

I. The Game

Everything is a Game

“The Game” brings to mind things like football, baseball, basketball, soccer, tennis, golf, bicycle racing, Donkey Kong, Mario, Monopoly, Chess, Checkers, Candy Land, or any of the countless games every one of us have played in our life.

For the most part, we play games for fun, entertainment, exercise, or to interact and socialize with others. However, we also learn, develop skills, and build character from games as well.

Learning to play games teaches many of the skills we use throughout our life. We are naturally competitive, some more than others, so we like the feeling of being good at something, and winning. The motivation that drives us to become better at the game carries over to all other facets of our life.

Losing also teaches lessons. In fact, the lessons we learn from losing are even more powerful than what we learn from winning. Painful lessons and memories last much longer than any other.

When you lay your hand on a hot stove, how long is it before you do it again? The drive and motivation we get from our dislike of losing, or hurting, fuels a lot of human accomplishments.

Most of the games we think about are packaged in a neat time frame, box, or program. There is a starting point, an

ending point, a defined process of play or competition, a set of written rules, and a final goal.

There are, however, a multitude of other games that are not so formally or clearly packaged. These games, though less well defined, have a significantly more profound impact on us and our lives... both positively and negatively.

As a matter of fact, **everything** we do is a game, can be thought of as a game, dealt with like a game, simplified like a game, or explained like a game. Life itself is a game.

This “everything” is a broad abstract thing. In order to use it to make the point here, “everything” will be broken down into five major life areas: *Sports*, *Relationships*, *School*, *Jobs*, and *Life*. Using these five specific areas will help clarify and explain the “Play the Game” concept.

Sports- Sports, board games, and computer games are the basis for the title concept of this book, simply because most everyone knows a lot about a lot of games.

We don't even have to play some games to know how to play them. Most people generally know how to play football, or baseball, or basketball, whether they've ever played or not.

When you say, “play the game,” most people will intuitively think about one of their favorite games. Games are so ubiquitous, universal, and friendly that they are great to draw analogies from... like this book does.

Relationships- The relationships we have with other people in our lives significantly impact our life. Relationships result in more happiness, sadness, joy and pain than just about everything else in a lifetime.

For most of us, maintaining relationships and building new ones is a major part of life. Each relationship with someone else is unique, has its own set of rules, and requires us to play the game differently for each.

School- School is a significant and important part of everyone's lives, especially when we're young.

Just like relationships, every component of school (each individual class, teacher, grade, semester, friend, study partner, etc.) is unique and has a unique set of rules. Each also requires us to play each game differently.

Jobs- Jobs and careers comprise a majority of our adult life. Everyone will likely have at least one, some will have many. Every job, and every component of each job, is an individual game to be played.

Life- Life is nothing but one big game comprising all of the individual games we play throughout our life. The game of our life is the most important game every one of us plays.

How we play all of the other games impacts how the game of our life comes out. The goal of this book is to help you better play the game of your life.

So that is the premise of this book: **everything is a game**, and the key to the game is to play the game.

Before we can start playing the game, we need to talk about some of the parts of every game.

Every Game has Rules

Football and monopoly have specific rules that dictate how the game is played and what you can and cannot do. These rules are also instructions on how the game is played.

To be good at any game, we learn the rules and then find the key to making the most out of each rule while staying within the rule.

Determining the consequences of breaking the rules also tells us what we will lose and what options or choices will be eliminated if we don't play within the rules. Not breaking the rules ensures access to the most options, which is extremely important in every game.

Each individual relationship we have with someone else has a set of rules specific to that relationship.

Take parents for instance. There is a specific set of rules that dictate how we interact with each individual parent. Then, there's a different set that dictates how we interact with them together.

These rules are not written down anywhere really: we learn them through experience. We find out what we can and cannot do with parents by trial and error as we grow up and get away with (or get in trouble for) doing the things we do. The rules are always changing so we are always learning them.

