

# CHAPTER ONE

## The Philosophy of Exceptional Living; Preparing For Challenges; Digging into MORE

*“There is always MORE, if you have the courage to dig deep enough.”*

Imagine a young girl around eight years old walking along a country road, kicking the gravel and thinking about life and all the wonderful adventures that await her. She is enjoying the moment with the hot summer sun beating down on her, but also understanding that there is more out there. Then imagine this same girl five years later navigating the complex halls of high school, weaving her way through a time of change. Fear, excitement, and insecurity are all wrapped up in this very intense period of her life. This teen then becomes a young woman facing her fears and heading off to university to test her knowledge and open her world. Upon graduation she leaves the familiar comforts behind, heads off to the big city where love, marriage, children, and professional growth follow through the years.

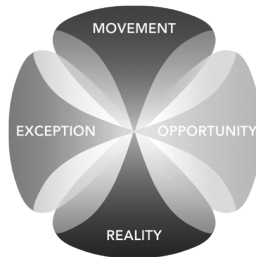
The driving force for this woman is to dig in and get more deeply into her life. She stumbles often along the way, but starts to see a pattern. There are certain principles that emerge from this pattern that bring her clarity and vision. Viewing this life one would see that it is not necessarily glamorous, but the truth of the story is that it is an exceptional life. This capacity for exceptional living is within anyone who truly wants it.

I, in fact, was this girl and continue to be this woman walking along a path that has come to make sense to me. Using the

principles I have developed over the years I hope to be able to help you decide if you truly want an exceptional life and, if you do, to show you how you can make it happen. MORE is at the heart of my philosophy of exceptional living. If you want to live an exceptional life, be prepared to deal with the challenges and difficulties that come with it. Through practising this philosophy there is a path to living a life with true satisfaction and purpose.

MORE is an acronym for “Movement, Opportunity, Reality, and Exception.”

M–Movement  
O–Opportunity  
R–Reality  
E–Exception



The MORE philosophy is not about things, or the accumulation of wealth, or living life in pursuit of some elusive entity that fills up your life. Financial success is admirable, but it may not be wise to build your well-being entirely on wealth or accomplishments. Being attentive and present in each moment, while enjoying your life, may be ultimately more important. The MORE philosophy is quite the opposite of focusing exclusively on financial success; it is about getting a substantial experience out of your life. Living a unique and exceptional life is at the core of the MORE philosophy. Becoming increasingly present, additionally connected, and authentically fulfilled is the goal.

Prior to really digging in, let's do a brief overview of the four words of this philosophy so that you can understand how they connect into a pattern and are at the core of everything else to come in this book. The illustration above shows how these four words converge in the moment. No matter what the situation is in front of you, these four principles can be applied to create a response on how to deal with that moment. It is a simple

structure that can assist you in any circumstance and bring clarity to the choices and actions required of you in that moment.

**The first letter of MORE is “M” and it stands for  
“Movement”**

Life is moving forward whether we like it or not. It is my hope that this book will encourage movement in the reader. To feel stuck is incredibly frustrating, and wastes considerable energy. You may have some stuck spots in your life and “M” represents the action that is required to get things moving. There is no progression in an action plan without movement. “Movement” is “action.”

**The second letter in MORE is “O” and it stands for  
“Opportunity”**

Take the opportunities that are in front of you, and recognize that even the most difficult time is an opportunity for growth. Focusing on opportunity enables us to assess what is right in front of us, giving us the vision to reframe the moment as an opportunity for something valuable in our lives. It is also the ability to seize the moment. Once we understand this assessment skill, we have the ability to deal with and utilize all the aspects of our lives. “Opportunity” is “assessment.”

**The “R” in MORE is for  
“Reality”**

We need to have honest conversations with ourselves in order to get the most out of the life we have been given. When we can see the reality, we get the true information we need to make decisions. We need to pay attention to the “reality checks” that life offers. “Reality” is “information.”

## The “E” in MORE is for “Exception”

It is daring to be the unique exception that you are and thus live an exceptional life. Each of us is one of a kind, and when we take the risk to be true to ourselves, we bring our best to the world and achieve a heightened experience of the world. This is the goal we are aiming for when we examine the steps to exceptional living. “Exception” is the “outcome.”

The MORE philosophy is at the heart of this book and at the heart of my life. These four elements can inform any moment we encounter and assist us in how to respond to our lives.

