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## Wake-up Call

The World Has Changed and So Have We

Sarah Blaskovich | K. Shelby Skrhak |

**The world has changed and so have we—and in many ways for the better. Take a minute to reflect: You are stronger, more resilient and resourceful than you might've thought a year ago, right? While you're taking that long look in the mirror, ask yourself these questions: Are your priorities in order? Do you have a firm grasp on those aspects of your life and business that you can control? What changes do you need to make?**

Peak-performance coach Tony Robbins says crises and extreme stress can be useful for growth, learning and determining what really matters most to us. "Sometimes your worst day can be your best day if it produces a change," he says. "There is something called post-traumatic growth. You don't have to have post-traumatic stress. You can have growth come out of extreme stress."

This economy has prompted many people to reappraise their lives, their goals, their priorities. Many can take pride in personal victories and comfort in knowing their priorities are in order. Others realize their perspectives are skewed, and they're making changes.

In a survey conducted ([read full results](#)) in May by *SUCCESS*, readers overwhelmingly say they are: • Working harder to innovate and taking more risks to grow their businesses. • Making healthier eating choices and exercising more often. • More aware of their ability to prosper and create their own wealth. • Actively seeking new friends and connections and spending more time with family. Here are a few of their stories.

## Taking Control of Your Dreams

"In the good times, it's easy to do life in a mediocre way," says Amy Renee Armstrong, 42, who admits she had always gone through the motions, never completely committing to her goals. The Sunnyvale, Calif., woman vowed to change her ways when her life changed: *Once I get married, I'll pay more attention to finances. Once I have children, I'll be more responsible.* But when neither of those things happened, Armstrong found herself stuck as the person she didn't want to be.

It was the tough economic climate that made her realize her life wasn't going to change on its own, and that if she had dreams and goals, she had better go after them. "Now that I have the opportunity to tighten my belt and take perspective, I can learn from it. I started feeding myself with positive things that pushed me in the direction I want to go."

Armstrong's first priority was to surround herself with positive, encouraging people. She began charting her goals: saving money to buy her first home, living a healthier lifestyle and losing weight, keeping a journal, and making stronger personal connections. And on her calendars, she included action steps toward achieving those goals.

"I've grasped the reality that it isn't too late," says Armstrong, a medical assistant now taking evening classes in nutrition and health education. "As long as we're still breathing, it isn't too late to be what we want to be."

Wayne Dyer, author of *Excuses Begone!*, agrees that changing your mindset is always possible. "When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at actually begin to change. Mental health is about flexibility—it's about having an awareness that, *If this isn't what I'm to be doing, I'll do something else.*"

Dyer says self-awareness that focuses upon the present is crucial during these economic times. "If

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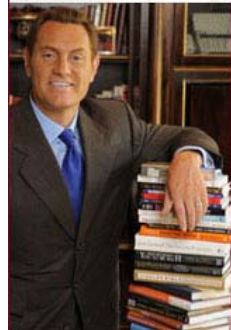
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## Goal Setting

How do you set goals?

- I write out my life goals.
- I write out my life goals and daily goals with deadlines.
- I have goals I want to achieve, but I don't write them down.
- I think setting goals is too limiting. Life happens.
- I don't have any goals.

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*"When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at actually begin to change."*  
—Wayne Dyer

you can have that relationship in the now, you'll have a great relationship with life. Most of us have trained our mind to be anything but right here, right now," he says.

"When you're on the dance floor, the purpose of the dance isn't to end up in a different place on the dance floor. The purpose is to enjoy every note," he says. "Find a way to be fulfilled. Life is about feeling good."

### **Strong in Body**

Physical health is one of the few factors that are controllable despite the economy. Exercise helps relieve stress, boost energy and clear the mind to take on new challenges. Seeing positive results with your health also provides a confidence boost that translates to other aspects of life.

Matt Martin has seen these benefits as a result of his initiative to take charge of his health and well-being. Martin, 25, of Dallas, works full time at a bank, has a part-time job in retail and takes evening college courses toward a degree in business marketing. He could easily make excuses for not having time for fitness. "When I realized that exercising was preventing me from getting sick or getting injured, that's important," he says. "I'm decreasing medical bills and doctor's office visits."

Jillian Michaels, fitness trainer from NBC's *The Biggest Loser*, endorses Martin's strategy. "If you want to save money on your health and wellness costs, invest in preventative measures," she says. Some prevention techniques include running or walking—both free and close to home—or eating healthier at low cost. She also suggests "killer, cost-free workouts," such as incline walking, stair climbing or jump roping. "Every dollar you spend on prevention can save 80 down the road in treatment costs," Michaels says.

