

LEWIS HOWES

A portrait of Lewis Howes, a man with short brown hair and a slight smile, wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt. He is standing in front of a chain-link fence. The background is slightly blurred.

THE SCHOOL

of

GREATNESS

A REAL-WORLD GUIDE TO
LIVING BIGGER, LOVING DEEPER,
AND LEAVING A LEGACY

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RODAIE

*To my family, this book is for you,
Diana, Ralph, Chris, Heidi, and Katherine.
Thank you for encouraging me to chase my dreams,
guiding me spiritually, showing me how to be
of service in the world, and teaching me grace,
patience, and most of all, love.*

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PREFACE

You were born with potential.

You were born with goodness and trust. You were born with ideals and dreams. You were born with greatness.

You were born with wings.

You are not meant for crawling, so don't.

You have wings.

Learn to use them and fly.

—Rumi

For the last few years, I've felt like the luckiest guy on earth. Every week, my job has been to study at an elite and exclusive—but entirely unofficial—university, a mythical academy where the world's greatest men and women teach, lecture, and pay forward the amazing knowledge they've accumulated on their paths to becoming the best in the world at what they do.

My professors were Olympic gold medalists, award-winning musicians, *New York Times* best-selling authors, world-changing activists and philanthropists, enormously successful entrepreneurs, and inspiring experts and thinkers. I was fortunate enough to be their student, audit their classes, and learn things from each of them that I will carry with me forever. I consider this education the greatest gift I've ever been given.

Deep down, all of us suspect—we *hope*—something like this exists somewhere, but we just have no idea where it is or how to get in. Our world is swimming in information and data, unlike at any other point in human history, and for years that has been intoxicating to many of us. We could type anything into the Google search bar and we'd have a million answers in a millionth of a second. We could pick a topic and go down the Wikipedia rabbit hole for hours, if not days. But eventually, information for curiosity's sake wasn't enough. We needed more. We wanted to know how to apply it to the world and to our lives. We wanted knowledge and wisdom, not just 1s and 0s. We think that places like the World Economic Forum in Davos are maybe where we can find it. Or Summit Series. Or TED. I've been to a few of those forums and events, and frankly, they're

not even close to what I've experienced over these last few years.

The place I am talking about is more like Plato's cave than the red circle on the TED stage. My amazing mentors did not speak to me for 18 minutes and then disappear into the ether; they sat across from me, literally and virtually, and brought me out from the shadows into the light of real knowledge. How did this happen? I'm still not entirely sure, but there is one thing I know beyond any doubt: They fired my passion to sit across from you, through the pages of this book, and share their teachings with you.

I've come to call this place the School of Greatness.

It's not your stereotypical school. There are no classrooms. No homework. No principal or dean enforcing rules or even tracking attendance. Nobody pays tuition (except maybe the price of this book). Some of the "professors" would recoil at being called that. And when we leave to try our hands at the real world once again, there will definitely be no graduation ceremony and certainly no diploma.

Now to be clear, this school is great not because it admits only great students but because the teachers are and the students want to be. Both share big dreams. And as Wilma Rudolph, the Olympic champion who was once the fastest woman in the world, said, "Never underestimate the power of dreams and the influence of the human spirit. We are all the same in this notion: The potential for greatness lives within each of us."

With *The School of Greatness*, you will learn how to recognize and harness this potential. You will come to understand the importance of dreams and the tools that exist within you to make those dreams reality. *The School of Greatness* is not a bag of tricks and hacks. It's not a boot camp. It's a way of life, a way of living. When you want to lose weight and keep it off, you don't go on a diet, because diets are about artificial restriction. They're miserable. Instead, you change your lifestyle to match your goals. This is the same thing. *The School of Greatness* is a lifestyle for a lifetime that you are going to love.

Like the professors and students in *The School of Greatness*, I've chased big dreams my whole life. Ever since I can remember, I wanted to be an All-American athlete. Growing up in Ohio, and then growing to be 6 foot 4, obviously meant football at the Ohio State University. That was every Ohio boy's dream. Everything I did as I grew up was aimed toward accomplishing that goal. There wasn't a day that went by that I didn't think about it and work on it—and I made it, sort of. I went to a smaller Ohio college after I transferred schools a couple of times for better (and bigger) opportunities, and I even set a number of records along the way.

But it wasn't until my fourth year that I finally became an All-American athlete—in the decathlon, of all things: a sport I'd never even trained for. Never in my wildest dreams could I have imagined that happening!