**M–Movement = action**

**O–Opportunity = assessment**

**R–Reality = information**

**E–Exception = outcome**

### The First Principle is Movement “You have to move it, move it!”

The first principle of MORE is “Movement.” Without movement, life is stagnant. We feel alive and vital as long as things are moving. When things get “plugged up” there is pressure. Life is like a garden hose: if there is an obstruction or knot in the hose, the water cannot pass through and the pressure builds to the point that it eventually bursts. There needs to be flow and movement. In comparison, think about a pool of water without movement; in essence, it becomes contaminated and even dangerous. Water is the essence of life and essential to humans, but water that is stagnant for a long period of time can become filled with bacteria that are harmful to us.

This principle is the same for us, emotionally and psychologically, as well as physically. Water that has movement is vibrant, refreshing, and brings us life. We use it to nourish and cleanse

our bodies, as well as to play and celebrate. Intrinsically, humans are drawn to the movement of water in rivers, lakes, and oceans. Every summer we find ourselves packing our picnic and toys, and heading out to the nearest body of water. Our bodies, our spirits, and our minds are not meant to be sedentary, without movement. When we experience movement in our lives, we celebrate and feel refreshed and invigorated. In every aspect of our human experience, we are built for movement. Therefore, if we do not provide movement for our minds, we create problems. We either shut down or we spin around on the same old information.

## Jason

To understand the importance of movement, let's take a look at Jason. Everything about Jason indicates his life should be exceptional. He did very well in high school, is tall and handsome, his parents are wealthy, people find him charming, and he was always told he had so much potential. This young man is now twenty four and undoubtedly highly intelligent, but he is still living in his parents' basement. He is also unable to find a job or a school program that will hold his interest. Why is this happening?

Through the years he was told how smart he was, but he has always feared that he could not live up to those expectations. He does not feel he deserved the marks he got in high school as he never really tried, and he has now failed several of his post-secondary courses, as he did not attend class or even open the textbook. He finds himself frustrated with the smallest of things, including his parents' endless promptings to do something with his life. In essence, he is spending less and less time with friends and family, as he does not want to explain why his life looks the same or worse than it did five years ago. Instead, he prefers to spend most of his time on his computer, and feels that his virtual world is much more interesting than the real world. This is happening because there is no movement in his life and Jason is stuck!

When we think about Jason living in his parents' basement without any progression in his life, we know he is getting depressed and disconnected. His thoughts are increasingly negative and he is critical of himself and others. He has taken himself out of "the game" and does not want to participate, but his thoughts are increasingly toxic to him. The mind, just like the body, must move; without direction, the mind begins to twirl and swirl over the same things, particularly if we do not provide it with new information and stimulation. This is where the bacteria of the mind can begin to develop.

Jason needs to get some movement happening in his life in order to live an exceptional life. As stated before, thoughts and feelings without movement can become toxic, limiting us and keeping us away from what we need. Consequently, movement is essential to our life and health. There is no exceptional living without movement.

### **The Second Principle is Opportunity "When opportunity knocks..."**

The second principle of MORE is "Opportunity." Life is filled with opportunity. It is a series of different opportunities with a series of different possible outcomes. It is not possible to take every opportunity, but if we take no risks, constantly hesitate, and let all the opportunities pass by, our lives will become stagnant and have no movement. Time keeps moving regardless of what we do. So as time moves, windows of opportunity will come and go, some of which we will take and some we will not. We can be creative forces in our own lives by choosing which windows of opportunity we will open and move through. Not every opportunity has assured success nor can we expect a great outcome from every choice. Each opportunity can be a learning experience if we allow it and open ourselves up to see what lesson lies within.

The best guides to choosing your opportunities are your

curiosity and your fear. Stay curious in life and you will have some interesting experiences. However, if you find yourself fearing the opportunity, be warned that it just might be the one you need to pursue. There is an amazing liberation in transforming a fear by taking it on as an opportunity and moving through it. This is how we build our confidence, competence, and sense of courage and self in the world. In the end, courage is the reward that comes from working through fear. Furthermore, it is important to understand that opportunities seldom come when we are ready.

When I really look at each big change, turning point, or accomplishment in my life, I do not believe I was ready for any one of them. An opportunity usually comes before we are ready, so you cannot wait for the right time to take it. Instead, you can choose to take an opportunity when it is presented to you, “ready or not”! It is very important to understand that mistakes and difficult situations are the “yellow brick roads” of opportunities. They are life’s way of teaching us lessons and leading us forward into growth and movement.

