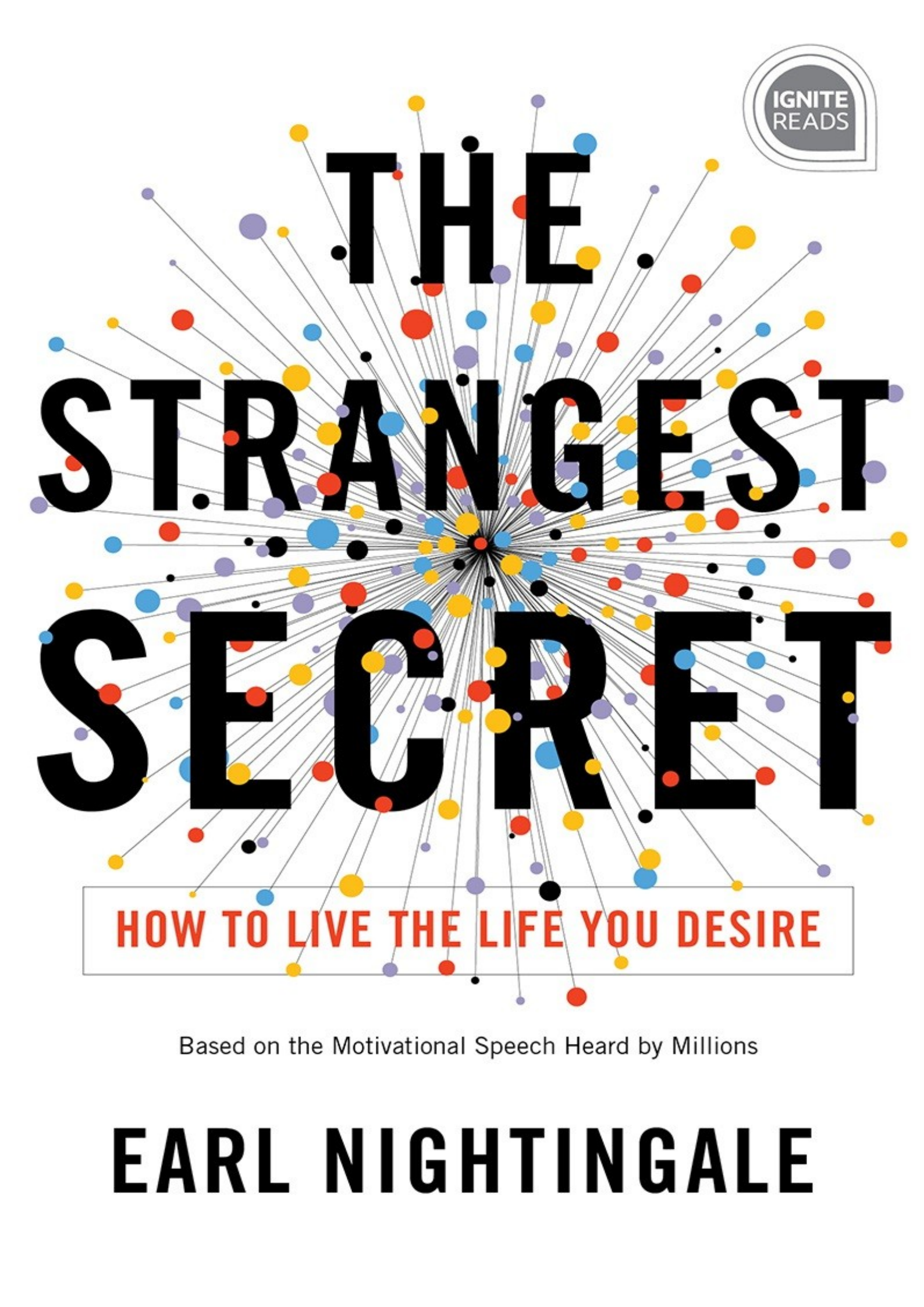


The logo for Ignite Reads, featuring the words "IGNITE READS" in a white, sans-serif font inside a grey, rounded rectangular frame with a white border.

