

Foreword

Welcome to this book! Firstly, I would like to congratulate you on taking the time and effort to invest in yourself. It's one of the greatest investments you can make in life. For the ultimate experience during your stay on this planet, awareness of personal growth is important to keep your life on track. It keeps you focused on what you want, either for yourself or together with others.

I wrote this book with commitment to people and my desire to help them achieve more with less effort when they view themselves and their environment differently. This book is designed to help people who are amid their own personal quest to shape their lives more consciously, for those who feel the need to be more at the helm of their ship and manifest their lives instead of being molded by the 'reality' of daily life.

The following pages are nothing more than my own life experience and insights. You do not have to agree with what I claim, or how I state them. What matters is that you become encouraged to develop your own conscious opinion of yourself. To see yourself more as the center of your own world. To start making choices for 'something' that really matters to you, while at the same time realizing that this does not mean you are selfish or egotistical. On the contrary, you are the most important person in your life and when you take good care of yourself, you can be a better person for others.

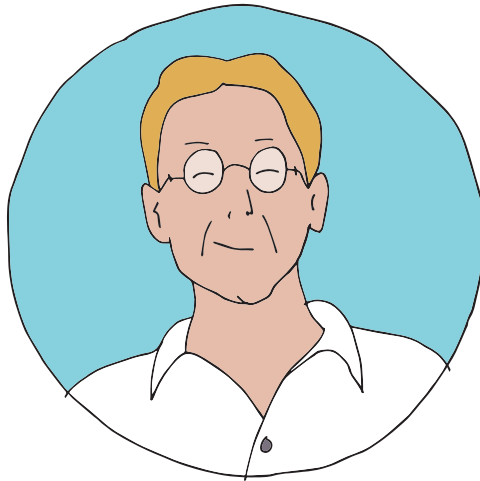
I am not a writer, coach, trainer, or consultant. I am certainly not a psychologist, sociologist, therapist, or someone who thinks 'he's got it all figured out'. To be perfectly honest, I still don't know exactly who or what I am, but I do know what I want. Just like you, I am a human being, who is living, exploring, experiencing, and trying to make sense of life. I live my life in my own authentic way, as much as possible with caring, creativity, connecting, and being positive, but also with my own personal baggage of shortcomings, insecurities, talents, disappointments, joys, passions, and hardships. With my strengths and my heart-felt desires, I continue looking for what else is possible. Because I too, think my life matters.

This book came to be thanks to everyone I have met in my life, professionally or privately, for a short or long period, in harmony or in tension: all those people who love me, or who have ever loved me, everyone who trusted me, believed in me and supported me. But also, especially those who have hurt or opposed me

in my efforts to persevere in my 'own way', in what I believed in and still stand for. All of you have helped me continue to develop myself into who I have become today. I am truly grateful to everyone for helping guide my growth towards becoming a more authentic human being, something I may eventually become someday, or perhaps never! But I am especially grateful to Fenna and Jan, who have taught me the most important life lesson, which is who I really want to be!

I am grateful for all your contributions to my life in any way: they were indispensable for me in writing this book.

Thank you!





Introduction

For our contemporary society, the past 20 years have been extremely dynamic, to say the least. And, it's had a great impact on our lives. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, we have witnessed digitization, globalization, severe geopolitical events, financial crises that continue to follow one another, refugee issues, privacy, racism and discrimination, EU developments, and COVID-19. Especially during the Corona period, something has awoken in people. There is a stronger sense of consciousness, and a kind of new desire. A process that had been dormant for years, developing steadily but slowly, suddenly seemed to reveal itself more than ever before. In a short period of time, our lives drastically changed as we experienced working from home, the importance of connection between colleagues and loved ones, our partners and the family or household, hard work without financial results, restricted freedoms, and the importance of health. Almost everything came with countless uncertainties. Especially the importance and need to express ourselves. An important right and privilege of our Western society is that we have the freedom of speech and movement. Because of government-imposed restrictions to contain the virus, it soon became clear how important these rights mean to us. As a result, we came to realize what really matters more than ever before. In the West, people, as individuals and as human beings, are raised in society to be unique and authentic beings, who want, and especially, need to experience themselves. We realize that we want to be free to make our own choices, and to have purpose in life, which seems to completely suit us. This process will only presumably continue. But is this something that comes naturally? It might just lead to more frustration and inner turmoil. Reality shows that expressing this feeling is one thing, but actively pursuing it is quite another. The question is: how do you do that? How do you find purpose in something that is so important and really matters to you?