As soon as being an All-American became a reality—first as a decathlete, then the next year, finally, in football—it immediately began to lose its luster, and I had no idea why. I'd accomplished all of my goals, and I went further than most people would have ever expected, but that was little consolation. At a party celebrating my achievements, the moment that should have been my greatest triumph, I was miserable. I couldn't enjoy it because my focus had already shifted to bigger and better things: turning pro. Eventually, I had a tryout in front of a dozen NFL scouts at an indoor training facility at the Ohio State University, my former dream school, along with a number of future NFL players, including an eventual Super Bowl MVP. I performed well, but coming from a smaller school, I had little chance of being drafted. An Arena Football League team—which is technically professional football—did pick me up, but 1 year is all I played as my career ended due to a series of frustrating injuries and recovery setbacks.

Suddenly, those dreams of glory and fame came crashing down to earth. It wasn't pretty. I was 24 years old, washed up, broke, and sleeping on my sister's couch with my arm in a cast and a mountain of credit card debt staring me in the face. My dreams vanished. What I was living through at that point was a nightmare—and I feared that it was something I'd never wake up from. It was the lowest low I've ever experienced.

What I realize now, only in painful hindsight, is that I wasn't chasing the specific dream of being an All-American or playing in the NFL. Those were discrete goals. I was chasing a broader dream: being great. And what was missing from my life, on that couch with a broken wrist and no money to my name, wasn't talent or ability—it was a sense of a greater purpose, a feeling that I was working and striving for something bigger than myself.

I knew I wanted to be better, and I had all this passion and energy, but I had no outlet for it. I had to do something. So I reached out to others: friends of mine, friends of my family, coaches, my siblings. A new mentor suggested I check out LinkedIn, the social media Web site, which back then in 2008 was just starting to get traction among business professionals. I saw all sorts of potential to connect with high-profile business owners and other CEOs whom I never would've encountered otherwise. I began reaching out and connecting like a madman. I reached out specifically to people who worked in the sports business because I had just come from my own athletic experiences. I had a positive message to share, and I

enjoyed helping people and relished becoming what Malcolm Gladwell calls a “connector.”

I eventually built this presence on LinkedIn into an incredibly lucrative speaking, advising, and teaching business. I had no background in online business, but I had good instincts and was willing to work my butt off, and as I took some advice from mentors, the money started flowing in. After an initial period of figuring it all out, my first year brought in close to \$1 million in sales. By year 3, that had more than doubled. Eventually, my business partner bought me out in a deal for seven figures.

There I was, not even 30, with more money than I’d ever seen before, having turned a vision into a lucrative reality and reinvented myself as an entrepreneur in the process. With some help and some hustle, here I was again, on top of the world. It should have been another moment of triumph—I had built a business from scratch and grown it to scale—and yet the call to something larger still haunted me. I knew a piece was missing.

One of my teachers, the author and journalist Steven Kotler, would later define greatness as “waking up every day and saying ‘Okay. Today I’m going to move mountains.’” That’s what I wanted. That’s who I wanted to be.

I started over again, this time with the notion that I would seek out something larger, since it wasn’t coming to me through these stereotypical markers of success. In January 2013, I decided that I would start interviewing some of the smartest, most successful, and *greatest* men and women in the world and ask them every question I could. I wanted to be around only those people who understood what it meant to strive for true greatness, who woke up every morning to move their respective mountains, pay it forward, and help others get to a better place. Part of my motivation was selfish—my own insatiable thirst for understanding how individuals seek and achieve this higher ground—but I also wanted to give readers and listeners access to this wisdom. What good was greatness if I couldn’t share it?

The response was overwhelming. My little podcast, *The School of Greatness*, amassed a large audience with more than five million downloads before the first 2 years and hundreds of thousands of unique visitors every month. In a world with a seemingly infinite supply of available podcasts, *The School of Greatness* has been featured on the main page section of iTunes more than 10 times and has ranked number one on iTunes’ Business and Health list.

Not only were these lessons resonating with listeners and readers but, as I was in the process of conveying them, they were also changing my life.

They were the lessons I wish I had been given and understood when I was 16 years old, struggling to make sense of athletic gifts and struggling through a tense and often terrible family life. It's what I wished I could have turned to when, immediately after leaving the All-American podium, I was engulfed by depression and pain. They could have helped me make the most of my opportunity in professional sports—and they could have saved me hundreds of thousands of dollars in costly business mistakes.