IGNITE
READS

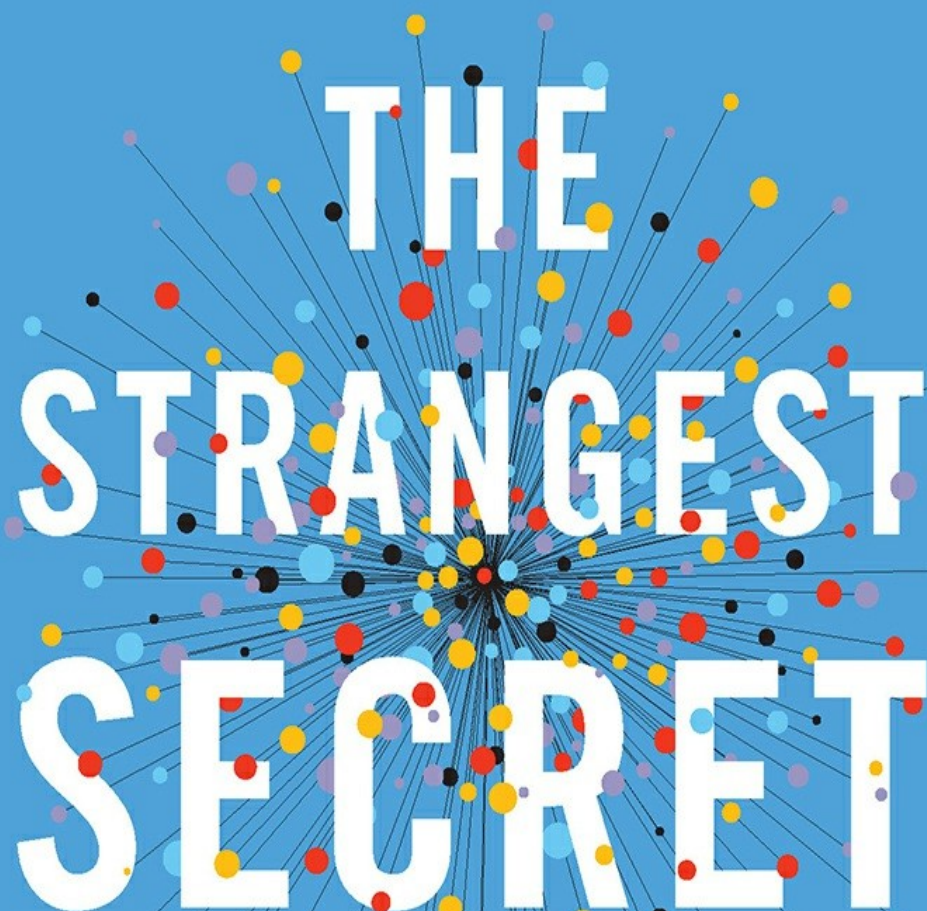
A complex network diagram with a central black dot from which numerous thin grey lines radiate outwards. At the end of each line is a small, colored circle in shades of blue, yellow, red, purple, and black. The overall effect is that of a starburst or a neural network.

THE STRANGEST SECRET

HOW TO LIVE THE LIFE YOU DESIRE

Based on the Motivational Speech Heard by Millions

EARL NIGHTINGALE



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Foreword by Dave Ramsey

Earl Nightingale was a national treasure, plain and simple.

Before there was Dave Ramsey or Tony Robbins, there was Zig Ziglar. And before there was Zig Ziglar, there was Earl Nightingale. His influence as the grandfather of motivational speaking has had a powerful impact on everyone in the personal development space, and his words and teachings have touched more lives directly and indirectly than can be counted.

I'm grateful to be listed in that number.

My parents first introduced me to Earl's message in the 1970s. They were in the real estate business when I was a kid, and they would take me to motivational seminars. I would also listen to cassette recordings of incredible speakers like Earl. So I had already been exposed to *The Strangest Secret* by the time I was twelve years old.

Interestingly, that was also about the same time that I started my very first business, mowing lawns around my neighborhood. I don't know if Earl inspired my first taste of entrepreneurship as much as my dad's insistence that I start earning my own money, but I wouldn't be surprised if his words had at least some impact.

As I grew, so did my appreciation for Earl. I remember getting the chance to hear him speak in that wonderful baritone voice at the Municipal Auditorium in Nashville, Tennessee. That day, he shared the stage with some real legends: Paul Harvey, Zig and Judge Ziglar, Cavett Robert, and Charlie "Tremendous" Jones.

What an incredible lineup!

That day reinforced so much of what I had already learned from Earl, the kind of stuff you'll learn from this book. As you read Earl's words, you're going to discover what the strangest secret in life is all about. More

important, you'll realize why this has become the bestselling personal development talk in history.

And here's a spoiler alert: the strangest secret is "you become what you think about."

