



From Average to
AWESOME
Lessons for Living an Extraordinary Life

Jim Smith, Jr.

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Alexandria, Virginia

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Share Yourself with Others as a Way of Life

Jim Smith Jr.

Some people light up a room when they walk in, and some people light up a room when they walk out.

—AUTHOR UNKNOWN

There is so much work to do! There are so many people to serve! There are so many lives to assist! Let your light shine!

It's not a major undertaking. It doesn't even require a degree, tutoring, licensing, or certification. We could do it daily simply by saying hello, opening a door, saying thank you, smiling, lending an ear, or even by just showing up. The key is to place the focus on others.

My friend Amy Wilson has recently learned how to let her light shine through self-actualization. She discovered that she gets an enormous boost from helping others work through their personal issues and challenges. She says that knowing that her

friends, co-workers, and family truly depend on her and have come to trust her with their deepest feelings and thoughts makes her feel complete and valuable. She says it's a feeling that is stronger and more precious than money or material wealth.

I remember my after-work conversations with Edna, the 60-something grandmother who cleaned the offices of one of my former employers. She would tell me that I was one of the few people who spoke to her. She said that at times she felt invisible at the office. People would usually only speak to her when they wanted something—their desks wiped down, floors swept, and so on. Edna and I would talk about her family, her weekend plans, just life in general. I didn't make time to speak to Edna to earn a humanitarian award or an interview with Oprah or Barbara Walters. I just did it because that's the way I was taught . . . to let my light shine.

Through discussions with Edna and Amy and others, I've come to know a number of unsung light shiners—and it's awesome watching them in action. My buddy Joe—a balding, always-smiling, diehard Philadelphia Eagles fan and security guard—did his daily light shining as employees entered and left the building we worked in. He welcomed people with a smile, a hearty laugh, a score, or a much-needed kind word. He often greeted people by opening the door and by lending a hand if their arms were full.

Hustling John—a sinewy, elderly, gregarious, teeth-missing, tattered-clothes-wearing, dependable paper guy—did his light shining on the corner of 8th and Vine every day as he sold the *Philadelphia Daily News* and shared laughs with motorists each morning. He always had a spirited thought to share and extra pep in his step. Seeing him each morning dodging cars and running through traffic lights, in any weather, to make sure motorists had their morning newspaper and motivational quote for the day was often the propeller-starter for my day.

Amy, Edna, Joe, and John would go out of their way for others. They were my friends, my people. Their occupations and

stations in life were never going to preclude the blossoming of our friendships.

At one incredible stage in my life, my daily routine included seeing John in the morning when I bought my paper, Joe during the day, and Edna right before I left the office to go home. They were great “pick-me-ups” whom I looked forward to seeing. They were such a positive force! I believe I connected with them more easily than did others in our corporate world because of my working-class background. From my life experiences, I knew that goodness, intelligence, and integrity were not products of your salary but of your character.

Consider This: Light shiners have a certain glow, a certain energy. It's contagious. Does that describe you?

“When my son Matt is sad in the morning or nervous about something coming up in school that day, I fill his hands with kisses,” my friend Sandi said when I asked her how she shines her light on others. “I tell him that whenever he needs a kiss from me during the day, he just needs to put his hand up to his cheek and he has a kiss to remind him how much he is loved. When my husband and I were dating, we decided that 11:11 would be our time. Whenever we were together and we saw that time, we would tell each other how much we loved each other. If we weren't together and saw the time, we would send good thoughts to each other. Matt and I made a similar pact—10:10 is our time. He knows that time is just shared between him and me, and every time he sees 10:10, he comes running for 10 hugs and 10 kisses. Also, when my family is together in a crowd, and we want to say ‘I love you,’ we tap or squeeze the person's hand three times and they, in return, tap or squeeze back three times.”

“Giving of oneself is the most awesome, motivational force I can think of,” Peggy Hazard once told me. I’ve known and worked with Peggy for the past nine years, and the only time she’s not helping someone is when she’s sleeping. Her drive is unmatched! Professionally, she’s the managing director of a major Philadelphia diversity-consulting firm. Personally, she’s a managing director in building relationships, doing volunteer and community work, partnering with nonprofit organizations, and letting her light shine, both domestically and internationally. She has traveled to Egypt, Ghana, South Africa, Brazil, Zimbabwe, China, Indonesia, Thailand, and throughout Europe.

“We should take time to marvel at the transformation we can cause with a simple smile, a hug, or a compliment,” Peggy says. “I think of the beleaguered grocery clerk trainee who takes five minutes to find the price on not one but every produce item. Patrons’ sighs and rolling eyes accumulate in the growing lines. You don’t really feel like spending any additional time in line, but you say, ‘Take your time, I know it’s hard when you’re first learning.’ You can see his rigid muscles soften immediately, hear a sigh of relief, and watch a smile spread on his face as your light flows in. With just one sentence, you have transformed him—not only in mind but also in body. Then equally as awesome is the positive energy that enhances your own glow and spreads to the others in line. I know I’m exaggerating, but your bags even feel lighter. It’s the little things that we can do each day that make the greatest difference.”

