



From Average to
AWESOME
Lessons for Living an Extraordinary Life

Jim Smith, Jr.

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Alexandria, Virginia

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Find the Answers within Yourself: Listen to Your Own Advice

Jim Smith Jr.

Hallmark moments or tragic situations prompt me to take a self-inventory of who I am, what I have done, and what I desire to accomplish in life to become a better person.

—MICHAEL ROBINSON, PHILADELPHIA

“Hate” is an extremely strong word.

My friend Jaia hates her job. Jaia often talks to me about how much she hates her job. I hate that Jaia still has that job. I hate hearing about the job. OK, that’s enough hate for the next 50 years. I very seldom use the word “hate.”

Jaia and I were talking on the phone recently. Immediately after we moved past the usual pleasantries—“Long time no hear,” “It’s been months,” “How have you been?”—I’m sorry to say that

we fell into the other traditional aspect of our phone conversations: talking about her dead-end job. This was my fault, I guess. I had asked how things were looking on the job front. Had she found anything new? And like a courtroom defense attorney who just heard an inconsistency in the prosecution's star witness's testimony during his line of questioning, Jaia pounced on this opportunity to return to her pity-party "hate my job" mantra.

She told me she had quit but that her boss wouldn't let her leave. "Your boss wouldn't let you leave?" I thought angrily to myself. I was furious. But I didn't say much. I bit my tongue. I had grown tired of giving advice that was seldom used.

My friends often have to hang in there during my motivational pep talks. Like a doctor who has a diagnosis or prescription for all his or her friend's ailments, I have an inspirational thought or two—or three or four—for whatever is ailing them.

Jaia got off the hook easy this time. After two or three motivational sentences, I was ready to move on to the next topic. "You're telling me the same things I always tell my son," she said matter-of-factly.

"What did you say?" I asked, knowing exactly what she had said but wanting to hear her repeat it.

"You're telling me the same things I tell . . ." she said before not completing the sentence. "I need to listen to my own advice, huh?"

How many times have we told people how to clean their kitchens when our sinks are filled with dirty dishes? How often have we told others to clean their cars when our trunks are filled with junk? We can tell others what to do but stop there. What's more confusing is that we become miffed when they don't take our advice, taking their situation personally, but not caring that our own situation is still in peril.

We have PhDs in other people's business but need tutoring in our own. What's that about?



AWESOME ADVICE

I've learned to trust my intuition and common sense. Some of the most successful and truly happy people I know are not necessarily the most intelligent or the most educated. What these people do have in common is that they consistently trust their inner voice, and they never stop applying good old common sense to their problems, challenges, and opportunities.

When things are at their toughest, I find a quiet place, relax, and *listen* to my inner wisdom. . . . It has never steered me wrong.

And when you find yourself so down in the details of a particular problem or challenge that you just can't seem to find the answer or make a decision, don't be afraid to step back, rise above all of the "noise" and ask yourself, "Does this pass my common sense test?"

—Joe Sparacino, Philadelphia

Pat Harmon, my friend and former photographer, finally listened to her own advice and has been doing cartwheels ever since. Upon entering college, she majored in pre-law. This was an impressive field, one that could help create a financially satisfying living, she rationalized. However, after determining that this major required too much reading and decisionmaking, focusing more on what's in one's mind rather than what's in one's heart, she switched to human development.

Pat's first jobs were of the office variety. The jobs were "mind-paralyzing," not providing the consistent challenge, sincere personal interactions, and positive energy she sought. Relying on the special satisfaction she received from taking pictures of family and friends (and from taking pictures of the tall ships as they sailed along the Delaware River in the 1980s), she took up photography. It wasn't long before she realized the obvious: She loved taking pictures, and she was extremely good at it. She had an uncanny talent for working with and bringing out the best in people and capturing their innermost essence on film. Not only did she take fabulous pictures, but she also doubled as a career counselor and therapist, giving plenty of advice and feedback during the photo shoot on how her clients could grow their careers and change their lives by following their hearts.

After 15 personally but not financially satisfying years, Pat began to listen closely to the number of "friends" who told her she could never make a living on her own just by taking pictures. "Make it a hobby, but not a living," they told her. They made the case and provided the contract, and she signed on the dotted line. She returned to the safety and predictability of the corporate world.

Though boring and professionally unfulfilling, Pat's job was secure, providing the benefits and a steady paycheck that her photography business did not. Relying on all the "wise counsel" she had received, she talked herself into the notion that she had

burned out on photography. The naysayers' words and thoughts became the lens cap that blocked the power and beauty that emanated from her camera.

After marinating in a series of internal reflection workshops, teachers, and inspirational books, Pat became camera-hungry again. She learned that she could not sell what she did not believe in: herself and her work.

During her first photography jaunt, Pat had played not to lose rather than playing to win, even though she could do breathtaking things with a camera. She had a gift! Her clients fed off her. When she was "present," her photography was awesome! When she wallowed in worry (bills and a lack of steady customers will do that to you), her photography was average.

Then Pat began to listen to her own advice. She followed her heart.

Pat threw away her lingering self-limitations and doubts like a parent throws away a stinky diaper and made an unfailing commitment and promise to herself and to her work. With a renewed drive and fire, she reopened her photography business and has been on a steady diet of extremely satisfied customers ever since. She says she's now in a zone!

*Consider This: "It's hard to listen while
you're planning something you think
needs to be said." —Author unknown*

Make yourself a promise. Promise yourself that you are going to start listening to your own advice, from this point forward. You're going to begin listening to the powerfully directional words of wisdom you freely give others. Promise yourself that you're going to spend more time writing the script to your own movie rather than always trying to direct the movies of others. Hey, you

have great advice. You always want other people to listen to you. So listen to yourself!

Moving from Average to Awesome

This chapter is not only about listening. It's also about how you should pay more attention to your situation before you advise others about theirs. This exercise will help you move from an average mindset to a more positive and powerful awesome way of living.

First, consider which statement describes how you think about offering advice and coaching:

- **Average:** You're ready to give advice to others but not ready to follow this same good advice yourself.
- **Awesome:** You listen to your own advice and then share your lessons with others. But you still know that the true teacher encourages students to find the answers within themselves.

Second, take some time and consider the questions below. Respond to the questions and be sure to explain your answers. Finally, rate yourself on your progress. If you are currently average, say so (A). If you feel you deserve an awesome rating, indicate that as well (AW). If you are neither average nor awesome but working toward being awesome, just write W.

Getting to Awesome

Key questions	Your response and explanation	Rating
Are you a better teacher or student?		

What advice have you given others that you did not apply yourself?		
What areas do you typically give advice in, and how did you come by this expertise?		

Rate your progress: average (A), awesome (AW), or working toward awesome (W).