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# **BE USEFUL**

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**SEVEN TOOLS FOR LIFE**



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# INTRODUCTION

A few months after I left the governor's office in 2011, my world came crashing down around me.

It's not like things had been going so great in the years before that. After winning a landslide reelection with 57 percent of the vote in 2006, then passing environmental policies that inspired the world and making the biggest infrastructure investment in California history—one that will serve California's drivers, students, and farmers long after I'm gone—my final two and a half years in the Capitol, which I spent in the thick of the global financial crisis, felt like being stuck in a clothes dryer with a load of bricks. It was nothing but beating after beating from every direction.

In 2008, when the crash hit, it was as if one day people

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were starting to lose their homes, and the next day we were in the biggest recession since the Great Depression, all because a bunch of greedy bankers brought the world's financial system to its knees. One day California was celebrating a record budget windfall that allowed me to set up rainy-day funds. The next day the fact that California's budget was too tied to Wall Street left us with a \$20 billion shortfall and dragged us nearly into insolvency. I spent so many late nights locked in a room with the leaders of both parties in the legislature, trying to pull us back from the brink, that it felt like the state might legally recognize us as domestic partners.

But the people didn't want to hear any of that. They just knew that we'd cut their services while we raised their taxes. You can explain that governors don't have control over a global financial disaster—but the truth is, you get credit when the economy's on the way up even though you have very little to do with it, so it's only fair that you get the blame on the way down. It just doesn't feel good.

Don't get me wrong. We had some wins. We blew up the system that had given political parties virtual veto power over the best interests of the people and turned our politicians into do-nothing losers. We beat the oil companies

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trying to undo our environmental progress and moved forward even more aggressively—we blanketed the state in solar power and other renewables and made historic investments to lead the world in clean technology.

But I learned in those last years of the 2000s that you can pass some of the most groundbreaking, cutting-edge policies that state government has ever seen and you'll still feel like a total failure when a voter asks why you can't keep them in their home, or a parent asks why you cut their kid's school budget, or workers ask why they've been laid off.

This wasn't my only experience with public failure, obviously. I had dramatic losses in my bodybuilding career, I had movies that went in the toilet, and this wasn't the first time I'd watched my approval ratings fall like the Dow Jones Industrial Average.

But I wasn't even close to rock bottom.

And it wasn't the recession that brought my world crashing down.

I did that to myself.

I blew up my family. No failure has ever felt worse than that.

I won't be rehashing that story here. I've told it before in other places, and other places have told it multiple

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times. All of you know the story. If you don't, you've heard of Google, and you know how to find it. I've hurt my family enough, and it's been a long road to repair those relationships; I will not turn them into fodder for the gossip machine.

What I will say is that by the end of that year, I had found myself in a place that was both familiar and foreign. I was at the bottom. I'd been here before. But this time, I was face down in the mud, in a dark hole, and I had to decide whether it was worth it to clean myself up and start the slow climb out, or to just give up.

The movie projects I'd been working on since I left the Capitol went up in smoke. The cartoon loosely based on my life I was so excited about? Bye-bye. The media wrote me off—my story would be over after three acts: Bodybuilder, Actor, Governor. Everybody loves a story that ends in tragedy, especially when it is the mighty who have fallen.

If you've ever read anything about me, though, you probably already know that I didn't give up. In fact, I relish the challenge of having to climb back up. It's the struggle that makes success, when you achieve it, taste so sweet.

My fourth act has been an amalgamation of all three

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previous acts, combined to make me as useful as I can, with a little something else added in that I didn't expect. I continue my bodybuilding and fitness crusade with a daily fitness email to hundreds of thousands of hungry people and my Arnold Sports Festivals all over the world. My policy work goes on at After-School All-Stars, where we serve one hundred thousand kids in forty cities across the nation; at the USC Schwarzenegger Institute for State and Global Policy, where we advocate for our political reforms all over the United States; and at the Schwarzenegger Climate Initiative, where we sell our environmental policies all over the world. And my entertainment career? That pays for it all. This time, after climbing out of the Hollywood wilderness doing movie after movie, I returned with a television series, which is a new creative medium for me that I've enjoyed enormously trying to master.

I knew I'd continue all those careers. Like I always tell you, I'll be back. But what I never expected was that, as a by-product of all this failure and redemption and reinvention, I'd become a self-help guy.

