

# Your Next Five Moves



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Master the Art of  
Business Strategy

Patrick Bet-David  
with Greg Dinkin



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To my father, Gabreal Bet-David,  
the Aristotle of my life



## **Author's Note**

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I tell stories that go back more than thirty years and do my best to describe those events accurately. The people in the book identified by their first and last names are real people. Those mentioned only by first name are either composite characters or people whose names and identifying details have been changed. The essence of their stories is factual.





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## Introduction

# Before Your First Move

When I first watched *Magnus*, the documentary about Magnus Carlsen, I couldn't stop thinking about the parallels to business. Carlsen is a Norwegian chess prodigy who became a grand master at thirteen. Talk about a visionary; he is constantly thinking as many as fifteen moves ahead. In doing so, he has the uncanny ability to predict (and control) what his opponents will do. I was also impressed by his meticulous preparation. Because Carlsen has played the game in his mind so many times *before* it actually happens, he is unflappable in the heat of battle. Plus, he has to deal with something founders and CEOs face all the time. He said, "If you want to get to the top, there's always the risk that it will isolate you from other people."

After watching *Magnus*, I continued to think about how much successful entrepreneurs and chess masters have in common. It didn't surprise me when I learned that Tesla and SpaceX founder Elon Musk started playing chess at a young age. "He's able to see things more clearly in a way that no one else I know of can understand," his brother, Kimbal, said. "There's a thing in chess where you can see twelve moves ahead if you're a grand master. And in any particular situation, Elon can see things twelve moves ahead."

That quote about Musk put everything into perspective. Most people don't think more than one or two moves ahead. Those people are amateurs and flame out quickly in business. Effective strategy is about making a move and being prepared to launch another series of moves based on how the market or your competition reacts. You must think beyond your first strike to execute an effective strategy. When you start to get really good, you anticipate how others will react and can deploy a series of moves that are nearly impossible to counteract.

Though business is a game of thinking several moves ahead, this is not a book about chess. This book is about taking the vision and mindset of a chess master and applying it to business. In fact, you don't even have to know anything about the game. There aren't any specific chess examples in the pages that follow, but there are plenty of examples of successful men and women who *think* like winning chess players.

People who don't think more than one move ahead are driven by *ego*, *emotion*, and *fear*. Your top salesman threatens to quit if you don't give him a raise. The emotional amateur responds by saying "Nobody threatens me" or "We don't need him anyway." The practical strategist, on the other hand, is plotting his next moves.

The same approach applies to parenting. Giving kids whatever they demand—whether it's candy, an iPad, or permission to skip piano practice—feels fantastic. They smile and tell you how much they love you. You also know that the alternative—an all-out tantrum during which venom and hatred will be hurled at you—will feel awful. This scenario shows you that, as with most business decisions, one is clearly the *easier* choice; the other—which entails thinking five moves ahead—is the *more effective* choice.

I wish somebody had taught me to think this way when I was transitioning from salesman to sales manager to founder to CEO. At every stage of my development, this kind of critical thinking would have saved me millions of dollars and dozens of panic attacks. When I reflect on how I went from a hot-tempered, insecure, cocky

health club salesman to a strategic, self-aware, confident CEO, I see that the key was learning how to think at least five moves ahead.

Some of you overachievers may be wondering why *only* five moves ahead. There are two reasons. First, five moves is the sweet spot of thoughtful strategy and swift action. Though there may be times when you will want to think beyond five moves, such as at an annual off-site meeting or when you are analyzing a possible acquisition (or building a colony on Mars), thinking too many moves ahead can lead to paralysis by analysis. Five moves is enough to make sure you are anticipating future outcomes and seeing moves and counter-moves. The second reason is that, on a macro level, there are five moves you need to master to succeed in business. I've divided the book into these five moves to make sure you know exactly what you need to do to achieve success.

There are many things I can't do. I'm six foot five and 240 pounds but can't play basketball or throw a football. I can't write code or rebuild an engine from scratch. But if there's one thing I can do, it's help entrepreneurs and C-suite executives put together a strategy to conquer a market. When I sit down in a boardroom with a founder or a CEO, we approach strategy as a game. The only difference between business and chess (or Monopoly or Final Fantasy, for that matter) is that we're playing for millions (or billions) of dollars instead of bragging rights. With this mindset, leaders learn how to create the strategies that position them for growth.