## Brianne

To illustrate how ignoring or disguising mistakes can lead to missed opportunities let's look at Brianne. She is in her third year of university, taking a degree in chemical engineering, but feeling increasingly paralyzed by anxiety and seldom enjoying her life. In the past, she was always successful with friends, academics, and sports. She received a scholarship at the university she applied to, and travelled to the other side of the country to attend this prestigious school. Everyone told her how she was so lucky to be accepted at this school and to receive a scholarship.

It would look as if Brianne was taking every opportunity. The opposite is true. Brianne is actually missing the opportunities right in front of her. Although everything looks like it is happening for her, in reality she has not told anybody how difficult things have really been for her since she left home to go to school. She hates

making mistakes and is at risk of failing some of her classes for the first time in her life. Overall, she is not getting the same high marks she did last year, and she feels herself slipping deeper into a hole.

In addition, she is struggling with how she can keep pretending that everything is okay, when everything seems to be at risk of falling apart. She does not want her parents to know what is happening as they might be disappointed in her. Her fear is that she is a big fake and that she doesn't have it all together the way everyone thinks she does. She increasingly fantasizes about disappearing, or just crawling into her bed and not coming out of her room for months. In addition, she is beginning to feel increased anxiety and avoids the classes she is struggling with and, although knowing that this is the wrong thing to do, she just feels too overwhelmed to attend. Not even her best friends know what she is going through. Inevitably, she feels alone and like a failure.

Brianne was fighting against these lessons and learning opportunities and trying to cover up her mistakes by telling her parents and friends that everything was great at school. Consequently, she did not want to reveal her struggles, and her desire to be perfect and have it all together is actually keeping her stuck. She was not taking the biggest opportunity that was in front of her; increasingly, she was hiding from it. If we are real with ourselves and approach a mistake or a difficult situation in an open non-defensive manner we can find the nugget that will assist us in growing and moving toward something exceptional. It is through our challenges and mistakes that we develop resilience and adaptability.

Our strength and health emerge after we have revealed a mistake or worked through something difficult and humbling. There is no doubt this is difficult, as our instinct is to run and cover up these things. If Brianne could begin to see the learning opportunity in her mistakes and reveal her struggles, she could get the assistance she needs and learn more about who she really is



in this world. Her energy has been spent trying to keep up the façade of having everything together, and she is reaching the point of exhaustion. The path to a more authentic and fulfilled life is there for Brianne, but she has not been able to accept her mistakes as opportunities yet. The courage it takes to face the fear, and the humbling that is needed to take responsibility for a mistake is an essential key to using opportunities as stepping stones to achieving a more balanced life.

### **The Third Principle is Reality “Time for a Reality Check”**

Hand in hand with principle two is the concept of reality. To achieve the outcome of an exceptional life you need to live in the real world! Living in a fantasy will only yield a fantasy, and frankly that is pretty unfulfilling. A fantasy may be pretty and perfect and have a “happy” ending, but it is not real. It is insubstantial and nothing else truly exists there but your imagination. It is healthy to have fantasies, to use your imagination to create visions for the future, but those exceptional moments that offer opportunity and require movement, only exist in the real world.

Fantasy, imagination, and visionary thinking are essential, but in order for vision to have an impact, there needs to be an action that then emerges in the real world. This information is the R of the MORE philosophy. We need to recognize fantasy and wishes for what they are, and pay attention to the real world that is right in front of us. It is filled with people, sights, smells, and sounds, and although amazingly beautiful it is messy and ugly at times.

Life is meant to have all the elements. There is no relationship of substance without some disappointments and difficulties. Without despair there is no joy. Without tears there is no laughter. There is a duality to the real world and therefore, the entire picture helps us appreciate and enjoy what is in front of us. If every day were Christmas, it might feel great for a few days, but then this “special” occasion would become old and “not so

special.” Life is meant to change and have room for both the special and the mundane.

Life provides “reality checks,” and we need to pay attention to them. Often we do not want to see the reality check, because we have attached ourselves to a fantasy or a hope for the future that will not allow us to accept the reality of today.