For Martin and many Americans, time and cost can be factors hindering fitness goals. Martin invested in low-cost equipment like resistance bands and stability balls. "I'd always been active, but I'd found excuses not to go to the gym. Now, mine's right there in my house."

Martin's goal is to be strong in body and mind. The development of your *mind* as a healthy, physically fit person is essential, says Shawn Phillips, author and life-performance expert. "Are we waiting for the country to get healthy and strong again—or are we beginning with ourselves? A stronger, healthier you, with more confidence and health and well-being, makes for a stronger country. You control your own square inches!"

For those new to working out, Phillips suggests starting in doable doses: "Your first move is to do *something*," he says. "Your second move is to give it some structure." Make a checklist of all the exercises you want to do. Get involved in group exercise, so you're socially committed and accountable. Develop the confidence to believe you can achieve your fitness goals, because you're in control.

"It takes so little activity to get a tremendous return on your investment," says Dr. Kenneth Cooper, chairman and founder of the Cooper Aerobics Center. Even those struggling with weight can get great benefits from 30 minutes of activity a day, Cooper says. "Exercise will help your blood pressure, your cholesterol and your aerobic capabilities." It's also a way to ward off "recession obesity," resulting from seemingly cheaper high-calorie, high-fat choices.

On a budget, Martin says he buys plenty of produce, which is generally less expensive than processed foods. And, he changed his mindset so that nutrition and fitness were positive parts of his day. "Sometimes, I cheat and have a piece of pizza," he admits. "But, I know I'm going to reward myself with a workout. I consider working out a reward, just like I reward myself with good food. If you have a healthy mentality, you'll have a healthy life."

### **The Heart of the Matter**

As the economy began faltering last year, Tara Kennedy-Kline thought the best thing she could do for her family was to continue working 60 hours a week, often traveling overnight for business. Husband Chris was equally preoccupied with work.

Home life was chaotic. Her 10-year-old, Max, competed for attention with exaggerated stories, while 8-year-old Alex, who has a form of autism called Asperger's syndrome, would withdraw into a video game or book until he unexpectedly exploded in a tantrum. Kennedy-Kline angered quickly as the decibel levels increased.

Then Kennedy-Kline got laid off last October. "When I was forced into a situation where I wasn't given a choice, I realized my family needed me more than they need a paycheck."

Many other people have experienced similar wake-up calls, realizing the satisfaction derived from their careers and material possessions can be fleeting, while strong relationships endure, through good times and bad. Family and close friends provide comfort, compassion and stability, especially as the world seems to teeter out of control.

For Richard Rosser, a South Florida-based entrepreneur, the challenging economic times have reinforced his deepening relationships with his family. He and his wife, Susan, who have two young children, started a marketing company three years ago that has thrived. Yet, today's challenges give



Rosser pause to think about other storms that could come their way. He already had recognized that he couldn't have a better partner than Susan in business or life. "I had already made a conscious decision that what I had at home was pretty good, and the tough economy has reinforced that," he says. "It's about being in this together. It's about working together."

International speaker and life coach Amanda Gore says hard times show us how wonderful the "little things" in life are. "Hardship reminds us to reconnect our heads and our hearts, and our hearts with other people's hearts," she says. "There is nothing more important than that!"

"Families thought happiness came from buying stuff—the more we had, the happier we would be," Gore says. "Now, we have more time together as a family because we can't afford to have everyone running around doing different things, like eating out or shopping. We can focus on the truly important things in life—like love, connections and contributing."

Kennedy-Kline realized how desperate her situation was when Alex had another meltdown, screaming and crying, telling her she was "the worst mother ever." Kennedy-Kline resisted her first urge to reprimand him. Instead, she counted silently to three and said, "I'm listening to you."

He couldn't believe it, "No one ever listens to me," he said.

Her heart broke. "If you wanted to be heard in our house, you had to have a bigger voice. Alex often retreated within himself," she says.

Since then, the family has made an effort to improve communication and understanding. They eat dinner together, taking turns talking. Before bedtime, she spends time journaling with the boys, encouraging them to express their thoughts.

Kennedy-Kline also started a business from her home in southeastern Pa. Tara's Toy Box sells children's items to corporate charities.

And Alex, who once rarely communicated except through fits of rage, now shares his dreams. "Alex wants to be an astronaut so he can build a roller coaster on the moon," his mom says. "My response to him now is, *You could probably do that*. There's no reason he can't do the things he dreams."