As an adviser to executives and a guide to students and aspiring entrepreneurs, one of the most common questions I get is: Should I quit my job to start a business? Other frequent questions are: Should I raise money by giving up equity or issuing debt? How do I set up my compensation structure to attract and retain C-suite executives or a 1099-based sales team? Should I expand globally now or wait until market conditions change?

The simple questions in business are binary. Their answer is either yes or no. The trap is believing that *all* answers are binary. The

answer to any question is actually a series of moves deployed in the proper sequence. “Experts” often make things worse by giving yes or no answers as if everyone fits into the same box. That’s why, as you’ll see, our first move is figuring out who you are and what you want.

The other problem I see is a lack of planning. Enthusiasm can be powerful, as long as it’s coupled with planning five moves ahead. Too many people want to make move number five without first going through the first four moves. There’s a sequence to it. To reach the next level, you have to shift from one-track (and one-move) thinking to seeing many moves ahead.

If you are clear that you want to be an entrepreneur, quitting your job may be move four, or it could lead to a series of moves to create a lucrative position within your current company (becoming an intrapreneur, which we’ll cover in chapter 3). If you have a family and don’t have any savings, quitting your job is definitely not move one. In fact, you may not ever have to quit your job to become exactly who you want to be. The information in this book applies to people in all phases of life and at all levels of business. You may be a CFO who loves being a CFO or a freelancer who enjoys the variety and flexibility of being a “solopreneur.” One of the things I love so much about business is that there’s a path for everyone—as long as you have self-awareness and the willingness to think five moves ahead.

Regardless of which sequence fits your circumstances, what sets shrewd strategists apart is their ability to *anticipate*. The best military leaders have a knack for planning several moves ahead. The top fighters know how to set up their opponent. They may be willing to lose round one because a move that seems to be working against them early in the fight is actually being used to bait their opponent into a mistake in a later round. World-class poker players do the same thing, making a bluff and sacrificing chips early in the game to set into motion a series of moves that will ultimately bust their opponent. And though we don’t necessarily think of Warren Buffett as a chess master, his sustained success comes from his patient, strate-

gic approach. Buffett isn't trying to win a particular trade or even the quarter or year. He's making a series of moves to win the long game.

NBA legend Kobe Bryant told me, less than six months before his tragic death, that when he was thirteen, he already knew he wanted to be one of the greatest basketball players of all time. At that time he was the fifty-sixth-ranked player in the nation. He created a hit list of all the names ahead of him until, five years later, he passed them all and became a first-round pick right out of high school. Rumor has it that Michael Jordan used playing for the 1992 US Olympic "Dream Team" as a way to learn the weaknesses of his teammates and use those weaknesses against them when he returned to the NBA. Both of these players were master strategists who were always thinking at least five moves ahead. You will need to think this way, too, especially if you plan on competing in your market and eventually dominating your industry.



In the pages that follow, I'll give you everything you need to think like a master strategist. I'm also going to show you how to:

1. Differentiate yourself and communicate your unique value
2. Find investors and build a high valuation for a lucrative exit
3. Attract top talent and design incentives to cultivate and keep them
4. Maintain systems during rapid growth and staying power/sanity during chaos
5. Process issues, make decisions, and effectively solve problems
6. Identify who you want to be and the legacy you will create
7. Negotiate, sell, and strategize as if your life depended on it

Maybe you picked up this book thinking that you lack the education or resources to build a business. Or you might be the person with a high IQ who can't make a decision to save your life because

you're always overthinking it. It doesn't matter where you start. If you have any doubt that someone can't grow to be an entrepreneur, consider my story.

Anyone who knew me growing up would have labeled me "least likely to succeed." You're going to see how I went from a guy who couldn't think ahead at all (and as a result had twenty-six credit cards with a total of \$49,000 in debt) to a CEO. You'll see how I founded PHP Agency, a financial services marketing company with sixty-six agents in one office in Northridge, California, and, ten years later, had grown it to more than fifteen thousand agents with 120 offices in forty-nine states and Puerto Rico.