We have managed to create an amazingly beautiful society for ourselves. Yet, of course, there are certainly pitfalls. In the Netherlands, we live in one of the most developed countries in the world and score high as one of the happiest on the planet. The Dutch retirement plan, education, and health care systems are ranked among the best in the world. Dutch citizens are cared for and pampered by 'Father State' and citizens can always fall back on the system to take care of

them when needed. Good living and working conditions are an acquired right, and the Dutch elected government has played a primary role in this through implementing specific laws and regulations to protect its' people as much as possible. This, of course, is a good thing, especially when it comes to the weakest members of society. But there is also a downside. While much in the Netherlands has been centrally regulated to make things safer, nicer, and more comfortable for its citizens, it can also come at the expense of an individual's self-reliance, and their ability to take care of themselves or set things in motion that are important for their continued welfare.

Until now, prosperity has been described mainly from the point of view of material and physical well-being, but this has become less important due to established rights and basic services we now enjoy. Our mental well-being is now under much more pressure. There is often something missing, or gnawing at us, that we cannot exactly put our finger on, or because we seem unable to break through our dormant sense of *dis-ease*. Now there is the feeling that we are the ones 'being lived', instead of the ones doing the living. We are working harder and harder, experiencing more stress, and getting stuck in our own thoughts. It's a vicious circle. Increasingly there are more doubts about life we ruminate on, which is time-consuming and tiresome. Especially because the people around us are experiencing the same feeling of helplessness. Believe it or not, young, or old, rich or poor, dark or light skin-colored, gay or straight, male or female: we are all searching for a life that will make us feel good. Everyone, in their own way, is trying to find a way to 'come home' – a place to live their lives in the way that suits them the best. People are looking for that 'sacred space' that allows them to show what they stand for. They want to use their talents in such a way that they matter, not only for themselves, but also for the people around them.

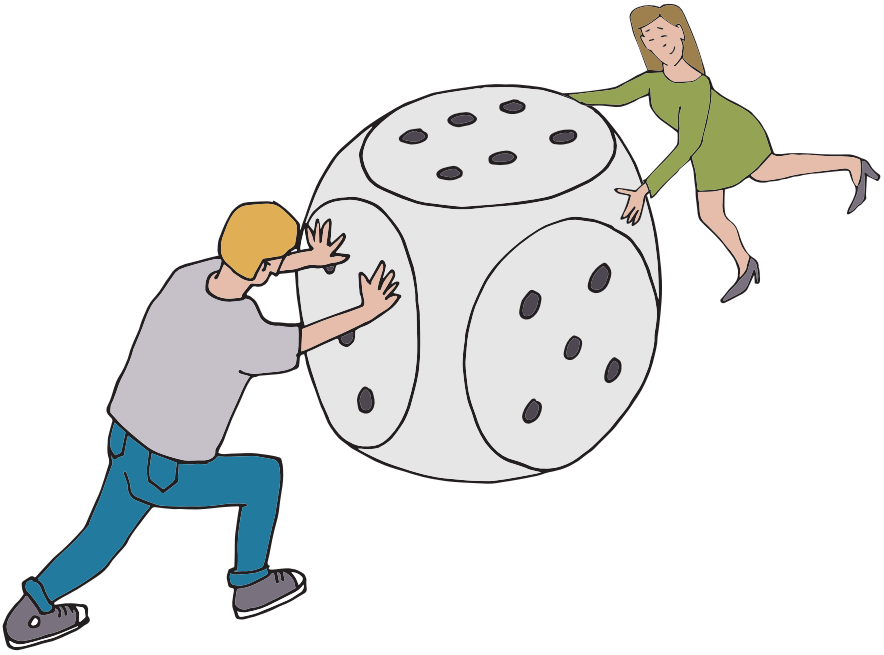
Unfortunately, as a skill this is usually not taught to us. That's why it's essential to take better care of ourselves. Truth be told, nobody else is going to do it for you. You – and you alone – are responsible for shaping your mental well-being. Of course, you can always consult others, but ultimately the responsibility rests on your shoulders.

Your Life Really Matters! is a personal life-endeavor. It will help you gain insights into your own personal operating manual, and you will understand which knobs you can turn to take care of your personal affairs based on your qualities, talents, and preferences. This book deals with various life matters such as 'who am I and do I do the things I want to do', 'why do I do the things I do', 'what do I need to do to adjust' and 'how am I going to make this happen in real life' and 'how I am going to continue with it'. I incorporated many of my own experiences from my training and coaching sessions as possible to reflect the theories and concepts based on real life situations. To ensure the privacy of those involved, I have slightly modified the context around the characters and asked their permission to share their life stories. This will help you have as vivid and real-life of a picture as possible so that you can recognize yourself more easily and develop a framework more quickly.