### Rich Life

Erin Al-Mehairi's friends and family thought she was crazy. Why, in the midst of such an unstable economy, would the working mother of three quit her hospital public relations job of seven years to start her own business? Simple—layoffs and across-the-board pay cuts were shattering morale. "I wasn't going to make excuses or talk myself into staying," says Al-Mehairi, 34. "I had to do what was right for me to be successful. I realized that having a job does not define me. I define me."

So she joined the rank and file of entrepreneurs taking control of their income and, ultimately, their destiny. Al-Mehairi founded her own PR firm, Addison's Compass, named for her 2-year-old daughter, which offers public relations and marketing services for businesses in her small Amish-country town of Ashland, Ohio.

Al-Mehairi is like many entrepreneurs who recognize that the recession provides opportunities for creating their own prosperity. Richard and Susan Rossersay last year was their best so far for their 3-year-old marketing business. "Just because there are layoffs doesn't mean people don't need the kind of work we do—they're just outsourcing it," he says. The Rossers recently started a regional online magazine called *East* and have plans to expand in other metropolitan areas.

"A recession is a great opportunity to build wealth and create your own economic prosperity plan," says author David Bach, whose new book *Fight for Your Money: How to Stop Getting Ripped Off and Save a Fortune* is his seventh-consecutive best-seller. "What the recession has taught us is that now is a time to get excited because you can use a recession to your advantage."

Bach says tough economic times help strengthen our entrepreneurial muscle. "Starting your own business in a recession is like running against the wind," he says with the enthusiasm and vigor of a personal trainer motivating his weary client. "If you're training for a marathon by running with the wind, what are you going to do when you have to run against the wind? You have to run against the wind to learn how to run hard, lean and mean."

He continues the metaphor, "Anyone can succeed in a growing economy. But succeeding in a recession means, when things turn around, you're positioned for explosive growth." That's why Bach says business owners who are creating their own income and prosperity are a great example of lessons we've learned in the recession. "If you're willing to work in a recession like nobody is, then you'll experience boom times like nobody else does."

Al-Mehairi includes her two oldest children, 9-year-old Nassem and 5-year-old Emma, who help stuff bags and pass out promotional materials at events. "I hope by including them in my business, I'm setting a good example for them to become their own business owners one day," she says.

**"A recession is a great opportunity to build wealth and create your own economic prosperity plan."  
—David Bach**

So, with her entrepreneurial spirit and strong work ethic as her "compass," Al-Mehairi says she loves her new direction. "I am happy and prospering. I love where my life is going!"

### Better Business

The positive effects of a recession may sound like an oxymoron, but experts say there are valuable lessons we've learned in this downturn that will make businesses stronger in the long run.

Consider the following:

**We've gotten back to basics.** Take it from the man who co-authored that yellowing, dog-eared copy of *In Search of Excellence* on your bookshelf: "The basics are the basics are the basics," Tom Peters writes on his tenured management blog simply titled *Tom Peters!* "We get in trouble when we forget the basics. We get out of trouble when we remember the basics."

Peters teamed with Bob Waterman in 1982 on the little book that said America was in deep trouble because we failed to put people first, listen to our customers and make products that worked at the top of our business agendas.

"Survival—even growth!—in bad times comes from having wildly 'over'-invested in relationships and training and service and employee-customer-vendor loyalty, while behaving in a fiscally prudent manner in good times," Peters writes.

**We're open to opportunities that may come—even as blessings in disguise.** Self-professed geek Bryan Hefner of Williamsburg, Va., was working long hours in the technology sector when his employer closed the company's local office. Hefner raised his hand to become a part-time remote employee. What could have been a layoff became a win-win opportunity.

"I love technology!" Hefner says. "When my 6-year-old daughter gets off the bus in the afternoon, I'm here to greet her." And, in his spare time, he's polishing his entrepreneurial skills to prepare for new endeavors. "There is tremendous opportunity out there when you look for it."

**We're forced to be our best, even in the worst times.** "Sometimes, we have to get pushed out of the nest in order to fly," says syndicated radio host and financial expert Dave Ramsey, whose drawing witticisms on personal finance, government and best practices attract an audience of millions. "There's a lot of eagles out there that hadn't spread their wings in a while." He describes these eagles as bosses who, perhaps, got comfortable in their "golden handcuffs"; good employees who left good enough alone and didn't strive for great; and businesses that got away from doing what made them their first buck.

"Whether they're starting a new business or expanding their vision in this new economy, now, all of a sudden, I'm seeing these eagles soaring," Ramsey says. "Their creative juices are flowing again; they're smiling again; they're happy again. These are the right kinds of people that see this recession as an opportunity to improve. And this is the kind of fabulous talent that is out there, that you want in your business."

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