I'm proud of the fact that our agency is recognized for its unique diversity, millennial culture, and social media presence. We did it in the life insurance industry, which has a "boring" reputation. (The average life insurance agent is a fifty-seven-year-old white man; our average agent is a thirty-four-year-old Latino woman.) We haven't been successful because of our connections or thanks to any good fortune. In fact, my personal background proves that entrepreneurs can come from anywhere and don't have any qualities that you don't also possess.

## **The Least Likely CEO**

I grew up in Tehran, the capital of Iran. During the Iran-Iraq war in 1987, my family lived with the possibility of an attack at any moment. Even though I was only eight, the sounds still stick with me. Every attack began with a siren, and the sound alone could pierce your soul. Then a voice would warn of enemy planes crossing the border. Finally, we would hear the whistling sound of bombs falling through the air.

After each whistle, we prayed that our shelter wouldn't get hit. I remember sitting next to my parents, frightened beyond belief. Finally, my mother had had enough. She told my dad that if we



didn't leave the country, their son was going to get stuck and have to serve in the Iranian army. My dad realized that the surest way to fail would be to fail to act.

My sister, my parents, and I got into our white, two-door Renault and headed toward Karaj, a city two hours from Tehran. To get there we had to cross a bridge. Right after we crossed, there was a massive flash behind us. Dad told my sister and me not to look back, but we couldn't help ourselves. I wish we had listened. When we turned around, we saw the devastation of a bomb that had dropped onto the bridge less than a hundred yards behind us—right after we had crossed safely. I still have no words for it, other than to say that no one, much less two terrified kids, should ever have to witness something like that.

I can replay that moment in my head as if it were yesterday. Times like that can break you, or they can build in you an amazing tolerance for pain and adversity. Somehow we managed to skirt disaster and escape. We lived in a refugee camp for two years in Erlangen, Germany, before eventually moving to Glendale, California, on November 28, 1990. When we arrived in the United States, I had just turned twelve, spoke little English, and couldn't escape the horrible mental images of fleeing a war-ravaged country.

Thanks to my parents' decision to make the right move in the face of life and death, I'm alive today, a proud US citizen with a thriving business and a beautiful family of my own.



When you learn to think five moves ahead, it may seem as though you're becoming a mind reader. What's actually happening is you've seen the moves so many times that you can anticipate what your opponent is going to say or do next. I bet you are wondering: Can I do this? Can I truly go from a person who lacks experience to someone who thinks strategically and builds an empire?

You might be saying, “But, Pat, you have the gift of gab. You have the pedigree of an entrepreneur. You, Pat, are a lot smarter than I am.”

Smarter than you? Really?

Consider the following:

1. I barely graduated high school. I had a 1.8 GPA, got 880 on my SATs (out of a possible 1,600), and never set foot inside a four-year college. I was constantly told by friends and relatives that I would never amount to anything in life.
2. You think I have the gift of gab? At age forty-one, I *still* get teased about my accent. As an immigrant teenager, I was more scared of pronouncing certain words than I was of war. Words such as “Wednesday,” “island,” and “government” challenged me the most. That was when reruns of *Gilligan’s Island* made the TV show really popular. You can only imagine how I pronounced both words—and how brutally I was teased for it.
3. My parents divorced after they arrived in the United States. I lived mostly with my mom, who was on welfare. Even though I was a tall kid who loved sports, I didn’t play any because my mom couldn’t afford the \$13.50 monthly membership fee for the YMCA.
4. I enlisted in the army at age eighteen because I believed I had no other choice. At age twenty-one, when those with the real brains were starting their careers, I was selling gym memberships at Bally Total Fitness.

On the one hand, it would seem as though I had no business beating the odds. On the other, it was those very challenges that fueled my success. Had it not been for all the adversity I experienced, I wouldn’t have had such a strong desire to succeed.

Let’s get this straight right now: I cannot teach you desire. If you prefer to avoid hard work, if you feel no desire to do something important with your life, there’s not much I can do for you. This book is for people who are curious to find out what their best looks

like and are looking for the right strategies to help them get there. They're not just looking for motivation; they're looking for proven strategies that work. They want to find effective formulas to speed up the process of getting to the next level. Does that sound like you?