In this era of corrupt business dealings and “look out for number one” attitudes, this light-shining mission can often seem challenging for some. If that is your reality, here are seven super ways to let your light shine, professionally and personally:

- Always be prepared for a light-shining opportunity; it’s better to be prepared and not have an opportunity than to have an opportunity and not be prepared.

- Listen to both what is said and what is unsaid.
- Do it before they ask you to.
- During a conversation, make the person with whom you're talking feel like he or she is the most important person in your life at that moment.
- Empower yourself to reach back, reach over, and reach up.
- Do not overcommit.
- Remember that people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.

My buddy Alvin said that his vivacious fellow passenger, Mary, appeared to be on cloud 99 (even before the plane took off) as she took her seat across from him in first class. Not a single passenger walked by her without receiving a smile or a wave. He overheard her telling one of the flight attendants that she had just put the bow on her birthday celebration with her family and that she was flying home to Charlotte. Mary asked for some champagne and nestled into her seat with the bubbly and the Sunday newspaper.

Later in the flight, Alvin said, he thought he heard someone sniffing, some crying, but wasn't quite sure. Then he heard it again. And again. He looked over and saw that Mary's eyes were wetter than a Seattle umbrella. Taking off his seatbelt, he went across to her seat and asked what was wrong. She was reading article upon article about the September 11 catastrophe, and it was tearing her apart. "This is such a shame," she sobbed. "I can't believe all those people lost family members. It's just not fair." Alvin reached over, gave her a comforting hug, and told her that everything would be all right. He offered her the book he was reading, Mitch Albom's *Tuesdays with Morrie*, and encouraged her to read it when she finished the newspaper.

Alvin returned to his seat, and Mary put down the newspaper and immediately dove into the book. When the plane landed,

the two hugged again, Mary got off, and Alvin continued on the flight to Philadelphia. A few weeks later, a package from Charlotte arrived at Alvin's home. Mary had returned the book with a note: "Thank you very much for sharing this special book!" Alvin's light shone brightly.

Judi Hovde, one of my Minneapolis clients, and I were talking recently about what she likes most about her job. I met Judi at a training conference last year. She attended one of the sessions I facilitated on "How to Close with a bang!" and we connected right away. Every time I saw her during the conference, she wore an infectious smile. As we talked, she said, "Jim, in a workshop I once shared a very personal story, a story that I had not shared with anyone at work." Intrigued, I could not wait for her to continue. "As I was telling the story, I wondered to myself why I chose to talk about it, and why to this group at this time. The next day one of the attendees came to my desk and told me that because I had talked about my personal struggle with depression, she now felt capable of dealing with hers. That was awesome. This is the type of experience that keeps me going, knowing that in some small way I am making a difference in the lives of others. I just hope and pray for the continued opportunity to be awesome!"

My friend Jack Marinelli, who is also a corporate trainer, realizes the impact of his light-shining work. "Each time I facilitate, I remind myself that my information will undoubtedly help my participants with their patient care, their business relationships, and the interactions they have with people in general," he once told me. "Sometimes we see the fruit of our training immediately, while other times the benefits come farther down the road. Either way, it fuels my motivation to be even better in future sessions and to continually look for more creative and innovative ways to help my learners grow."

I know exactly what Judi and Jack are feeling. It's an exhilarating experience to help others in their development and to have



AWESOME ADVICE

Loving your job has different meanings for various people. Helping people succeed has always been my motivating factor. My first job out of college was as a customer service representative, which, to me, is the most critical job in any organization. It's the first point of contact with the customer and the first chance to make an impact.

Since that time I have touched the lives of many, and every time that I see the end result, it motivates me to do more. I love George Bernard Shaw's quote: "I tell you that as long as I can conceive something better than myself I cannot be easy unless I am striving to bring it in to existence or clearing the way for it."

—Hannah Gomberg, Bear, DE

them sprint up to you to express their sincere, heartfelt thanks after a session. I'm stunned, overwhelmed, and somewhat embarrassed when this happens to me. I'm just letting my light shine, and they're giving me way too much credit. They say that I've changed their lives and that I provided a much-needed boost. They also thank me for sharing so much of myself and for coming into their lives. I would not have it any other way.

Moving from Average to Awesome

This chapter is not only about being an exemplary role model. It's also about how invigorating it is to bring out the best in others. 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 giving back and helping others fulfill their goals, dreams, and aspirations:

- **Average:** You focus mostly on yourself.
- **Awesome:** You share your self, your time, your wisdom, and your energy with others as a way of life.

Now, 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
Do you make excuses for not being able to help someone?		
Do you find that you generally help others when you have accomplished and completed all that you've planned that day?		
Who have you taken under your wing (or mentored), and what has been the result?		

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