Those lessons form the core of this book. The lessons in this book are not *my* lessons; they are my lecture notes from a unique and wonderful school. I'm simply lucky enough to be the messenger. As I was writing, I learned that there is a long tradition of this kind of book. From Aristotle's *Ethics* and Epictetus' *Discourses* more than 2,000 years ago to a more recent book like Peter Thiel's *Zero to One*, the great thinkers themselves didn't write those books: A student did. What survived was simply the lecture notes from an epic course we were not fortunate enough to have attended in person. Classicists have been kind enough to give author credit to the masters, and I hope you'll see that with this book, too. Although my name is on the cover, the names of my teachers should be as well. I couldn't have written this without them, and it is with the deepest gratitude that I share their wisdom.

INTRODUCTION

What Does It Take to Be Great?

Greatness is a spiritual condition worthy to excite love, interest, and admiration; and the outward proof of possessing greatness is that we excite love, interest, and admiration.

—Matthew Arnold

I'm a pretty good athlete, but there are legions who are far better than I'll ever be. Olympic gymnast Shawn Johnson accomplished more in sports as a teenager than I will in my entire life. I've done very well in business, but men like Angel Martinez, CEO of the billion-dollar shoe brand Deckers, and fellow lifestyle entrepreneur and angel investor Tim Ferriss aren't looking in their rear-view mirrors for me. So I am not just talking about the kind of greatness that can be measured and assessed by a universal standard; I am talking about the greatness of exploring, reaching, and sustaining your potential—that is, the kind of individual and unique greatness that we are all capable of.

Greatness, as I've come to learn from people like Shawn, is “not just holding a gold medal at the top of a podium.” It's about inspiring people, about sharing a message, about believing the truth in that cliché: It's the journey, not the destination to some perceived treasure or moment of adulation. In fact, there are a million ways to be great and a million more things to be great at. Most of them don't come with a medal or a giant check. Consider this list.

- Being a parent
- Being an artist
- Being generous
- Being a leader
- Being a change maker
- Being an advocate
- Being healthy
- Being an entrepreneur
- Being of service

All of these are amazing dreams where greatness is a worthy and

attainable goal. Those who have become great at any of them—irrespective of plaques on their walls or trophies on their mantels—are the people we can all learn from. In this book, we’re going to learn from people who did stand on podiums—literally and figuratively—but were great at these things as well. They embodied excellence in many facets of their lives, and we can apply their approach to our own.

As Shawn put it to me, “Greatness means having pride in yourself, being happy with yourself, knowing you’ve worked for something and couldn’t have done anything more. That is greatness itself.” It is cultivating the character and habits that not only lead to success but also help you overcome any challenge or adversity. It’s about lifting yourself up from the depths of despair and using mindfulness, joy, and love to harness your dreams. It is a progression through a series of lessons—eight areas of focus and continual improvement.

- 1 . Create a vision.** Most great athletes describe their ability to visualize the outcome they desire in a competition. They know what they want and where they want to go. It is as much a part of their process as any aspect of training. As the famed acting coach Lee Strasberg put it, “If we cannot see the possibility of greatness, how can we dream it?” Now, what is *your* dream?
- 2. Turn adversity into advantage.** It’s hard to find the story of someone who has achieved greatness who did not face some sort of significant adversity. When you look more closely, you see that this adversity actually helped them—it put them on the path toward a unique and individual form of greatness. What challenges do you face and how can you use them to develop greatness?
- 3. Cultivate a champion’s mindset.** What does it take to become a champion, and how does a champion see the world that she is trying to conquer? Visualization, meditation, mindfulness, and emotional intelligence are tools that help you understand who you are and where you are at any given moment in your life and allow you to find joy and fulfillment in the moment. This is where greatness takes root. How can you view the world through the eyes of a champion?
- 4. Develop hustle.** We all face obstacles and seem to have an impossible amount we need to get done. Many get stuck at this wall, but what separates the greats from the rest of us is that they reduce the wall to a barrier and make it into something they can

climb over. It's also important to never stop hustling— even after we've accomplished a goal. Where will your hustle and energy come from?