Speaking of formulas, I've been as diligent in looking for them as I've been in sharing them. Back in 2013, I started making videos about what worked for me in business. It was just me, my right-hand man, Mario, and a small Canon EOS Rebel T3 camera (which is typically used only for still photography). We first called those videos "Two Minutes with Pat" and put them on YouTube. Within a year, we had sixty subscribers and changed the name to Valuetainment. Three years later, we had 100,000 subscribers and created a reputation for producing useful and practical content. In March 2020, we passed 2 million YouTube subscribers. Along the way, I advised people from all walks of life. At our first big conference in May 2019, called the Vault, 600 entrepreneurs from 43 countries in 140 industries traveled to Dallas to attend. They ranged from small start-ups to executives to a CEO running a business with top-line revenue of half a billion dollars.

Why did people spend their hard-earned money to fly halfway around the globe to attend that conference? Why all those subscribers? It's because all the philosophies and strategies I've learned are *transferable*. You can easily understand them and put them to use immediately. Many of my followers began calling themselves "Valuetainers" and seeing positive results. Though we're not a traditional business school like Harvard, Stanford, or Wharton, Valuetainment has become a breeding ground for both successful executives and entrepreneurs worldwide.

I firmly believe that entrepreneurship can solve most of the world's problems, and I have learned from experience not only how it can be done but how to teach it to others. From my personal con-

versations to our group meetings to tense negotiations, I'm putting every bit of wisdom I have into this book because I've seen it work and know you can achieve similar success.

## The Path to Achieving Your Goals in Business

In your hands is a complete playbook for accomplishing whatever vision you create. You'll learn not only the skills required but also the *mindset* required. Along the way, you'll see what it takes to be a better leader and human being. By the time you have studied all five moves, you will have everything you need to achieve whatever type of success in business you are after. The five moves are:

1. Master Knowing Yourself
2. Master the Ability to Reason
3. Master Building the Right Team
4. Master Strategy to Scale
5. Master Power Plays

Move 1 is about **knowing yourself**, a topic rarely talked about in business circles. What you'll see is that thinking ahead is impossible without self-awareness. With self-awareness, you gain the power of choice and control over your actions. Above all, with the knowledge of who you want to be, you will know which direction to take as well as why it matters.

Move 2 is about **the ability to reason**. I'll show you how to process issues and provide a methodology to deal with any decision you'll face, no matter what the stakes. No decision is black and white, and this section will teach you how to see all the shades of gray and move forward decisively despite the uncertainty.

Move 3 is about understanding others so you can **build the right team** around you—the team that will help you grow. Though you

may view some of my tactics as Machiavellian, at the heart of everything I do is leading people to find the best in themselves. I do so by asking questions that uncover their deepest desires. Just as I challenge people to understand themselves, I will challenge you to understand your relationships. Building trust in employees and partners creates profitable alliances, speeds up all parts of your business, and helps you sleep at night.

Move 4 is about how to implement **strategy to scale** to create exponential growth. We'll cover everything from how to raise capital to how to create rapid growth and how to hold people accountable for their actions. By the time you get to this section, you'll be thinking like a seasoned CEO and learning how to gain—and maintain—momentum as well as how to create systems that allow you to track and measure the key parts of your business.

Move 5 is about **power plays**. We'll discuss how you can beat the Goliath in your industry. You'll also see how to control your narrative and leverage social media to frame your story. You'll learn about psychology and gain insider secrets from one of the most notorious business organizations in the world: the Mob (yes, the Mob—and you'll soon see why!). We'll close out with some incredible stories that show how winning entrepreneurs think five moves ahead.



Even though I have no formal education, I have read more than 1,500 business-related books. I was, and remain, obsessed with learning. I've squeezed every bit of wisdom out of these readings and applied it to my business. As Valuetainment started to take off, I was able to interview many brilliant minds and strategists. It has served and continues to serve a dual purpose: I have been able to improve my own business and life, and, as a by-product, viewers from all over the globe have benefited from this wisdom.

To help you understand how the most successful entrepreneurs and strategists think and operate, I'm going to share their stories. These include people I've interviewed, such as Ray Dalio, Billy Beane, Robert Greene, Kobe Bryant, Patty McCord, and a host of mobsters including Salvatore "Sammy the Bull" Gravano. The book also includes people I've studied and admired from afar, such as Steve Jobs, Sheryl Sandberg, and Bill Gates. All of them are fascinating, and their stories will help bring my advice to life.

