in. As a brand-new company with no track record, in an industry that functions on connections and knowing the right people, we had our work cut out for us. And wow, did we have a lot to do—a daunting, inconceivable amount. We had to find venues, figure out how to sign top-tier talent, engage corporate sponsors, and market the events to sell tables and individual tickets.

It was an unnerving insane amount to process, but we were eager to accomplish the unthinkable, and somehow, we knew we could do it. To say the small staff of five at Capital A worked *hard* would be a severe understatement. There isn't a word to describe how tirelessly we worked. Our intensity bor-

dered on absolute insanity. The timelines were unreasonable. The team and I made hundreds of calls per day. We traveled back and forth from one coast to the other to meet with the biggest celebrities and brands in the world—sometimes just for one meeting only to hop on a return flight the same day. We didn't have any fancy office equipment, nor did any of us have any formal experience, but we did have a unified goal and the will to succeed. Like Bill Gates—who famously claimed he didn't take a single day off in his twenties—there was no such thing as a day off for us. Every day was a Monday. Hell, there wasn't even time to sleep, and when we did, we did it at our desks. It was nonstop, all day, every day for more than a year.

We got thousands of no's, but we remained relentless. There's a proverb that states, "The sale doesn't start until they say 'No.' Otherwise, it's just a request or a question, not a sale." It was the most magical yet vulnerable time of my life. In a matter of months, I went from living on Major's couch after law school to meeting with the CEO of Sports Illustrated, the Black-Eyed Peas, and P. Diddy—just to name a few.

We were up against some thirty other companies that had been throwing parties for decades—giants like Maxim, the juggernaut of Super Bowl parties (which we tried to buy, but that's a story for another book). We didn't just hold our own; we did something special and competed at the highest level.

Through grit and luck, countless cold calls, and no sleep, which I don't recommend, especially after reading Arianna Huffington's book *The Sleep Revolution*, we signed the Black-Eyed Peas to perform during our Friday night party (they

were also the Super Bowl halftime headliner that year). David Guetta and Diplo would open for the Peas. (In 2011, Guetta was voted as number one in *Dj Magazine's* Top 100 poll.) For our Saturday event, P. Diddy headlined, and Clinton Sparks with DJ Irie was on the turntables. Our corporate sponsors included Nivea for Men, Facebook (now Meta), Sports Illustrated, and Tequila Avi3n (yes, the tequila brand that was a major plotline in the seventh season of HBO's show *Entourage*).

Leading up to Super Bowl XLV, everything *seemed* wildly successful. Most tables were purchased for \$50,000 apiece, and we sold thousands of tickets. Capital A came out of nowhere and aligned with the biggest acts and brands in the world within a year of forming the LLC—on a shoestring budget, no less. Maxim usually gets the A-list celebrities and the biggest names, but we came out on top that year. Even Mark Zuckerberg showed up to our party. Luck is a powerful thing—especially when it finds you working.

While preparing for the Super Bowl parties, we were also planning our third event for the NBA All-Star weekend, which took place the following week in Los Angeles. Within a year of forming Capital A, we organized two back-to-back weekend parties.

The most established brands in the world throw one party a year. We did three.

Committed to creating the best experience possible, we managed to rent the Playboy Mansion and contracted Snoop Dogg, Blake Griffin, Kevin Love, Fabolous, and Trey Songz.