

- Despite his enviable success, he felt that something important was missing from his life. A few years later, Alan looked in the mirror one morning and realized, "This is not who I truly am. There is more to me than this." In a move that shocked everyone around him, Alan sold off all his businesses and relocated to Boston, where he tried his hand at something that even those who knew him best would never have predicted: making men's suits.

- There is a term for those who triumph against the odds—for winners nobody saw coming. They are called dark horses.

- Ever since the term was coined, society has enjoyed a peculiar relationship with dark horses. By definition, we ignore them until they attain their success, at which point we are entertained and inspired by tales of their unconventional ascent. Even so, we rarely feel there is much to learn from them that we might profitably apply to our own lives, since their achievements often seem to rely upon haphazard spurts of luck. We applaud the tenacity and pluck of a dark horse like Jennie or Alan, but the very improbability of their transformation—from fast-food server to planet-hunting astronomer, from blue-collar barkeep to upscale couturier—makes their journeys seem too exceptional to emulate. Instead, when we seek a dependable formula for success, we turn to the Mozarts, Warren Buffetts, and Tiger Woodses of the world. The ones everybody saw coming. Mozart was composing symphonies at age eight, Buffett was buying stock at eleven, and Woods was winning golf tournaments at six. Early in life, they knew where they wanted to go and put in the long hours to get there.

- Not this book. Dark Horse is premised upon the conviction that we are entering a new epoch demanding a very different formula for success.

- The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative are funding the implementation of personalized education technologies in schools across the country. Even colleges are beginning to embrace personalized learning. In 2013, Southern New Hampshire University became the first university to jettison grades and credit hours and win Department of Education approval for a degree program that is 100 percent self-paced and competency-based.

- Individuality matters.

- In 2018, the nonprofit think tank Populace conducted a national survey through Luntz Global that questioned a demographically representative sample of nearly three thousand men and women about their perspectives on success. When the participants were asked what constituted society's definition of success, the two most common responses by far were wealth and status. But when asked if they agreed with this definition, only 18 percent reported completely or mostly sharing society's view, with 40 percent asserting that they had moved away from society's view over the course of their life. Instead, a large majority of respondents asserted that their own personal definition of success prioritized happiness and achievement.

- This discrepancy between public and private views of success manifested most clearly when participants were asked about what kind of person was considered most successful: though 74 percent declared that according to society's definition it was "someone who is powerful," 91 percent said that for them personally, it was "someone who is purpose-driven."

- But just because we now desire a new kind of success doesn't mean we know how to get it. This rising demand for a life of personalized success has run ahead of what science can deliver because the academic study of success remains stubbornly marooned in the Age of Standardization. For nearly a century, researchers have almost exclusively investigated one-size-fits-all notions of success, persistently posing the straightforward-seeming question: "What is the best way to achieve success?"

- In the spirit of this credo, we asked a slightly different question: "What is the best way for you to achieve success?"

- We had both struggled through life, always swimming upstream. Todd dropped out of high school at age seventeen, married his teenage girlfriend, and had two children before his twentieth birthday. He supported his family by selling chain-link fence across rural Utah. Ogi dropped out of four different colleges five different times and could not hold down a nine-to-five job, at one point supporting himself by selling used books out of the trunk of his car. We both had a long rap sheet from our transgressions during the Age of Standardization, languishing through long stretches when we tried our best to conform to the standardized institutions of work and school, yet were never able to fit in. Maybe we only managed to claw our way to professional proficiency through dumb luck, but one thing we knew for sure was that whatever success we had scraped together was the result of breaking the rules of the game. Not out of defiance or hubris. Out of grim necessity. All of our attempts at following the Standard Formula resulted in failure. That realization provided us with our hunch that dark horses might present a special opportunity for investigating how to achieve excellence on your own terms.

- Every dark horse we interviewed followed an unorthodox route to excellence, by definition.

- Dark horses are not defined by their character. Nor are they defined by a particular motive, socioeconomic background, or approach to training, study, or practice. There is a common thread that binds them all together, however, and it was hard to miss. Dark horses are fulfilled.