The same holds true for our relationships with our spouses, children, and friends. We interact differently with every person we know because there is a specific set of rules for each.

Relationships ebb and flow like the tide from time to time. How close we are to others is always changing and people enter and leave our life all the time- that's just life.

Rebelling against some relationships (like parents) is often explained as natural. However, every one of us must come to our senses occasionally and start playing the game again when we realize the distance between us and the most important people in our life is our fault. That's a hard thing to do when we're young, but unbelievably important.

In school, every teacher of every class has a set of rules that dictate everything in that class.

We start learning those rules before the class even begins from others who have taken it before. To get the most from any class, make it as easy as possible, eliminate as much stress as possible, and get the highest grade, we have to learn the teacher's rules and play their game.

The same holds true with every job.

Many jobs have a written set of rules for employees to follow, but there are always just as many or more unwritten rules. The key to every job is to learn the rules and play the game.

The key to a great career is to learn to play by the rules of every job you move through.

Some of the rules of life are also written down, they are called laws.

Because the life game also includes all of the other games we must play along the way, many of the rules we learn in them also apply to the life game.

Playing fair, for example, is a rule in every game, including the game of your life. We learn other life game rules from our upbringing, church, school, watching others play the life game, and, like we do with parents, trial and error as we play the game.

One difficult aspect of rules is that there is no limit to how many there are, and every situation has a different set of rules. Also, with today's increasingly fast paced changing technology and society, the rules are also changing constantly.

Our task in playing the game is to be continuously learning and mastering the rules throughout the entire game. In the case of the most important game, that's a lifetime.

A bunch of the important rules of the game of your life are listed further along in this book in Chapter III.

Every Game has Options

With every down in football, the team has numerous options or choices on what the next play will be.

Every move in checkers has several options.

We always have options or choices to make at almost every moment in every game: what move to make, what direction to head, what decision to make, etc.

Two major keys in every game are having numerous options to choose from and then choosing the best options at the right time.

We have no choice in our family members, but we do have the option to choose what kind of relationship we have with each member of our family. We have the option of choosing who our friends are, who to make friends with, or how close we are to our friends. We also have the option to choose who to not to be friends with.

Every day of every class we're in has countless options. We make a choice every day how much effort and time we put into the work of learning.

One important thing about school is that it is responsible for more options later in our life than just about anything else. The choices we make in school will limit or increase the options we have available to us later on.

The list of options we have in jobs or careers is endless. We even have the option to change at any time we wish (which is a common occurrence today).

In the game of our life, we have options and choices that we must make every day.

The options we choose dictate what our future options will be. Choosing the wrong option will limit our future options, while the right option will open up new and better options.

One of the most important things we can do for ourselves is do all we can to have as many options and choices available to us as possible. The fewer the options we have to choose from, the harder it is to reach our goals.

Every Game Requires Skills

To enjoy it and be good at any game, we have to learn and master not only the rules, but also specific skills and abilities.

Sports games require athleticism, stamina, vision, dexterity, and many other physical skills. Video games require memory, attention to detail, and focus. Board games require strategic thinking, decision making, and long term planning.

Relationships require love, friendliness, kindness, forgiveness, acceptance, and patience.

School requires dedication, morals, long term focus, time management, perseverance, and sheer determination.

Jobs require commitment, loyalty, integrity, and the specific skills required by the job.

All of the skills listed here benefit us immensely in our life game as well. Countless other skills and abilities are touched on throughout the rest of this book. Perhaps the most essential skill... “*want to*”... is so important that it has its own chapter.

It is important to know that all of the skills and abilities required in the game of your life can be learned or developed whether they come naturally or not. Some people are born with talent in certain skills, but even they must develop that natural talent or it’s useless.

Every Game has Detrimental and Unacceptable Behaviors

Historically, baseball players openly chewed tobacco during the game. Today, because it's been proven to be detrimental to us and with society's increasing aversion to all tobacco, the habit is now unacceptable.