Suddenly, people were paying me as much as former presidents to show up and give motivational speeches to their clients and their workforces. Other people were

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taking the videos of those speeches, putting them on YouTube and on social media, and they were going viral. Then my own social media channels started to grow, because anytime I used them to share my wisdom about urgent matters of the day or to offer a calm voice amid the chaos, those videos went even more viral.

People really seemed to benefit from learning from me, the same way I benefited early in my career from reading about and meeting my idols, many of whom you will hear about in this book. So I leaned into that. I started spreading more and more positivity out in the world. And the more I spoke, the more people came up to me in the gym to tell me that I'd gotten them through a dark time. Cancer survivors, people who had lost their jobs, people transitioning into the next phase of their career. I heard from men and women, boys and girls, high school kids and retirees, rich people, poor people, every color, creed, and orientation in the rainbow of humanity.

It was fantastic. It was also surprising. I wasn't sure why this was happening. So I did what I always do when I want to understand something. I stopped and analyzed the situation. What I noticed when I took a step back was that there was so much negativity and pessimism and

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self-pity out in the world. I also noticed that a lot of people were really miserable, despite the fact that experts keep telling us that things have never been better in the history of human civilization. There has never been less war, less disease, less poverty, less oppression than right now. This is what the data shows. It's objectively true.

But there is another set of data. A more subjective set that is harder to measure but that we can all see and hear when we watch the news, or listen to talk radio, or scroll on social media. So many people talk about feeling irrelevant or invisible or hopeless. Young girls and women talk about not being good enough or pretty enough. Young men talk about being worthless or powerless. Incidents of suicide and rates of addiction are on the rise.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, in particular, we are experiencing an epidemic of these emotions across virtually every segment of our society. Depression and anxiety have increased 25 percent worldwide since 2020. In a study by the Boston University School of Public Health published in September 2020, researchers discovered that the prevalence of depression among US adults had *tripled* between 2018 and the spring of 2020, just a few months into the lockdowns. Whereas

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before, 75 percent of American adults reported feeling no symptoms of depression, by April 2020 that number had dropped to under 50 percent. That's a huge swing!

But the problem goes beyond COVID-19, because there are groups out there—entire institutions and industries, if we're being honest about it—that are taking advantage of people's misery and selling them nonsense, making them angrier, feeding them lies, and inflaming their grievances. All for profit and political gain. These forces are incentivized to keep people miserable and helpless, and to obscure how simple it should be for them to engage with the tools of usefulness and self-sufficiency that are the primary weapons in the fight against unhappiness and apathy.

That, I think, is why so many millions of people all over the world have flocked to podcasts and Substacks and newsletters like mine in search of answers that make sense to them. Things have gotten so bad out there in the culture that they are seeking out someone they can trust, someone who refuses to play the bullshit games, someone who tries to be ruthlessly positive when everyone else is being relentlessly negative.

Those are the people I was bumping into at the gym every single day. And I felt a kinship with them because

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they were expressing a lot of the same emotions I felt after I left office in 2011 and things fell apart. I also noticed that when I offered them advice and encouragement, when I tried to inspire and reassure them and pump them up, I was pulling from a very familiar tool kit.

It was the tool kit that I'd developed over the course of sixty years and followed successfully on my journey through the previous three acts of my life. It was the very same one I reached for more than a decade ago now, when I hit bottom and decided to dig myself out of the hole. This tool kit is not revolutionary. If anything, it's timeless. These tools have always worked. They always will work. I think of them like elements of a blueprint or a road map to a happy, successful, useful life—whatever that means for you.

They involve knowing where you want to go and how you're going to get there, as well as having the willingness to do the work and the ability to communicate to the people you care about that the journey you want to bring them on is worth the effort. They include the capacity to shift gears when the journey hits a roadblock, and the ability to keep an open mind and learn from your surroundings to find new ways through. And most important

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of all, once you get where you're trying to go, they demand that you acknowledge all the help you had along the way and that you give back accordingly.

This book is called *Be Useful* because that is the best piece of advice my father ever gave me. It has stuck in my brain and never left, and my hope is that the advice I am offering you in the pages to follow will do the same thing. Being useful was also the motivating force behind all my decisions, and the organizing force around the tools I used to make them. Being a bodybuilding champion, being a millionaire leading man, being a public servant—those were my goals, but they were not what motivated me.