- Many dark horses explicitly mentioned "fulfillment." Others talked about their strong sense of "purpose." Some described their "passion" for their work or their "sense of pride" in their achievements. A few spoke of living a "life of authenticity." Several dark horses volunteered "this is my calling," and one informed us in hushed and reverent tones, "I am living the dream." No matter how they described it, every dark horse we conversed with was confident in who they were and deeply engaged with what they were doing. Simply put, their lives are meaningful and rewarding.

- And this all-important decision to pursue fulfillment is what ultimately defines a dark horse.

- The most important headline about Jennie and Alan and the other unlikely luminaries from the Dark Horse Project is not that their pursuit of excellence led them to fulfillment. It is that their pursuit of fulfillment led them to excellence.

- Dark horses were not fulfilled by being excellent at something but by being deeply engaged with their own thing. Jennie McCormick is fulfilled by gazing through telescopes at distant

worlds. Alan Rouleau is fulfilled by fashioning stylish apparel. Swap their jobs, though, and neither one would be very happy.

- By choosing situations that seemed to offer the best fit for their authentic self, dark horses secured the most effective circumstances for developing excellence at their craft, since engaging in fulfilling work maximizes your ability to learn, grow, and perform.

- Personalized success is living a life of fulfillment and excellence.

- Harness your individuality in the pursuit of fulfillment to achieve excellence.

- Dark Horse is first and foremost a user manual for the dark horse mindset.

- More than one person voiced the opinion that Ingrid's problem was a lack of discipline. If she wanted to make something of herself, they advised, she needed to pick one thing and work hard at it. But Ingrid always worked hard.

- Time and again, we encountered a common theme in the journeys of dark horses: a period when they did not fit into their lives—when they felt like a round peg in a square hole. Some were stuck in tedious jobs that required little in the way of acumen. Others developed enviable expertise in a field they believed they should be mastering because it was respectable, stable, or lucrative, yet they felt little satisfaction. Despite feeling bored or frustrated, underutilized or overwhelmed, most dark horses reluctantly plodded along for years before finally coming to the realization that they were not living a fulfilling life. Then came the turning point.

- Dark horses frequently encounter forks in the road that prompt them to forsake the straight path for a winding path. But that invites the question: What, exactly, is provoking these turning points?

- The chief commandment for achieving success within the Standardization Covenant can be summed up in eight simple words: Be the same as everyone else, only better.

- As any college admissions officer or high school counselor can tell you, most parents don't want to hear about philosophical prescriptions for a fulfilling life—at least, not until their child has been admitted to Stanford. They just want to know how to boost their kid's chances of getting in.

- Here is the crucial point you should register about Ingrid's mindset when she decided to stop her public relations work and go all-in on an unproven business idea. At the time, she did not "know her destination"—she had no idea how much money she would make from her new venture and had no clear sense of what her business might ultimately look like. Nor did she suddenly buckle down and "work hard"; she always worked hard. And she certainly wasn't "staying the course" on some long-suppressed professional dream; she had never contemplated a career in floristry before. Nor was it an act of defiance against the system. Her clients were generally conservative in their tastes—corporate customers seeking reliability rather than rebellion. Instead, Ingrid made the decision to reject the Standard Formula—and the Law of Jante—once and for all and blaze her own winding path.

- Though the precise twists and twirls of every dark horse journey are unique, the first step of the journey is always the same: the decision to prioritize fulfillment. When dark horses make that choice, they do not focus on the potential wealth to be had or how masterful they might one day become. Instead, they recognize that an opportunity exists that fits their individuality—and they seize it. From that point forward, they make their decisions based upon who they are, rather than who others tell them they should be. And by continuing to make decisions in this manner, dark horses inexorably develop excellence.

- We can't standardize our way out of standardization. But dark horses teach us that you can personalize your way out of standardization.

- all our lives we have been conditioned to view success through the lens of the standardization mindset.

- "purpose," "perseverance," and "achievement" are wholly colored by the aging values of the Standardization Covenant. That's why the hardest part of the journey to personalized success isn't adopting the new mindset it's letting go of the old one.