## Susie

Susie is thirty-five and wanted nothing more than to be a Mom, to live in a loving home, and be the best wife and mother possible. She knows that her husband Randy treats her poorly, and never seems to appreciate all the things she does for him and their daughter. He was never faithful to her, even when they were dating, but he told her that he would change when he became a father. She feels stuck, but does not really want to change things. She tells herself that the right thing to do is to stay with Randy as she wants her daughter to grow up with both her parents, and not live in a broken home. Randy has always wanted a son, and Susie sometimes wonders whether, if they had another child, this would change things and bring their family closer. On some level, though, she knows this is not the answer. Their home is not a healthy, happy place for her daughter, but Susie talks herself into staying, because she keeps the hope alive that one day it might get better. Susie has attached herself to her wishes for her life and is ignoring the reality of her life. Without paying attention to the reality, she will continue to miss opportunities for movement and growth, and she will stay stuck and unhappy.

Just like Susie, we have all used one form of justification or another, but the whole time, if we listen and pay attention, our intuition is trying to give us a reality check. Oddly, it is our intuition that is trying to tell us the truth, the real story, and it is our mind that is telling us the make-believe story.

Reality checks are often painful and difficult, but if you do not heed them, they tend to come back harder, more strongly, and

more painfully. In the end, the cost of denying reality becomes very high indeed. If you fight it, the reality check costs you more as time passes. If you listen and accept the reality check, it will lead you toward the exceptional life you seek. The gift is that it is never too late to listen to the reality check and turn things around, but the work will be harder the longer you wait.

Intrinsically, the longer Susie ignores what is going on in her life, the more difficult it will be to turn it around. If she continues on as she is, she will increasingly disconnect from her intuition and her purpose. We limit our ability to participate and contribute if we are stepping out of the real world. What we have to contribute always means the most when we are being real. Our reality checks can lead us toward purpose. There is a great stimulation and rush in being authentic and offering the world what you really have.

### **The Fourth Principle is Exception “Dare To Be Different”**

Let’s now take a look at the final principle of MORE, and the meaning of the word “exceptional.”

The “E” of MORE stands for daring to be the exception, and to live the exceptional life. In order to understand this concept, we need to define what “being exceptional” actually means, and then decide if an exceptional life is the life you truly want. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, “exceptional” means:

1. Forming an exception: rare.
2. Better than average: superior.
3. Deviating from the norm.

So, an exceptional life is one in which we are aiming higher than the average and is a move away from the ordinary into the extraordinary.

When they hear the word “exceptional,” many people think

it means “great” or “terrific,” but in fact it means something quite different. Something or someone who is exceptional often stands alone or apart. This is not an easy place to be, as we crave company and it is human nature to want to belong to the group. Although we may not mind standing out, we do not want to be lonely, and there are times when living an exceptional life means facing the fear of loneliness. The exceptional life is not the norm. Instead, it is the exception. The exceptional principle of MORE encourages you to take risks and to be the unique person you are. Overall, let your life flow with movement, embrace opportunities, and learn from them.

## Christie

Christie is twenty-nine and running a successful software company. She is without a doubt “quirky,” and has managed to take her quirks and turn them into a successful way of life.

When I first met Christie, she was fifteen and struggling in high school. She had never really fit in with the other students, and high school was a challenge as she felt alone and different from her peers. She did not have many friends and felt like an outsider. She was too tall, too intense, too loud, and too unusual for most of the people she went to school with. She did not care about fashion and did not want to talk about boys with all the other girls in her class. She loved to read, was designing her own websites, and felt a passion for cake decorating and animal rescue. There was nothing “cool” about Christie to her peers, but her warmth and passion are what really make Christie interesting.

There is no doubt that she was the exception among her peers. She worried about world issues like hunger and war, and struggled with some anxiety around these things. There were times she felt a lot of pain, and at times it was a struggle to be compassionate and caring without getting depressed by the pain in the world. She cared about people deeply and helped start a gay and lesbian support group at her school, even though she was not a lesbian

herself. She also started an animal rights group and volunteered at a community kitchen to serve meals to those in need.

She was definitely not the norm, and she suffered at times, as she still wanted to belong. But she grew to understand that she had a lot to contribute and her position as an outsider helped her understand and assist marginalized groups. She found a great sense of purpose in her social activism, and as she used her courage to help others she also grew more and more confident in her unique self.