Now, if you're reading this book, I'm pretty sure I didn't spoil anything. You already knew that. But it's important to remember exactly what Earl was teaching through this talk. In almost every generation, so many men and women just drift through life with no real purpose. And when that happens, the power of intentionality—really paying attention to what fills our minds—can feel like a superpower.

Of course, people have tried to discredit Earl's words by misusing them. Obviously, no one's going to become eight feet tall just because they wish it were true. And, unfortunately, I can't grow more hair on my bald head by thinking about it hard enough. But when it comes to being intentional about behavior, we absolutely become what we think about.

Here's an example I like to use: If you're married, you thought about courting and dating someone. In fact, you probably put a lot of energy into planning for it. You were intentional about working that plan, and it eventually paid off! Like any success, your marriage was the result of several intentional acts that consumed your very being for a period of time.

What you thought about became reality because you were *intentional*!

Henry Ford once said, "If you think you can or think you can't, you're right." I love that quote. I believe that you can overcome adversity, temporary failure, enemies, and almost anything else if you're intentional about setting goals and willing to take the necessary steps to achieve them. But the decision to believe it's possible is always up to you.

The classic story of Roger Banister is a great example of that.

By the 1940s, the world record for the fastest mile was set at 4:01. And that's pretty much where most people thought it would stay. In fact, one medical expert even said that if someone ran a mile in less than four minutes, his muscles would collapse, his heart would explode, and he would drop dead at the end of the race. Conventional wisdom said that humans had reached their physical limit.

And, since no one believed it could be done, no one did it—until May 6, 1954. That was the day British runner Roger Banister ran a mile in 3:57, breaking the record that had stood as a barrier for nine years. He didn't explode. He didn't fall over. He didn't die at the finish line.

He also didn't hold the record very long. Another runner broke it forty-six days later!

You see, once people realized that the four-minute mile could be broken, they went about the business of breaking it—a lot. From 1954 through 1960, the record for the mile fell twenty-two times. Today, even high schoolers at local track meets can run a four-minute mile.

Like so many situations in life, the problem wasn't in the runners' legs: it was between their ears. They had to believe their goals were possible and act on that belief. As Earl said, the power of intentionality made all the difference.

When I was first starting out, I waited for someone to “discover” me. I was convinced that an appearance on a national television show or even the nightly news would create my breakthrough moment. Now, after working more than thirty years to become an overnight success, I realize that what Earl said so many times is absolutely true: *success is the progressive realization of a worthy ideal*. The incremental, intentional steps we take create the thought patterns and momentum that push us forward in life.

That's because we live in a sowing and reaping world. What you plant in your life is going to grow. Farmers don't plant corn and then stand back in shock when corn comes up! They understand cause and effect. They aren't looking for soybeans because they know that whatever goes into the soil is what's coming out.

They also don't control the sun or the rain, but they do control the work they put in. Likewise, you can't control how God chooses to bless something, but you can control your effort and how you use what you've been given. Like I said, intentionality is important.

Earl liked to say that our minds and our lives are incredibly fertile. Unfortunately, we probably use less than 20 percent of our intellectual and

emotional capacities—and too often the part we do use is focused in the wrong direction. We get all twisted up and distracted because we're human. Earl always encouraged folks to be incredibly intentional so they could be incredibly effective.

The older I get, the more I realize the untapped potential of our minds. I remember hearing Earl talk about that on those cassette tapes when I was a teen. Now, four decades removed from those recordings, I'm still learning how profound our potential is—and how it takes intentionality to create a maximum impact.

One sure sign of greatness is a lasting legacy. And Earl Nightingale's message has certainly stood the test of time. This book reflects the story of an iconic man doing an iconic talk. And the truths you'll find here are as relevant today as when Earl first put them on a flimsy, temporary acetate record for his sales team years ago.

So, read the book. Learn the power of *The Strangest Secret*. And for goodness sake, do what Earl would tell you to do: implement it! Put these principles into practice every single day.

And one more thing...take the time to listen to an audio of Earl's original recording. I promise that you won't be disappointed.

There's just something special about hearing that *iconic* voice delivering this *timeless message*.

Prologue by Diana Nightingale

In order to tell a story effectively, one must begin at the beginning and set the scene with the time, place, and circumstances. So in order to fully appreciate the impact on the countless lives—and perhaps on the very reshaping of society as we know it today—that the writing and recording of *The Strangest Secret* had in 1956, we must revisit the time and circumstances during which it was written and recorded.