The idea is that you realize that you are 'normal' and that you are not different from others in the way you think and with your [often] unconscious behavior. It might be a good idea to share your personal discoveries with others. Thinking out loud about your insights accelerates your process of growth and development. By the way, you will be amazed at how others recognize things about you. But most importantly, about themselves. Before you know it, you'll be having deep, personal conversations that will benefit all your relationships.

Reading *Your Life Really Matters!* will get you off to a good start. Take notes in the book, underline noteworthy points, highlight paragraphs; after all, this is primarily *your* personal workbook. Re-read sections that interest you. Use this book like a reference book; you'll notice that different things will pop up.

Acting will really make a difference. That's the only way. Many have successfully gone before you. Have a good journey!



**Don't sweat the
small stuff**

Children tend to get overwhelmed when they start playing games with others. Of course, it's fun but most importantly, it helps them develop socially and discover the limits of their own abilities with others, but also with themselves. Playing games was never really my thing. I only liked games where I could bluff and talk a lot. However, that often led to disagreements, because apparently the rules were not always clear, or because some cheated [me included].

Playing games with the family or with friends is the most natural thing in the world. It's also a lot of fun. You can outdo each other or beat others together under the guise of 'it's just a game, and it's all part of the game'. In the rule booklet, there are usually clear, set rules to play by, or you can just Google them. And if an ignorant newcomer joins, it's no problem, he will soon know how it works, 'just read it and we'll tell you the rest'.

Now, suppose you are playing a great game that is really lots of fun. On the board, you are one of the regular players. It all looks very promising, with lots of interesting pursuits, but you still don't exactly know what the objective of the game is. The rules of the game are never fully explained, and you still haven't figured out what way you can control, or set the game to your own advantage, so that you can win as a team, or as an individual. You'll find that you are often on guard as something always happens, such as others suddenly ignoring a game rule, starts cheating, or even knocking over the board right about the time when they are starting to lose. Often, you have figured it out way too late, as you started the game with only good intentions. Before you know it, you'll be taken by surprise or get disappointed. Sometimes everything is vague. You don't know who your fellow players or opponents are, and as the game progresses, this might change too. At some point, the final goal of the game becomes clear, but for some reason, others might convince you that you got it wrong, or they'll give a completely different meaning to it. You might also discover that you have not been given all the necessary attributes from the game box to manipulate this exciting game to your liking and entitled to your well-deserved victory. And then there's also the uncertainty of what a victory ultimately looks like. And should you realize this, chances are, others will not always easily acknowledge your success. So, does this feel like a game that energizes you? And now imagine participating

in several other games on other boards simultaneously? Are you having fun yet? Do you want to continue?

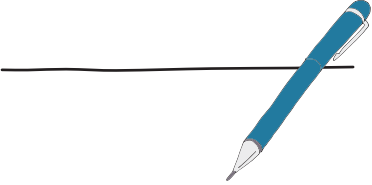
The described game is a metaphor for life. I am not saying that life is a game, but life is often played that way. We operate on different boards where things often go differently than we expected. As a trainer, I often hear people talk about their lives from a state of powerlessness. They want to play along so much, but sometimes don't know how things work together and how things work out with people. Especially now, when there is so much going on and life feels like it's in high gear when we are required to change and be flexible, we often can only see the complexity of life. As a result, we often feel annoyed, stressed, disappointed, get numbed, and experience feelings we would rather not. Sometimes it's almost impossible to ward off the negativity and other unwanted dynamics around us. Before you know it, you are dragged down and feel empty and distraught. While normally, that's not the way you really are.

What would it be like if you could understand when things were getting difficult between you and others quicker and easier? When you know why people around you react the way they do, and what circumstances trigger you, causing you to exhibit certain behavior that does not help you at all and keeps you stuck in the same issues? And when you start to realize why working harder makes no sense at all, and can even make the situation worse?

Consciously becoming aware of what we are experiencing means that we are thinking differently than we are commonly used to. We need to become more aware of our personal automatisms and take more responsibility for our own thinking. We should not see others as a threat, but as fellow travelers, who – like us – are going through the same struggle. Only then can we play the game optimally. We can play together rather than against each other. That's the core of our personal growth. Once we realize that we can collectively co-create, we can shape our current society that will allow us to face the challenges of the world. And that means, starting with yourself, even if that might mean still getting irritated by others. As soon as you discover your own instructions, you will develop yourself as a 'more right-thinking' person who is aware of his own limitations. And you'll understand others better too. Then you'll realize that everyone's facing the

same issues and striving for the same things. But also, that others are perhaps facing it differently. By taking this path and becoming more aware of the effect of your thoughts, will empower you with more freedom!

Personal learning moment:



Which games in life bother you the most?