5. **Master your body.** No one chooses the body they're born with, but almost everyone has the ability to build and maintain their physical assets far beyond what they imagined. It's all about thinking like a champion, training like a champion, and eating like a champion. Are you taking care of yourself?
6. **Practice positive habits.** How many hours *exactly* does it take to achieve mastery and greatness? It's not about a number, but great things will happen if you practice a certain skill over and over again. Building positive habits is a necessity to achieve your desired goals. And having a deep belief in something that can support those habits, be it religion or community or family, is a key ingredient in the recipe for greatness. What positive habits can you add to your daily life?
7. **Build a winning team.** You can't achieve greatness alone, period. Success is a shared process. Finding the right mentor and making the best use of that mentor or coach is a requirement. So is building a team of partners, employees, supporters, and fans. Success is all about developing and cultivating healthy and fruitful relationships—not just with your peers on the field of endeavor but also with those who can truly challenge you—in all aspects of your life. Whom do you need to join forces with?
8. **Be of service to others.** Trophies and rings and fat bank accounts have a surprisingly short shelf life when it comes to greatness. Research has shown that the happiest and most thriving people are those who spend their time giving back, helping others, and participating actively in their communities. In fact, the best gifts are the ones you give; they make your own achievements that much more fulfilling. How are you going to contribute and help others?

This book is the distillation of the eight master lessons on greatness that I have discovered on my journey, with help from my network of mentors and coaches, colleagues and teachers. By studying greatness this way, we will learn that it is a process of continuous education and self-realization. It's something we'll follow for the rest of our lives.

If you're like some of my podcast listeners or a lot of people who read books such as this one, you are probably saying to yourself, "This all sounds well and good, but what is this book actually going to help me do?" That's a fair question. I'm not here to waste your time or make false promises.

What *The School of Greatness* is going to teach you is, first and foremost, what is great and special about you. Most people think greatness or being great is external to themselves, that it's something you acquire or add on. That is not true. Greatness is something that is unearthed and cultivated from within. The lessons and the teachers in *The School of Greatness* will help you find the greatness in you.

This book will then inspire you to pursue it. It'll show you how to be great—whether you're an athlete, an entrepreneur, a mom, an organizer, a freelancer, or a designer—at whatever passion you harbor deep inside. They say "seeing is believing," but sometimes even that isn't enough. Sometimes people need to be convinced. They need to be inspired to have a vision, let alone pursue it with vigor in the face of countless unseen obstacles. I was fortunate enough to have truly great men and women draw out whatever potential I have inside me, and now you and I and all the other readers are going to work to become the best we can be—together.

GROUNDING

Before I do pretty much anything in life, I like to have what I call a "grounding" moment. I originally experienced this process in sports. Before every game, the coach would prepare us for the battle ahead by getting our thoughts together and putting us in the right frame of mind. I call it getting grounded. This is where I commit myself to my vision, get connected to who I am, and focus on what I'm intending to create in that moment. You may already have grounding moments in your daily life and not even realize it. Whether it's meditating in the morning to get ready for the day, taking a moment of silence or saying a prayer before meals, or psyching yourself up mentally and physically before a game or a speech or a sales pitch or any of the other "big" moments we go through in life, it's extremely important to find some head space for whatever your ritual may be.

This grounding process is critical for your success in applying the lessons in this book to your life—and critical for success, period. If you don't give yourself a moment to visualize the clear results you want to create, then you are less likely to achieve what you desire. It's all about

setting your intentions for what you want. Getting grounded can be one of the most powerful things you do if you apply this process to your daily life.

Each chapter will begin with my personal grounding statements to let you know what my intention is for you to get out of that chapter and to prepare you for what's to come. When my coaches would ground us before big games, it always gave me that calm confidence I needed to take on some of my most challenging competitors. I want to pass that calm confidence on to you. You have challenges and obstacles that stand in your way on a daily basis, and grounding in the morning and before any big moment is a habit that I know will support you tremendously.

The School of Greatness, in all its parts, is a framework for achieving real, sustainable, repeatable success. This book isn't just about making you feel warm and fuzzy. It's about giving you the tools, knowledge, and actionable resources to take your vision and turn it into a reality.

Who are you?

What do you stand for?

What's your dream?

What type of legacy do you want to create?

How can we become great together?

CHAPTER

1

GET GROUNDED

In this chapter on vision, I want you to dream. Allow yourself to clear your mind and look at everything as a possibility—no dream is too big or too crazy. Imagine what you'd want your life to look like if you knew you could never fail. Let go of what someone else wants for you, what you think society wants for you, and what you think you are supposed to do because it's reasonable and "makes sense." You are here to live an extraordinary life. Think about what *you* want to do in your life and how *you* want to live.