Following the end of World War II, men returned home to find jobs, and women left the factories where they had gone to work to support the war effort and returned home to assume their duties as wives, mothers, and homemakers. For all intents and purposes, life in America had settled back in to the peaceful routine that had been established by generations gone by. Each person knew the role they were expected to play in the family and in society—a role that they had been trained for from the time they were little children. Once children were big enough to pull their weight in the family, they followed in the footsteps of their mothers and fathers, learning their skills so that when they grew up, they could marry, have children, and assume their rightful roles as the scripted characters in the drama of life as it had been written long before.

While many may have been uncomfortable or unhappy with the roles they were expected to play, they continued on, living unhappy, unfulfilled lives. To do otherwise would have labeled them as a “misfit” or a “rebel,” and they would have been ostracized as having something “wrong with them,” so people continued to play roles for which they believed they were not suited, living lives of unhappiness, loneliness, and insecurities, dreaming dreams and having visions of living lives differently from those around them but believing that where they were was where they were

supposed to be.

Stories written about those who set off in new directions to explore the world or to dabble in experimentation, like Thomas Edison, Magellan, and other legends, may have further sparked the desire for a life lived differently, but books about these men, philosophy, poetry, science, and adventure were for the most part considered nothing more than a mental escape from the “real world” and did not serve as courage to risk or break the mold to live a chosen life.

Then, in 1956, along came a man who had lived in poverty as a child and had seen war up close and personal. His name was Earl Nightingale, and he not only had visions of how life could be lived in a way that differed from the multitude, but was actually living the life that he had imagined. He was suggesting that each of us has the power, the gift, and the ability to live our lives as we imagine them to be and then went on to reveal this “secret” as to how those ideas, dreams, and visions may be accomplished by us all!

Probably one of the most impactful statements Earl made in his message was that “the trouble with most men is that they simply do not think!” This was then and is even now troubling to most. After all, men and women have been “following the followers” since the beginning of time, and this man with this recording was suggesting that it was not only okay but that we owed it to ourselves and our families, as well as to building a better society, to think about what we would like to pursue in order to become our best selves. He was not only giving us permission but was telling us that we have and have always had the power to direct the courses of our lives.

This whole premise was so bizarre that each time the record was played, it sparked a response so great that each person wanted to have a record of their own and couldn’t wait to play it for others, who, in turn, wanted a copy of their own to share!

And so it was that this simple message that was written and recorded to be played for two weeks to just a handful of salesmen sparked a new idea that soon spread like wildfire, not only across the United States but, in

time, around the world, selling millions upon millions of copies and igniting a new spirit—one of entrepreneurial genius—inspiring people to think in new directions. Suddenly, a new industry called personal development was born, inspiring and inviting people to become all they wished to become simply by changing the way they thought about themselves and about life. People began changing, and so did our world.

In 1960, recognizing the growing need for this kind of information, Earl cofounded a company that would become the world's leader in personal development/success-driven audio programs, introducing such authors as Wayne Dyer, Denis Waitley, Zig Ziglar, Les Brown, and countless others to a world now eager to learn. Earl's company opened that world to speakers and authors who have gone on to enjoy their own personal successes based on the teachings found in *The Strangest Secret*, and while the personal development industry has grown to include inspirational messages of all kinds, it is somewhat intriguing that time and time again, the masses still regard Earl Nightingale's *The Strangest Secret* as the most powerful message of all.

For more than sixty years, *The Strangest Secret* has stood the test of time, still selling daily somewhere in the world, and still changing lives for the better. Earl's radio program, *Our Changing World*, was broadcast daily for more than forty years into the homes and cars of millions of people across the United States, Canada, Mexico, Australia, New Zealand, the Bahamas, Guam, the Armed Forces Network, and thirty countries overseas, not only making Earl a recognizable voice of authority but also opening the minds of people around the world to the many possibilities of life.

Earl Nightingale has been introduced often as the dean of motivation, a legend, one of the world's leading authorities on success, and the greatest philosopher of his time.

I remember Earl Nightingale as a man of integrity who was generous in spirit and love, a man who searched for truth and wisdom and had a strong desire to share all that he learned with others so that they might benefit from that knowledge as well. I am so blessed that this incredible man

chose to share his journey with me and that he has left me with his timeless legacy, one that I am proud to share with the present generation and with those to come along with the desire that each will find the secret that lies within: that we all become what we think about.

Diana Nightingale

Introduction by Crysten Cornish of Nightingale Legacy

In 1956, the landscape of career and personal opportunity seemed as gray as the colorless shows on TV. The trajectory of life was always the same: grow up, get married; if you're a man, go to work in your father's industry, and if you're a woman, take care of the home and the children. To follow any other path would have been not only unheard of, but frowned upon.