What bothers you the most about them?

Other insights:



**Retreat.....and pull
up the gates!**

Something that really dawned on me as a father was taking my children to swim classes. Maybe it was the smell of warm chlorine combined with a screaming lifeguard, who was trying to teach crying kids the backstroke, while holding a swim hook. Or maybe it was how proud I felt when they got their swim certificate and thinking how courageous my own kids were while they were bobbing with half-soaked head in the pool.

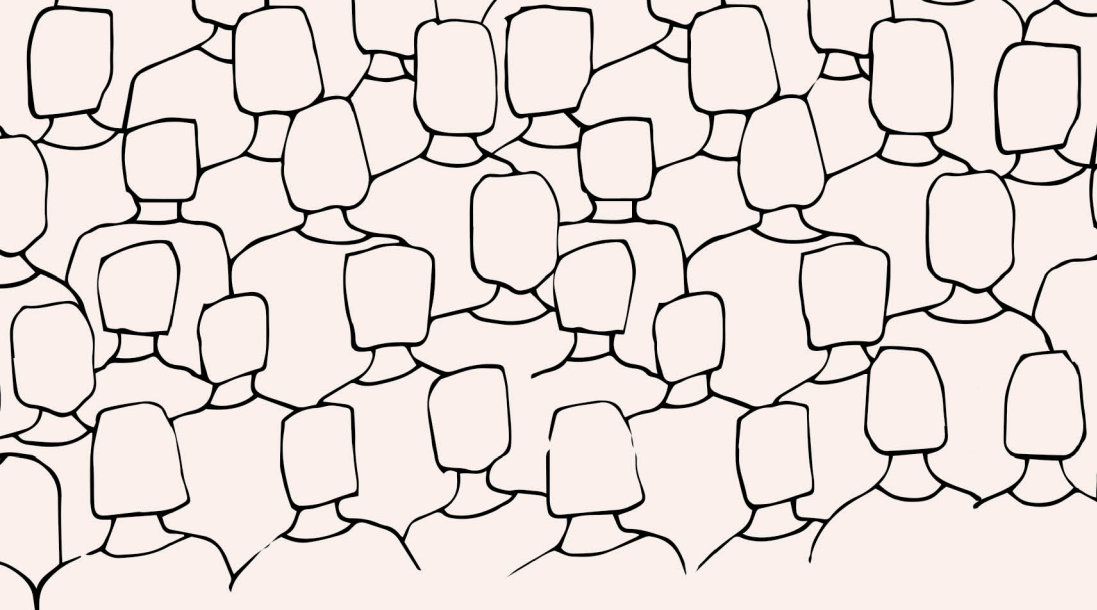
In the Netherlands where I live, I think it's fantastic how many children are taught to swim, not only for their own safety, but also for fun. I can't imagine what life would have been like for me – and of course for them – without water slides, diving boards, and doing cannonballs in the swimming pool. If I told someone that my children did not know how to swim, then they would call me crazy. Being able to swim is almost a guarantee for enjoying water sports. But also, safety.

Now, let me take a sidestep and ask you: 'Why do we consider learning how to swim more important than learning the following social roles and activities, which are crucial for the stability of contemporary society?'

- establishing relationships [personal or business].
- parenting [raising children, preparing them for 'real life'].
- leadership [inspiring others to take up issues of their own accord for a common or individual good].

These three issues are the cornerstone of our society, namely they provide the stability from which society benefits the most. Sooner or later, we are confronted with them, and they can often lead to helplessness and frustration. Sometimes they can be quite difficult to solve. Some notice it in their work or as volunteers or leaders, many as parents, but everyone notices it as a human being when they interact with others.

Several times a year I teach a workshop on personal effectiveness or personal growth to businesses. That's when I meet around twelve unknown people from different companies. The main objective of the workshop is to learn how to design and manifest their own professional and private lives, based on their personal ideals. Work is the starting point, but it doesn't take too long before people



**Do you want a better grip on life?
Then follow your heart's desire.**

Does change come difficult for you? Do you find yourself often pleasing others and neglecting your own personal needs and desires? Then *Your Life Really Matters!* is exactly for you. In this book you'll discover:

- Am I following my heart's desires?
- Why am I doing the things that I do?
- What adjustments do I need to make to stay on the right path?
- How I'm going to keep it up daily?

Your Life Really Matters! is an eye opener for everyone that wants to follow their passion in life and become the person they were meant to be.



Edwin Vreedevelde worked for many years as a manager at a large multinational until he realized that his passion in life was elsewhere. Afterwards he founded How Company and became an enthusiastic trainer and coach. Since then, he has helped thousands around the world discover their own personal and professional passions in life, and how to pursue them.



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