- Assumptions are very stubborn things, particularly when they are stitched into the fabric of everyday reality.

- Chapter 2 Know Your Micro-Motives

- But the fact of the matter is that ignoring someone's personal motives is not a particularly effective way to motivate her.

- A 2016 Gallup study found that while only 26 percent of fifth-graders are disengaged from school, 55 percent of eighth-graders are disengaged, rising to 66 percent of high school seniors. You might expect that motivation starts climbing again once you graduate and obtain gainful employment, but Gallup found that a staggering 67 percent of employees feel disengaged from their jobs.

- And if you want to attain fulfillment, it's essential to know exactly what puts the wind in your sails—not what someone else thinks should get you going. That's why Know Your Micro-Motives is the first and most crucial element of the dark horse mindset.

- Your micro-motives are composed of strong and abiding feelings rooted deep within your unconscious self. They include subtle preferences, frank desires, and private longings. Your goal in playing the game of judgment is to use your instinctive reaction to others to zero in on these live emotional wires and attempt to trace them to their source.

- ask yourself why you are experiencing those feelings. Be honest with yourself. The physicist Richard Feynman said it best when he warned, "You must not fool yourself—and you are the easiest person to fool." Focus on what you would like if you had their life, and what you would hate. For example, if you watch a celebrity interview and find yourself thinking, How can anyone be truly happy when they are chasing riches or fame? then you know that money and acclaim are probably not strong motivators for you. On the other hand, if you reacted to the story of Saul Shapiro by thinking, Come on, now . . . the guy's an upholstery repairman. Let's not pretend he's successful!—you've just learned something valuable about yourself. Status

and acclaim matter greatly to you. That's fine; own it. To attain fulfillment, you must be true to what lights your fire—whatever that may be.

- The Standardization Covenant is so pervasive and entrenched that the most difficult part of the game of judgment is resisting the sense that we should be motivated by certain supposedly universal motives, causing us to overlook or downplay our own desires.

- By cultivating awareness of your emotional responses, all of life can become a laboratory for self-understanding.

- For dark horses, passion is multidimensional and dynamic—and, crucially, under your intentional control. Dark horses reveal that passion is not something to be followed, but something you can engineer.

- The more distinct micro-motives you can identify and harness, the greater your engagement will be with your life.

- Following your passion takes little effort. Engineering your passion, on the other hand, is a more serious undertaking. It requires that you diligently pursue a deeper understanding of yourself. Engineering passion is hard work—but the benefits are enormous. When you Know Your Micro-Motives, passion becomes infinitely flexible since different opportunities will activate different sets of your micro-motives. This adaptability imbues your passion with something it lacks in the standardization mindset—sustainability.

- But there is a more fundamental benefit from self-engineered passion. It is not only a reliable source of the energy to act, it is a wellspring of personal authenticity. When you embrace the full range of your micro-motives, you are putting a stake in the ground that announces to the world, "This is who I truly am."

- "I sometimes hear people say that trying to make it in the music business is like standing by the side of the highway with your thumb out, just waiting to be picked up and hoping you get a lift," Susan asserts. "That was not the music business I was in. I never stood with my thumb out. I walked. And those of us who were successful, we all walked for a while. Eventually we got picked up, but we got help because someone saw us walking and everybody likes to see someone moving forward. But nobody likes to see someone standing around with their thumb out, waiting to get picked up."

- We've so thoroughly embraced the individuality-erasing mindset of the Standardization Covenant that we think we can learn something useful about our own likelihood of success by asking how the average person fares. But no dark horse is average, and neither are you. An average is a linear concept, and the reason dark horses ignore the average is because their evaluation of risk rejects the one-dimensional reasoning of statistical averages in favor of a more sophisticated analysis. In the standardization mindset, risk is determined by odds. But in the dark horse mindset, risk is determined by fit.