Even when not on the playing field, an athlete's actions and behaviors have a detrimental effect on the team. If a player is arrested, the entire team's reputation is adversely affected.

Being mean or lazy, smarting off, not following the rules of the house, being a slob, and any of the other things we have all been guilty of doing to our parents has detrimental effects on our relationship with them.

Not showing our spouse that we care about them or making them feel important to us has detrimental effects on our marriage. Not making sure our kids know we love them has catastrophic effects on our relationship with them (and possibly their entire life).

Coming in late, not showing up at all, not getting your required work done, and not being able to get along with co-workers are just some of the unacceptable and detrimental behaviors in any job.

Leaving a job on a bad note will have a detrimental effect on our career. It really is a small world and that kind of juicy information travels far and wide.

There are countless detrimental and unacceptable behaviors in the game of your life. Many obvious ones have laws against them (i.e. drugs, DWI, theft, robbery, etc.).

Numerous other examples are mentioned throughout this book.

Some damaging behaviors may be less obvious, but we usually know when something we're doing is beneficial... or not (it's called a conscience). Still though, one of the great mysteries of human beings is why we so often act out in ways that are not only unacceptable and detrimental, but even harmful to our own selves. This mystery may never be solved.

A major premise of this book is to bluntly and honestly lay out and discuss several life game detrimental and unacceptable behaviors. The decision to avoid them in your life game is extremely important.

Every Game Requires Dedication

Dedication is the most important requirement to win a marathon or endurance bicycle race. To win such a race takes countless hours of preparation... running or riding. When everyone else is having fun or relaxing, winners are dedicated to preparing.

To be great at any game requires lots of dedication to learn the game and the rules, and develop the required skills. Some people may have more natural talent than others so they may develop quicker, but no matter what, everyone has a learning curve to go through.

The most dedicated are the best in the long run, whether they have the most natural talent or not.

The length of time it takes to finish some games requires enormous commitment. It may not be too difficult to finish

one semester of college, but to complete an entire degree takes extraordinary dedication and perseverance. The high school dropout rate can probably be partially attributed to the lack of dedication in teens.

Fun games (or the fun part of games) require little or no dedication. Games that aren't fun (or the parts of games that aren't fun) is where dedication is required. Every game has something about it that nobody likes

For instance, practicing football in the stifling heat of summer for fall football season is never fun, even for the most avid player.

Lack of long term dedication to something specific is a weakness many share. One sad indicator of this weakness is the divorce rate.

So many people bailing out when the going gets tough in the countless broken marriages today clearly indicates a terrible lack of dedication to the work it takes to make a marriage successful.

Because it is so much easier to not play the game and just float through life with no real direction, goals, or intention, and because the game of our life lasts our entire life, it requires more dedication than anything else we will ever be involved in.

Dedication is one common skill shared by everyone who ever accomplished anything worthwhile.

Every Game has Multiple Levels and Dimensions

Every game has a number of different levels and dimensions. For instance, football has offense, defense, and special teams, and coaching along with the different age and skill levels like high school, college, and pro.

Levels- Donkey Kong and Pacman have numerous levels, each one successively more difficult and complicated.

Each move in chess creates a whole new game from that point forward and each successive move has the potential to impact the game even more than the previous move.

We go through different stages or levels with the people we know too. Spouses, for example, go from strangers through multiple levels to become the person we care the most about in the world when they become our spouse. There are also several dimensions to our relationship with spouses: friend, confidant, partner, advisor, motivator, etc.

The different levels in school are obviously the grade levels; 6th, 7th, 10th, etc. Obvious also are the different dimensions: English, math, science, social studies, etc.

The levels in a job could be working our way up through increasingly responsible tasks or duties (e.g: sweeping the floor, to washing dishes, to waiting tables, etc.). The different dimensions are the various tasks and roles we all have to perform in our job.

The life game is no different. Each stage of our life is a different level (childhood, teens, twenties, career, marriage, family, etc.). Generally, like Donkey Kong, each stage is successively more difficult and complicated than the previous.