The entire purpose of this book is to enable *you*, regardless of the position you're currently in, to thrive. By the time you're finished reading, you'll know exactly how to make your next five moves.

My goal is for you to create a series of "Aha!" moments—and to teach your brain to process information and strategize in a new way. Imagine the frustration of trying to unlock a safe without the right combination. Then imagine discovering the combination and opening up a vault of business wisdom. By reading this book, you'll gain the level of confidence of knowing not only what to do but also how to do it. And as a result, you'll gain the wherewithal to solve problems at all levels while growing your personal brand and business.

# MOVE 1



# MASTER KNOWING YOURSELF





## Who Do You Want to Be?

I believe that having questions is better than having answers because it leads to more learning. After all, isn't the point of learning to help you get what you want? Don't you have to start with what you want and figure out what you have to learn in order to get it?

—Ray Dalio, author of *Principles: Life and Work* and investor, on 2012 *Time* list of world's 100 most influential people

**M**ichael Douglas, playing Gordon Gekko in the 1987 film *Wall Street*, says to Bud Fox, played by Charlie Sheen, “And I’m not talking a \$400,000-a-year working Wall Street stiff flying first class and being comfortable. I’m talking about liquid. Rich enough to have your own jet.”

Some people read that quote and say, “Making \$400,000 a year and being comfortable sounds like a dream come true.” Some say nothing at all and claim they have no interest in material things. Others pound their chest and scream to the heavens that they’re going to have their own jet. What matters to me is what *you* think, since all your choices will be dictated by where you want to go.

Whether it’s a high school student asking for direction or a CEO running a \$500 million company, when someone asks me a question,

I respond by saying, “It all depends on how honestly you can answer this question: Who do you want to be?”

In this chapter, I’ll guide you to answer that question with clarity. I’ll also show you how to go back to the blackboard of your life and set a new vision for yourself that will fire you up and set you in motion. I’ll show you why making a plan and committing to it will unleash all the energy and discipline you’ll ever need.

## **Answer Questions to Reveal Your Deepest Desire**

Nothing matters unless you understand what makes you tick and who you want to be. Far too often, consultants and influencers assume that everyone wants the same thing. When I’m speaking to a CEO or a founder, I start by asking questions. Before making any recommendations, I gather as much info as I can about who the person wants to be and what he or she wants out of life.

I understand that not everyone knows who he or she wants to be. It’s normal not to have all the answers immediately. Remember that this question—and every move in this book—is a process. All the examples I give and stories I tell exist for *you*. They’re meant to get you to reflect and better understand yourself. If you don’t have a clear answer at this point in time, you’re in the majority. All I ask is that you keep an open mind and keep reading with the goal, in due time, of answering this question.

The purpose of this Move is to identify what matters to you the most and help put a strategy together that fits your level of commitment and vision. I may influence you to question certain decisions or ways you’ll go about fulfilling your vision, but it’s up to you to decide to stretch yourself and think bigger.

Who do you want to be?

As you continue to ask yourself this question, your answer will

determine your level of urgency. If you want to build a little mom-and-pop corner store, you don't have to treat business like war and you can be laid back in your approach. If you're looking to disrupt an industry, you'd better be armed with the right story, right team, right data, and right strategies. Really take the time to get clear about your story—exactly who you want to be—or you won't be able to soldier on when things get tough. And in business, things always get tough.

### **Make Pain Your Fuel**

I could sit here and tell you about the life that you may live one day. Talking about the cars, the jets, and the celebrities you meet all sounds wonderful, but first things first. You are going to have to endure more anguish than you can imagine to get there. Those who can tolerate pain the most—the ones with the most endurance—give themselves the highest chance of winning in business.

By the time we've been on our own for a few years, many of us have become cynical. It's an ugly thing, but I've seen it happen too often. We all have big dreams growing up, and we make a lot of plans for ourselves. Then life gets in the way, the plans don't happen the way we thought they would, and we lose faith in our ability to focus on who we want to be. You may not notice it, but it also hurts your ability to make your next moves.