- The dark horse mindset, in contrast, grants you the power to influence risk. You can reduce the role of chance in your choices by increasing your knowledge of your micro-motives. The more you understand yourself, the greater your ability to judge fit and decrease the role of

luck. By knowing yourself and having the confidence to act upon that knowledge, you take control of your destiny.

- But sometimes a bold move can be as simple as saying yes to a client with an unusual request.

- When you make your first choice based upon your genuine micro-motives, it's almost always going to be a good one. That's because a choice based upon a little self-knowledge is better than a choice based upon none at all.

- if a new opportunity provides a better fit than your present one and you can live with the worst-case scenario, then no matter how seemingly stable and satisfactory your current opportunity appears, you should still choose the more fulfilling option. The reason is simple. Seemingly small differences in fit can lead to very large differences in fulfillment and excellence.

- Dark horses don't follow their passion; they engineer it by understanding and activating their micro-motives. And dark horses aren't given their purpose; they engineer it by making bold moves.

- In general, we're least aware of what our minds do best. —Marvin Minsky

- In the dark horse mindset, a strategy is a method for getting better.

- Standardized institutions are not designed to help you discern the best strategy for you.

- We know with confidence whether we want to go skydiving or eat a plate of eel sushi or watch the latest Marvel movie. But unlike the steady beacon of motives, strengths are inaccessible, contextual, and dynamic.

- Unlike micro-motives, strengths are inaccessible to introspection because with a strength there is usually no real there there.

- You discern your strengths not through introspection, but through action.

- Making a bold move might reveal new micro-motives or clarify facets of existing ones but is unlikely to modify the motive that impelled you to make the choice. In contrast, the whole point of selecting a strategy is to improve your existing skills or knowledge—that is, to alter your strengths.

- Whenever you make a choice based upon your micro-motives, you are declaring, "This is who I am!" But whenever you choose a new strategy, you are making a more provisional claim: "This is what I'm trying next!"

- scientific truths, like personal strengths, are inaccessible, contextual, and dynamic. If a hypothesis does hold up, scientists never stop proposing new ones that might work even better.

- He succeeded because he chose opportunities that fit his micro-motives, and selected strategies suited for his strengths. In other words, just like every dark horse, he figured out how to get better at the things he cared about most.

- Aggregating other sommeliers' strategies didn't make me any better—it just made me understand how other people pass the test,”

- When you learn to Know Your Micro-Motives, you can engineer your own passion, which endows you with energy and authenticity. When you learn to Know Your Choices, you can engineer your own purpose, which provides you with meaning and direction. And when you learn to Know Your Strategies, you can engineer your own achievement. When you do, you will experience a deep sense of pride and self-worth because you will have accomplished meaningful feats while remaining true to your authentic self.

- The truth is, most of us discover where we are headed when we arrive. —Bill Watterson

- Perhaps the most impactful difference between conventional recipes for success and the dark horses prescription concerns goal-setting. The Standard Formula commands you to know your destination. In contrast, the fourth and final element of the dark horse mindset advises you to Ignore the Destination. Destinations are great for institutions. They're catastrophic for fulfillment.

- the unbridled variety of human individuality in this book. The individuality of micro-motives. The individuality of choice. The individuality of fuzzy strengths giving rise to a lavish variety of personal strategies. Put all these together, and you get infinite winding paths leading to an infinite variety of excellence.

- But dark horses reject such conclusions out of hand. In the dark horse mindset, time does not matter. 4. How many hours of study and practice does it take to pass the Master Sommelier Diploma exam? The correct answer is it depends

- Time does not inexorably drive you toward excellence. It is your choices, not the ticking of some metronome, that propel you toward excellence.

- Instead of asking pointless questions like “How long does it take, on average, to master tennis?” or “Why am I taking so much longer than my peers to understand organic chemistry?,” the only question you should ever ask yourself is “Is this the right strategy for me?”

- At first, such a declaration might be put forward reluctantly, but with perpetual pressure from family members, counselors, and teachers to know your destination, this tentative proposal often turns into a resolute plan. But an early commitment to a career is often doomed to failure because it disregards a fundamental feature of reality: the inevitability of change.