At twenty-four she graduated from university and joined a large electronic media company where she soon moved to the top. Then when she was twenty-seven, she left that position and started her own company with her husband who was a computer programmer. Their company is doing very well and both of them are very excited to be living exceptional lives in which their unique talents are utilized consistently. Christie and her husband are not afraid to be different and unique. They are both committed to assisting others, and part of their profit each year goes toward a foundation they have started that builds schools around the world.

These are exceptional people, living exceptional lives, and doing exceptional things. Once Christie understood that she could be the exception and did not have to fit in, she found her true self and felt great joy in creating and contributing.

### **The Origins of the Philosophy behind MORE**

I also recall struggling to fit in when I was young. When I look back, I realize that is when my understanding of the principle of exception emerged. I have certainly noticed the times when I did not feel that I belonged as my life progressed. I was a thoughtful child who felt as though I were different, but I also wanted to be a part of something bigger. I paid close attention to what was going on around me and I was always curious about people and life. Like any child, I experienced great joys and heartbreaks.

My first few years of life were on a farm and then we moved to a small Saskatchewan town in Canada's Prairies. It was not an idyllic childhood, but it was a great childhood filled with many fond memories. My parents did not have a lot of money and they worked hard for everything they got. They always provided for me and my brother, but nobody grew up entitled in my family. My brother is two and half years older than me and even then, he was one of my favourite playmates. Our parents both worked and we children were expected to pitch in around the house as well as manage our independence.

Hard work was not an option: it was just a way of life. I do not remember resenting the work that was expected of me; rather it made me feel significant and an important member of the family. My parents were busy working at their jobs or working around the house and yard, but we still had time for fun when the work was done. We did our chores and still had the time and independence to wander through town visiting friends, making up creative games to play, and exploring the area. I enjoyed those explorations with my brother; they included moments of long silences as well as great conversations. Sometimes we would discuss the minutiae of life and sometimes we would discuss the meaning of life and our hopes for the future. Yes, there was a freedom of movement and what now seems like an abundance of time.

It was on one of these walks when I had the first stirrings of thoughts behind what eventually became my philosophy of MORE. I just knew in my heart that this life was an incredible journey and I felt that there was something special out there for me. I wondered at the possibilities ahead and how I would experience this world and this life, and I wanted to do it in a way that would give me the most out of this experience. I did want an exceptional life; I just did not fully understand what I was seeking at that time. I wanted to be a part of something that mattered and I wanted to go deep into this life. I also understood that there was something very special right there in that simple

moment of exploring the prairie countryside with my brother. I was a satisfied child but the thought of discovering new things in my life made me excited and curious.

I feel very fortunate that I still enjoy conversations with my brother, as well as silences, and, occasionally bouncing a philosophical idea or two off him. I still feel the excitement of that young girl in me who is curious about the world; I continue to believe that we can all achieve a feeling of significance and joy in our lives.

### **Do You Have MORE in You?**

Most people feel the possibilities that lie within, but for many of us, these possibilities feel out of reach or remain just around the corner. How do you achieve this exceptional life you seek? What does MORE really mean?

The meaning of the MORE philosophy is intertwined among its principles. As mentioned above, there are four principles that can be applied to life and any situation encountered along the way. In essence, MORE is a way of living life in which movement and growth emerge from paying attention to the opportunities and reality checks along the way, and having the courage to be the exception. MORE is the avenue to exceptional living that lies within each moment and within every one of us.

The next chapters will explain the MORE philosophy further and weave it into real-life examples and stories. At the end of each chapter, there will be some questions for you to think about and apply to your own life. These questions are there to assist you in applying the information from the book and giving the MORE philosophy a context in your own life. I encourage you to think about what you read, ask yourself the questions, talk with others if you want, jot down notes in a journal, and give it all some thought.

To get you started here are a few questions to help you begin your journey through the MORE philosophy.

### Questions for Contemplation

Have you ever had that feeling that there was something special out there for you that you could not quite grasp yet?

When you take an action in life, how do you feel?

What happens to your mind and your body when you feel stuck on something?

Do you take the moment to assess the opportunity right in front of you?

When you make a mistake, do you try to hide it, defend it, forget about it, or analyze it?

Do you feel that you are able to be honest with yourself?

Are you aware of the reality checks in your life, or do you prefer to focus on the way you wish things to be?

Do you fear being alone?

Do you fear being lonely?

How do you feel when you have accomplished something you are proud of?

Do you fear standing up for something and being seen as unique, or does that excite you, or both?