We may even start to think, "Hey, what's the point in saying I'm going to do something big if I'm not going to follow through? Better to just aim low and play it safe."

The only thing separating us from greatness is a vision and a plan for achieving greatness. When you're fighting for a cause, a dream, something greater than yourself, you will find the enthusiasm, passion, and joy that make life a great adventure. The key is identifying your cause and knowing who you want to be.

In the summer of 1999, I was twenty years old and had left the army. My plan: to become the Middle Eastern Arnold Schwarzenegger. That June, I felt certain I would become the next Mr. Olympia, marry a Kennedy, become an actor, and eventually govern the state of California.

As the first step in my plan, I got a job at a local gym, hoping to be noticed as soon as possible. At the time, the biggest fitness chain in the area was Bally Total Fitness. With the help of my sister, I got an offer from a Bally in Culver City. It had to have been the smallest and most antiquated Bally location in the state of California.

Despite the less-than-ideal circumstances, I was promoted and transferred to the largest Bally gym, which happened to be in Hollywood. My plan was working! Because I kept getting better at selling memberships, I was making \$3,500 a month. Compared to what I had made in the army, it felt like millions.

One day, my supervisor, Robby, offered me an assistant manager position at the Bally in Chatsworth, thirty miles outside Hollywood. He wanted me to turn the club around; it had been hitting only 40 percent of its monthly goal.

I didn't want to go to Chatsworth. I wanted to be a weekend manager in Hollywood, a position that paid \$55,000 a year. Robby promised me that if I turned things around in Chatsworth, the job would be mine. The only other contender for it was a longtime employee named Edwin. As long as I outperformed him, I could bank on becoming the weekend manager in Hollywood.

Fast-forward ninety days. We were able to turn things around at the Chatsworth club, taking it from 40 percent of the monthly revenue goal to 115 percent. I was near the top of the leaderboard companywide, well ahead of Edwin. When I got a call from Robby to meet, I assumed that corporate must be pleased. My plans were coming together. I was going to meet the fitness legend Joe Weider, be spotted by a major Hollywood agent, get my acting career off the ground, and meet a Kennedy. I can vividly remember the anticipation I felt that afternoon before my meeting with Robby.

The moment I walked into Robby's office, I knew something was off. This wasn't the same guy who had promised me the position if I outperformed Edwin.

That's just paranoia, I reassured myself. Give him the benefit of the doubt and hear what he has to say.

"Patrick, I'm so proud of the performance you and your team put up the last ninety days," Robby said. "I want you to stay there for another six months and take the Chatsworth club to the next level."

"What do you mean?" I asked. "I made it very clear that I wanted the weekend manager position in Hollywood." That position, he said, had already been filled.

At that point, my blood was boiling. I couldn't believe a grown man could look me in the eye after going back on his word. I had been so focused on beating the goal that I hadn't put any thought into what I would do if it didn't work out.

Who'd gotten the position? You guessed it: Edwin. Why? Edwin had been with Bally for six years; I'd been there for only nine months. Never mind my accomplishments, kicking Edwin's tail on the national leaderboard. Never mind that, according to objective data, I had earned it.

In fairness to Robby, he wasn't being unethical. Because he had to follow marching orders from corporate, he was being political. In many ways it was a blessing to learn at a young age that corporations have agendas and that advancement is rarely based on merit alone. Robby could tell I was furious, and he asked me to step outside to cool off. I walked to the parking lot and tried to think. I imagined how these events were going to dictate the rest of my life. I played the movie in my mind, and I just couldn't accept how it would end if I accepted Robby's decision. I didn't realize it then, but I was already processing my next moves. The only challenge was that I was reacting to someone else's move rather than executing my own. I walked back into his office and asked him if the decision was final. He said it was.

At that point, I looked him in the eye and told him I quit. Initially, he thought I was kidding, but I was confident about my decision. What's the point of working somewhere that doesn't give you a clear direction on what you need to do to advance in the company? Why put myself through the misery? It was at that moment I realized I could not live another day with my destiny in someone else's control.