The lessons in this chapter give you permission to design the life you've always dreamed of while living unapologetically. The exercises at the end will help you practice the lessons and exercises in the seven chapters that follow this one. If you're like I used to be, you might be tempted to skip these exercises because they seem like "work"—but that's the whole point. This can be an uncomfortable process, but it's one that finally shows you what life could be like if you choose to live in a world where "anything is possible."

Get ready, my friend. This is the beginning of a beautiful journey, and I'll be with you every step of the way.

CREATE A VISION

The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision.

—Helen Keller

Greatness is my passion, but vision is my obsession. Let me explain. A clear vision can unleash extraordinary, mind-boggling power. I've been known to get more than a little intense on this topic. Let me tell you a story about a guy I met named Steve who reminded me of my younger self and was probably like a lot of you out there. He had been friends with my girlfriend at the time for a number of years, and she wanted us to meet up over dinner. I went through the whole "where are you from, what do you do" small-talk racket that you do when you meet new people, and Steve told me he was in graduate school to be a doctor of physical therapy and was finishing up in the next 6 months. As an athlete who has been through his fair share of injuries, I am familiar with physical therapy, so I found this pretty interesting.

I asked him, "So Steve, what do you want to do after you graduate? What's the dream?"

Like most people who just got blindsided on a first friend date, he said, "I'm not really sure."

"Well, if you could have anything, what would you want? If you could have it all, what would it be?"

Steve started talking about working with the military and doing physical therapy on wounded veterans and enlisted soldiers. The benefits would be good, and he could support his family. There's a big military hospital in Germany, so maybe they could see some of the world that way, too.

"That's really cool," I said. "Has that been what you've always wanted, or is there something else?"

Very quickly, Steve said, "I used to be a football coach. So I'd love to be a physical therapist on a pro sports team and work on these great athletes."

Now he was speaking about something I knew well, and I could tell he meant it. "That's awesome, Steve. So is that what you really want?"

He thought about it and said, "You know, actually, it'll probably be a lot of hours, like 80 hours a week. And I'd have to work my way up. And it'd

be a lot of time and energy. So maybe working for a pro team is just one of my options, like plan B or C.”

“Okay, so you don’t want to work for a pro team?” Now I was confused. “Then what is it you really, really *want* ? What’s your vision?”

I laugh every time I think back to this dinner conversation, because I feel so bad for Steve. When he ordered his meal, he had no idea it came with a side of interrogation, especially from someone who seemed to be getting frustrated with him. And believe me, I was getting frustrated, because I was asking him to focus in on what he really wanted to do with his life—what he desired—and instead, like so many of us who have not yet recognized the inherent potential for greatness within ourselves, he was listing all the things he could do but probably wouldn’t.

I learned about desire—the distinction between what we *can* do and what we *want* to do—and how to uncover it from the unstoppable Danielle LaPorte. She’s a phenomenal motivational speaker and author who has graced us with her presence on *The School of Greatness* podcast a couple of times. The first time she came on, she said something that still spins around in my head to this day. She stated, “You need desire to be fully alive and you need vision to fulfill your desires.” How amazing is that?!

Together with *The Desire Map: A Guide to Creating Goals with Soul*, which she published in 2014, Danielle changed my perspective on vision and is mostly responsible for turning it from an interest to an obsession. And now, every time we speak, she hones and clarifies my understanding of vision and desire a little more. The last time, she described her book this way: “*The Desire Map* is about helping as many people as possible get clear on their core desired feelings.”

That was exactly what I was trying to do with Steve: pushing him to get clear on how he felt about life so he could figure out what he truly wanted to do. Finally, he got real: “To have my own practice by the beach. And work like 5 hours a day. And then be able to be there to support my family.”

That is a vision—it was practical, it was real, and though he’d been afraid to be direct about it earlier, now you could hear the sincerity in his voice. I was eager to ask him how he felt after saying that out loud, but I didn’t want his dinner to get cold, so I let it go until dessert. We all dug into our entrées, and, between bites, Steve added one final thought that sums up the entire reason that holds people back from excelling in the School of Greatness:

“I just don’t know if that’s possible.”