Of great importance is every level we traverse in the life game builds on the previous one and each successive step has an increasing potential to impact the remainder of our entire game (e.g. high school builds on jr high, jr high builds on elementary school). Screw up the high school level (or any other) and your entire life will be impacted in all future levels.

Dimensions- The most obvious dimensions in our life are in areas like our home life, social life, work life, school life, etc. The most important dimensions in the game of our life are the different roles we play every day: spouse, father, mother, brother, sister, friend, acquaintance, co-worker, boss, etc.

No one dimension is any more important than any other; however, if we fail at any, all of them suffer (along with our entire game). All of the dimensions of the game of our life are essential and interconnected.

If our home life is not good, our school life and social life will suffer. The worse our home life is the more our school or work life suffers and vice-versa.

No matter how well we do in all the levels and dimensions in our game, everything in our entire game suffers if we fail in any single level, dimension, or role. Just like in Donkey Kong, fail at any level and the entire game suffers. Just like in chess, every move, level and dimension has a profound result on the entire game.

Every Game has goals

We automatically think that the goal of a game is simply to win the game. That may be true in baseball or checkers, but the goal of a lot of games is not simply to win, but instead to better a past performance or challenge ourselves to strive for something further than we've reached in the past.

Instead of winning or losing, reaching goals that we set for ourselves is the real goal of most games. The old saying "It's not whether you win or lose, but how you play the game," applies especially to some of the most important games.

The actual goal itself is not what's usually most important. Setting and going after the goal is what's ultimately important. Winning the game may be less important than putting all you have into trying to win (leaving it all on the field!).

The obvious goal of the relationship game is to get along with others and have good relationships with those people who matter to us most. We all should want to get along with others and have them like us. Nearly every person who has lived a lot of years will tell you that relationships with other people are the highlights of life.

In school, everyone has different goals. Some may set all A's as their goal, many student's goal is to do no more than is necessary to just pass. A lot of students are in a perpetual battle with the forces of laziness and procrastination.

Sometimes the goal isn't what we really think it is either.

Most think the goal of a class is to pass tests, make good grades, and graduate with a diploma or degree. In fact, the only goal of every class we will ever take is for us to LEARN and increase our level of knowledge.

We spend our entire childhood learning the bare minimum we need to know just to get by in the real world as adults.

A high school diploma is simply evidence we should have the minimum knowledge necessary to be a contributing member of society. The actual goal of going to college is to be a more valuable employee and have more options in our life.

The ultimate goal of the game of your life is to have the kind of life you dream of when you dream of how life ought to be. There are lots of interim goals to reach all along the way, but since the game lasts a lifetime, interim goals and victories keep us motivated along the way.

Of course we all want to be happy, loved, and safe; which are goals we work on every day. In fact, Stephen Covey said that what we humans really want in our lifetime are the four L's- to live, to learn, to love, and to leave a legacy.

Most everything we do, we can trace back to these four goals.

We all want to live, that's natural. We learn because we are at our best when we're growing and that's what learning is. We want to love and be loved (or at least liked) because humans are social animals. And we want to leave some trace of ourselves in the world after we're gone.

Play the Game

From all appearances, most people choose to not play the game of their life. They go through life with no goals, no real direction, and no real purpose. They have lots of fun and few worries. Their life looks so easy, exciting, simpler, fun and carefree.

Some, however, come to the realization at some point in their life that they are going nowhere. Even worse than that, they realize where they are headed is not where they want to be and it would have been so much easier to fix if they had just come to their senses sooner.

So, they do indeed finally realize that they must start playing the game if they even remotely expect to have the kind of life they really want, or if they ever hope to have any sense of accomplishment.

Of course some... maybe even most... never do.

Choosing to play the game gives you the power to create your future and make it what you want it to be. Playing the game is the only way to possibly live your dream.

Playing the game is much more difficult than not playing it, but at some point in your life, you will be glad you chose to play... or regret that you didn't.

So...

Play the game!