

INTRODUCTION: RUNNING AGAINST THE WIND

Tonight I watched a YouTube video of a seventy-two-year-old Bob Seger playing the last show ever at the Palace in his hometown of Auburn Hills, Michigan. His brilliant acoustic version of “Against the Wind” seemed a fitting “rumination on the march of time.” Just watching the power of the moment in that arena had me take a truthful look at how I was living and enjoying life. Forty years have passed since that song was first released, and I remember well listening to it over and over again.

Of course, on the video, Bob Seger looked so much older and more vulnerable with those forty years of experience, as we all do. Believe me, kids and grandkids, you will all come to know this fact. Knowing how fast time passes should teach us to learn the habits that help make each and every day a great day.

A year after the song was released, I was a young man of twenty-six, starting a family and the first business I was a part owner of. It was 1981, and as the year rolled on, our big financial opportunity had turned into financial hell. I had always had it in my soul that we were running against the wind; sometimes that was actually true. This time was one of them, as bankruptcy and total failure seemed to be biting at our heels.

These days, the words “running against the wind” mean something a little different to me. I’ve come to hear the aging we all experience and how we try to keep moving forward navigating our challenges in a tough world. How we all want to be loving spouses and parents, good children to our own parents, and to have successful careers, even as we face hardships. How we want our partners, our children, and our parents to respect and love us. How difficult it is for us to be successful at all of this while keeping our sanity, our character, and our integrity.

And finally, these words now make me think about how sometimes we have to face and run against the wind of our own destructive impulses in order to find the peace and happiness we want for our lives.

I have also tried to run against the wind of the many standard cutthroat, extremely competitive practices in business.

Through it all, I can honestly say running against the wind has made my life better as a result.

I reside in a state of happiness almost all the time, though still with a slight bit of an edge running through me that I sure wish I could fully get rid of. Before I started practicing much of what I am going to speak to you about in these notes, that edge was more like a heavy thunder roaring in my head. This hurt not only me but also my family as well. Because of this edge, I still need to give myself frequent attitude checkups. If I forget, even for a day or two, this attitude veers a little over to the wrong side, and it takes some self-awareness to check in and improve my thoughts, feelings, and actions. It is important to remember that while each of us is a beautiful, unique individual, we are also works in progress. All of this is to say, I have come to realize a simple truth that I hope you take to heart: if we do not continue to work on ourselves as we travel through life, we should not expect things to go so well.

From the age of nineteen years old, I have provided sales and leadership training in the dealerships I worked at or later owned. That’s approximately forty-eight years of contemplating and sharing my thoughts on attitude, resilience, anger, forgiveness, fear, gratitude, anxiety, and every other emotion that comes our way in the sales world, and I suspect in everyone’s world. As well, throughout these years, I have been blessed to learn so much from the teams I have worked side by side with.

In a competitive world, learning from others is a strength, not a weakness. Something else important that I learned early on, and which I continue to train on today, is that it's really easy to sell the truth in whatever it is we are selling. That includes our self-evaluations.

For some unknown reason, I kept many of these meeting notes in boxes for years on end, just regularly adding to the deck. Over the last twenty or so years, I've also kept personal notes on these subjects and many more, such as finding happiness and some peace in my life. Then about two years ago, when I was sixty-five years old, I started relooking at the notes I took from my staff trainings and the countless personal notes I've written over the years and decided to address them personally to you and gather them into a book, with the hopes they feel as helpful to you as these teachings and insights have been to me.

Among the many thoughts and feelings I had while rereading these notes were vivid memories of the times when they were written and the emotional states I was in during those periods. If I am to help you on each of your journeys, being completely honest and forthright was a given here, even though I know some of my actions and mistakes were (and still are) pretty embarrassing.

It took a while, but I've come to understand that too much of my time was spent dealing with significant anxiety, situational depression, heightened anger, too much craving, incessant guilt, too much drinking, and constantly beating myself up. Like so many of us, I was trying to deal with all these emotional issues but not looking in the right places for the solutions that would have provided long-term relief.

I assume I was a fairly decent salesperson, trainer, and motivator at a young age, or I simply could not have been in my own auto dealership business at twenty-six years old. However, it took me another twenty-plus years until I was able to learn how to live with myself. I now fully realize that the pain I was causing myself was also causing pain to my family, and I am truly sorry for that. I did the best that I was capable of doing during those periods, but what I was doing to fix the pain and behaviors was not working. I am hoping to share with you some of the things I ultimately learned that did work. It is perfectly clear to me that you will benefit as much as I have if you do even a small amount of the work on yourself that we all need to do.

To that point, when I began to think about compiling and organizing the thousands of pages of notes that I had written, obviously, many thoughts came to the forefront. The first recurring thought was that you sure need a lot of luck and good fortune along the journey because the odds are so stacked against most people in the world in every conceivable way.

That was certainly true for me, as I went from an unstable background with no money whatsoever to founding and running a significant company, finding true love, and being fortunate enough to have five marvelous children and four precious grandchildren.

The second thought was that I sure made an alarming number of mistakes along the way that should have doomed me. All I can say is "Thank you, Lord" for all the help.

The third and most recurring thought was that, boy, I sure needed to put in a lot of incredibly hard work. These notes have shown me just how much personal reflection and work on my own thoughts, feelings, emotions, and actions was done over the years. I could finally see what I needed to improve in myself and continue to improve over the years to get to the other side of happiness and success. I can assure you, children, without the inner work I did, my life would have turned out more like my father's, whom you will learn about soon, than the lives we live today.

My goals in taking on this project were profoundly clear:

- Can I help any of my three children, two stepchildren, four grandkids, or the future ones become happier and have better relationships with their partners, kids, family, and friends?
- Can I help any of you with some advice that could be of assistance to you on your career path, whatever that might be?
- Can I help any of you in any way to quiet your negative seeds and water your positive seeds?

I thought hard about how, today, Diana and I have the best marriage anyone could have, wonderful children and grandchildren, and a multibillion-dollar business with tremendous partners and friends alongside. The road to success has been long and sometimes dark and broken, with numerous land mines to navigate, and I am hoping some of the following notes will help you navigate your journey.

Children, the lessons learned and the serious mistakes I made are all going to be on the following pages for you. The truth is that at my age I have likely had my back against the wall a little more than you have. Please learn from my mistakes.

The best way to offer these notes, I thought, was to share them in different chapters according to themes. I organized this book so it can be read from start to finish, or it can be picked up on any given day and randomly opened to find a note that may speak to you. However you read this, and hopefully continue to read over the years, I pray these notes help you along your journey and offer you companionship and comfort whenever you find yourself running against the wind.

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