When Earl unveiled *The Strangest Secret* to the world, it was met with mixed emotions: a melting pot of fearful negativity and hopeful inspiration. To some, the notion that a person should fearlessly pursue their dreams seemed frivolous, reckless, and even insulting. But to others, it was a wellspring of life that would cure the generational drought of conformity. In a time when the standard "American Dream" seemed the only dream worth pursuing, *The Strangest Secret* unlocked an ocean of undiscovered ideas. People began asking the questions, "What if there's more? What if my dreams actually mean something? What if I really can break the mold?"

Earl's words would challenge a generation to stop aiming for complacency and start trading their delusions for dreams. What began as an encouragement to individuals became a movement for the masses, and the term *self-starter* was born.

Today, personal development is one of the fastest-growing industries in the world. Inspirational mantras are blasted through social media millions of times each day, and motivational books line the shelves of even airport gift shops. In the sixty-plus years since *The Strangest Secret* was revealed, society's expectations of life trajectory have undergone nothing short of a

full metamorphosis. In the 1950s, entrepreneurs were far and few between; today, over fifteen million Americans are self-employed full-time. Women, who once felt constricted by their home responsibilities, now comprise over 47 percent of the American workforce. Now more than ever, individuals are choosing to embrace their freedom to dream, continuing to tear down the confines of conformity.

As Earl so famously said when issuing the thirty-day challenge, “All you need is a plan, a roadmap, and the courage to press on to your destination.” Our hope at Nightingale Legacy is that in reintroducing *The Strangest Secret*, Earl’s wisdom will spark a fresh vision and passion in the current generation. We truly believe that when Earl unveiled *The Strangest Secret*, he forged the pathway from average to exceptional and, in doing so, provided listeners with the lifeline to their own legacy. Today, we invite you to take the first step in writing your own success story. We invite you to tear down the barriers of conformity and to step out of the shadows of normalcy, into the realization of the life you deserve.

Chapter 1

What is Success?

Some years ago, the late Nobel Prize–winner Dr. Albert Schweitzer was being interviewed in London, and a reporter asked him, “Doctor, what’s wrong with men today?” The great doctor was silent a moment, and then he said, “Men simply don’t think!”

It’s about **this** that I want to talk with you.

We live today in a golden age. This is an era that humanity has looked forward to, dreamed of, and worked toward for thousands of years, but since it’s here, we pretty well take it for granted. We in America are particularly fortunate to live in the richest land that ever existed on the face of the earth...a land of abundant opportunity for everyone.

However, if you take one hundred individuals who start even at the age of twenty-five, do you have any idea what will happen to those men and women by the time they’re sixty-five? These one hundred people who all start even at the age of twenty-five believe they’re going to be successful. If you asked any one of these people if they wanted to be a success, they would tell you they did...and you’d notice that they were eager toward life, that there was a certain sparkle in their eye, an erectness to their carriage, and life seemed like a pretty interesting adventure to them.

But by the time they’re sixty-five, one will be rich, four will be financially independent, five will still be working, and fifty-four will be broke.

So of one hundred, only five make the grade! Why do so many fail? What has happened to the sparkle that was there when they were twenty-five? What has become of the dreams, the hopes, the plans...and why is

there such a large disparity between what these people intended to do and what they actually accomplished?

When we say about five percent achieve success, we have to define success. Here is the best definition I've ever been able to find:

Success is the progressive realization of a worthy ideal.

If someone is working toward a predetermined goal and knows where he or she is going, that person is a success. If they are not doing that, they are failures. *Success is the progressive realization of a worthy ideal.*

Rollo May, the distinguished psychiatrist, wrote a wonderful book called *Man's Search for Himself*, and in this book, he says, "The opposite of courage in our society is not cowardice...it is conformity."

And there you have the trouble today: **conformity—people acting like everyone else...without knowing why or where they are going.**

In America right now, there are over forty-nine million people sixty-five years of age and older...and most of them are broke; they're dependent on someone else for life's necessities.

We learn to read by the time we're seven. We learn to make a living by the time we're twenty-five. Usually by that time, we're not only making a living, we're supporting a family. And yet by the time we're sixty-five, we haven't learned how to become financially independent in the richest land that has ever been known. Why? We conform!

The trouble is that we're acting like the wrong percentage group—the ninety-five who don't succeed.