I wasn't thinking like a winner at that point in my career. Given my inability to think more than one or two moves ahead, I was still an amateur. As a result, I was petrified. Driving home, I felt as though I'd made the worst decision of my life. My coworkers started calling me to ask what the hell I'd been thinking. My family couldn't believe it, either.

By the time I got into bed that night, most of the emotion had worn off, and I was left wondering what I was going to do next. Later in my career, I learned how to process while in the heat of the moment. Thankfully, that night I was able to calm down just enough to think about my next moves. When I think back on it now, I realize that it was a defining moment in my life.

I had to look inward and get clear about who I wanted to be—and where I wanted to go. The list I made looked something like this:

1. I want to make the name Bet-David mean something, so much so that my parents will be proud of the decision they made to leave Iran.
2. I want to work with people who keep their commitments—especially leaders with whom I work and who impact my career path.
3. I want a clear formula for how to get to the top based purely on my results. I can't stand surprises or the moving of goalposts.
4. I want to build a team that has bought into the same vision I have to see how far we can go collectively. This includes running mates whom I can trust 100 percent.

5. I want to make enough money that I'm no longer controlled by other people's politics and agendas.
6. I want to get my hands on every single strategy book out there to see the game from a broader point of view so I can learn how to minimize corporate bullying.

Once I was clear about who I wanted to be, I could see my next moves. The first step was finding a sales job with merit-based pay and clear expectations. Twenty years later, I can tell you that clarity comes from making decisions that are aligned with your core beliefs and values.

## Use Your Haters and Doubters to Drive You

I shared that story about being denied the promotion because I want you to tap into your own pain. It's those moments of feeling powerless, angry, or sad that clue you in to your deepest drive. Don't underestimate the power of shame to motivate you. When Elon Musk left South Africa for Canada at age seventeen, his father had nothing but disdain for his eldest son. In Neil Strauss's November 2017 *Rolling Stone* profile, he quoted Musk's description of his dad's send-off: "He said rather contentiously that I'd be back in three months, that I'm never going to make it, that I'm never going to make anything of myself. He called me an idiot all the time. That's the tip of the iceberg, by the way."

Barbara Corcoran, the real estate mogul whom you may have seen on *Shark Tank*, was one of ten children growing up in a blue-collar New Jersey town. In 1973, she was twenty-three and working as a waitress in a diner. While there, she met a man who lent her a thousand dollars to start a real estate company. They fell in love and were set to live happily ever after. Had the script played out, my guess is that Corcoran would have built a decent real estate business. But in

1978, the man dumped her and married Corcoran's assistant. To rub salt into the wound, he said to her, "You'll never succeed without me."

In a November 2016 interview with *Inc.* magazine, Corcoran said that she had turned fury into her best friend. "The minute a man talked down to me, I was my best self," she said. "I was going to get from that person what I wanted, come hell or high water. . . . He was not going to dismiss me. I would not tolerate it. I would say quietly to myself, 'F@#& you.'"

That type of rejection, that type of shame, can be one hell of a motivator. I want you to think back to the teachers, coaches, bosses, parents, or relatives who have put you down over the years. This doesn't mean you have to carry their negativity around with you. Instead, you can use it as rocket fuel. Corcoran channeled her rejection into resolve. As a result, she built the most successful residential real estate firm in New York and sold it for \$66 million. Then she wrote a best-selling book and became a TV star on *Shark Tank*.

As an investor in entrepreneurs, Corcoran actually looks for people who are fueled by pain. She sees growing up poor as an asset. She said, "A bad childhood? Yes! I love it like an insurance policy. An abusive father? Fabulous! Never had a father? Better! My most successful entrepreneurs didn't all have miserable childhoods, but somebody said they couldn't, and they are still pissed."

I'm not making light of your pain. Believe me, I experienced enough shame as a child to last a lifetime. It hurt then, and it still hurts now. Put-downs, insults, and abuse can be either your excuse or your fuel. And it's damn powerful fuel.

Michal Jordan's late father said, "If you want to get the best out of Michael Jordan, you tell him he can't do something." Five years after he retired from the NBA, when Jordan gave his Hall of Fame induction speech, guess what he talked about most? All of his haters and doubters. He still hadn't gotten over those who had put him down. Leroy Smith Jr. was the guy who had taken his roster spot when Jordan had gotten cut from the high school team. To show you