Yes, it is absolutely possible, and it has nothing to do with ability. As

the renowned leadership expert John Maxwell says, “Successful and unsuccessful people do not vary greatly in their abilities. They vary in their *desires* to reach their potential.” (emphasis mine) The reason I know this is true and that Steve’s dream is possible is because of my time with one of the School of Greatness’s greatest teachers: Angel Martinez.

I met Angel Martinez in Goleta, California, at the new headquarters of his company, Deckers Brands, a fast-growing, billion-dollar global footwear company. I’d heard of Deckers from the same mentor who introduced me to the power of LinkedIn, but I had little understanding of the company’s size or track record before connecting with Angel, Deckers’ CEO. From the looks of the company’s beautiful new campus, with its glass walls, intricate woodwork, and gleaming granite floors, it was doing pretty well. It turns out, like millions of other people, I was more familiar with two of their best-selling brands: UGG and Teva. When you think about the uniqueness of those two shoes and then you meet Angel, a guy who looks more like a jazz musician than a CEO, you understand why his motto for Deckers is “We want to inspire the unconventional.”

Angel took an unconventional route to greatness. It would be difficult to find another CEO with a similar résumé and worldview. An iconoclast and footwear industry legend, Angel was a founding member of Reebok—its third employee—and the catalyst for the company’s explosive growth back in the 1980s. He single-handedly pushed Reebok into the budding aerobics marketplace by combining style with function and designing the world’s first aerobic shoe for women. Driven by sales of that shoe (called the Freestyle) and lines of improved tennis, running, and basketball shoes, Reebok became the fastest-growing company in history up to that time and blew past Nike for the dominant position in the US athletic shoe market.

Angel went on to serve as CEO of the Rockport Company, a Reebok subsidiary, before eventually leaving the footwear giant to pursue his own ideas and passions. He later helped found Keen, the popular outdoor footwear brand, and joined Deckers as CEO in 2005, when the company had \$200 million in sales. Under Angel’s watch, in less than a decade Deckers’ revenues have soared to nearly \$1.5 billion. Fueled by his entrepreneurial vision, the company has expanded around the world with popular retail outlets, new brands, and record growth. If greatness is built upon insight, acquired wisdom, and a unique vision, Angel is the embodiment of that path to success—a path that begins in prerevolutionary Cuba.

Born in Cuba in 1955, Angel was sent off to live with guardians in New York when he was a toddler, never to return to his native country and

never to live with his father or mother again. His mother had left her young family when Angel was born, and because of the revolution in 1959, Angel would not see his father again for 34 years. Raised in a tenement in the South Bronx by his elderly aunt and her disabled husband, Angel always felt like an outsider who never quite fit in.

His first brush with footwear envy came when he was in grade school and yearned for a pair of Converse Chuck Taylor All Star high-top sneakers, the Air Jordans of the day. To be cool, you had to have Cons. At \$6.99 a pair, they may as well have cost a million dollars. His aunt offered to pay \$1.99 for sneakers—the price of cheap sneakers at Woolworth’s—but Angel was determined to get his Cons. He collected bottles that he redeemed at two cents apiece until he earned enough for them. So precious were those shoes to him that he walked the four blocks home from the shoe store on the sides of his feet so as not to get the bottoms of the Cons dirty.

“It was a moment of epiphany, the perfect confluence of attaining something I’d dreamed about for a long time and having it turn out to be just as good if not better than I had hoped for,” Angel recalled. “It was my first taste of the power of a product to provide emotional and psychological comfort.”

LESSON #1: BE SPECIFIC

This was also Angel’s first positive lesson in the power of vision. More important, it was a lesson in the power of a clear, specific vision. He didn’t want just any shoes. He didn’t ask his aunt for “a cool pair of shoes.” He knew exactly what he wanted: the \$6.99 top-of-the-line Converse Chuck Taylor All Star sneakers in the iconic black canvas with white laces and toe guard. He dreamed about these shoes so vividly that he could feel them on his feet and would do nearly anything to have them.

As the award-winning Brazilian novelist Paulo Coelho wrote in his bestseller *The Alchemist*, “People are capable, at any time in their lives, of doing what they dream of.” And it’s that much easier to accomplish when you know exactly what your dream is. It might seem odd to you that a goal as small as having a pair of nice sneakers of his own would be considered a dream—most of us have never had to struggle so hard for such a small material possession—but for Angel, growing up poor in the Bronx, it put him on the path he followed the rest of his life.

Angel’s story blew me away. From my time in the business world after