Why do these people conform? Well, they really don't know. These people believe that their lives are shaped by circumstances...by things that happen to them...by exterior forces. They're outer-directed people.

A survey was made of working people, and they were asked, "Why do you work? Why do you get up in the morning?" Nineteen out of twenty had no idea. If you ask them, they would say, "Well, everybody goes to work in the morning." And that's the reason they do it—because everyone else is doing it.

Now, let's get back to our definition of success. Who succeeds?

The only person who succeeds is the person who is progressively realizing a worthy ideal. He's the person who says "I'm going to become this" and then begins to work toward that goal.

A success is:

- The schoolteacher who is teaching school because that's what he or she wants to do.
- The woman who is a wife and mother because she wanted to become a wife and mother and is doing a good job of it.
- The entrepreneur who starts his own company because that was his dream—that's what he wanted to do.
- The salesperson who wants to become a topnotch salesperson and grow and build with his or her organization.

A success is anyone who is doing deliberately a predetermined job, because that's what he or she decided to do...deliberately. But only one out of twenty does that!

That's why today there isn't really any competition unless we make it for ourselves. **Instead of competing, all we have to do is create!**

For twenty years, I looked for the key that would determine what would happen to a human being. Was there a key, I wanted to know, that would make the future a promise that we could foretell to a larger extent? Was there a key that would guarantee a person's becoming successful if he or she only knew about it and knew how to use it?

Well, there is such a key, and I've found it.

Reflection Questions

Ask Yourself...

1. In what ways have you been or are you currently conforming to society's expectations?
2. How has the pressure to conform to another's definition of success prevented you from chasing your own dreams?
3. What is your personal definition of success?

**If the average person realized the power he wields
over his life and destiny, he would live in a
perpetual state of wonder and thanksgiving.**

—Earl Nightingale

Chapter 2

The Secret Is...

Have you ever wondered why so many people work so hard and honestly without ever achieving anything in particular, and others don't seem to work hard yet seem to get everything? They seem to have the magic touch. You've heard people say, "Everything he touches turns to gold." And have you ever noticed that a person who becomes successful tends to continue to become more successful—and, on the other hand, have you noticed how someone who's a failure tends to continue to fail?

Well, it's because of goals. **People with goals succeed because they know where they're going. It's that simple.**

Think of a ship leaving a harbor. And think of it with the complete voyage mapped out and planned. The captain and crew know exactly where the ship is going and how long it will take—it has a definite goal. And 9,999 times out of 10,000, it will get there.

Now let's take another ship—just like the first—only let's not put a crew on it or a captain at the helm. Let's give it no aiming point, no goal, and no destination. We just start the engines and let it go. I think you'll agree that if it gets out of the harbor at all, it will either sink or wind up on some deserted beach—a derelict. It can't go anyplace, because it has no destination and no guidance.

It's the same with a human being.

Take the salesperson, for example. There is no other person in the world today with the future of a good salesperson. Selling is the world's highest-paid profession—if we're good at it and if we know where we're going. Every company needs top-notch salespeople, and they reward those

people. The sky is the limit for them. But how many can you find?

Someone once said that the human race is fixed, not to prevent the strong from winning but to prevent the weak from losing.

The American economy today can be likened to a convoy in time of war. The entire economy is slowed down to protect its weakest link, just as the convoy has to go at the speed that will permit its slowest vessel to remain in formation.

That's why it's so easy to make a living today. It takes no particular brains or talent to make a living and support a family. So we have a plateau of so-called security, if that's what a person is looking for. **We have to decide how high above this plateau we want to aim.**

Now let's get back to the strangest secret, the story that I wanted to tell you today. And I'd like to begin by asking you an extremely important question:

Why do people with goals succeed in life and people without them fail?

Well, let me tell you something that, if you really understand it, will alter your life immediately. If you understand completely what I'm going to tell you, from this moment on, your life will never be the same again. You'll suddenly find that good luck just seems to be attracted to you. The things you want just seem to fall in line. And from now on, you won't have the problems, the worries, the gnawing lump of anxiety that perhaps you've experienced before. Doubt...fear...well, they'll be things of the past.

We become what we think about.

Here's the key to success and the key to failure: we become what we think about. Now, let me repeat that. *We become what we think about.*

Throughout all history, the great wise men and teachers, philosophers, and prophets have disagreed with one another on many different things. It is only on this one point that they are in complete and unanimous agreement.

Consider what Marcus Aurelius, the great Roman emperor, said, "A man's life is what his thoughts make of it."