For a number of years, my father didn't agree with my version of what it means to be useful, and I might not agree with your version, when it comes down to it. But that is not the purpose of good advice. It's not to tell you what to build, it's to show you how to build and why it matters. My father passed away at the same age I was when I brought my world crashing down on me. I never had the chance to ask him what I should do, but I have a good idea what he would tell me: "Be useful, Arnold."

I wrote this book to honor those words and pay forward his advice. I wrote it in appreciation for the years I've had that he didn't, which I've used to make amends, to

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climb back from the bottom, and to build the fourth act of my life. I wrote this book because I believe that anyone can benefit from the tools I've used through every phase of my life, and that all of us need a reliable road map for the kind of life we've always wanted to live.

But most of all, I wrote it because everybody needs to be useful.

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# BE USEFUL

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# CHAPTER 1

# HAVE A CLEAR VISION

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So many of our best people are lost.

So many of the good ones don't know what they're doing with their lives. They're unhealthy. They're unhappy. Seventy percent of them hate their jobs. Their relationships are unrewarding. They don't smile. They don't laugh. They have no energy. They feel useless. They feel helpless, as if life were pushing them down a road to nowhere.

If you know what to look for, you will see these people everywhere. Maybe even when you look in the mirror. It's OK. You're not broken. Neither are they. This is just what happens when you don't have a clear vision for your life, and you've taken either whatever you can get or whatever you thought you deserved.

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We can fix that. Because everything good, all great change, starts with a clear vision.

Vision is the most important thing. Vision is purpose and meaning. To have a clear vision is to have a picture of what you want your life to look like and a plan for how to get there. The people who feel most lost have neither of those. They don't have the picture or the plan. They look in the mirror and they wonder, "How the hell did I get here?" but they don't know. They've made so many decisions and taken so many actions that have landed them in this place, and yet they have no idea what any of them were. They'll even argue with you: "I hate this, why would I have *chosen* it?" Except no one forced that ring on their finger or put that second cheeseburger in their hands. No one made them take that dead-end job. No one made them skip class, or miss workouts, or stop going to church. No one made them stay up late every night playing video games instead of getting eight hours of sleep. No one made them drink that last beer or spend their last dollar.

Yet they fully believe what they're saying. And I believe they believe it. They feel as if life just sort of happened to them. They really think they had no choice in what became of their lives.

And you know what? They're partly right.

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None of us has a choice about where we come from. I grew up in a small village in Austria at the beginning of the Cold War. My mother was very loving. My father was strict, and he could be physically abusive, but I loved him very much. It was complicated. I'm sure your story is complicated too. I bet growing up was more difficult than the people around you think it was. We can't change those stories, but we can choose where we go from there.

There are reasons and explanations for all the things that have happened to us up to this point, good and bad. But for the most part, it wasn't because we didn't have a choice. We always have a choice. What we don't always have, unless we create it, is something to measure our choices against.

That is what a clear vision gives you: a way to decipher whether a decision is good or bad for you, based on whether it gets you closer or further away from where you want your life to go. Does the picture you have in your mind of your ideal future get blurrier or sharper because of this thing you're about to do?

The happiest and most successful people in the world do everything in their power to avoid bad decisions that confuse matters and drag them away from their goals. Instead, they focus on making choices that bring clarity to

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their vision and bring them closer to achieving it. It doesn't matter if they're considering a small thing or a huge thing, the decision-making process is always the same.

The only difference between them and us, between me and you, between any two people, is the clarity of the picture we have for our future, the strength of our plan to get there, and whether or not we have accepted that the choice to make that vision a reality is ours and ours alone.

So how do we do that? How do we create a clear vision from scratch? I think there are two ways to do it. You can start small and build out until a big, clear picture reveals itself to you. Or you can start very broad and then, like the lens on a camera, zoom in until a clear picture snaps into focus. That's how it was for me.

## START BROAD AND ZOOM IN

The earliest vision I had for my life was very broad. It was of America. Nothing more specific than that. I was ten years old. I'd just started school in Graz, the big city just east of where I grew up. It seemed like everywhere I

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turned in those days I was seeing the most amazing things about America. In my school lessons, on magazine covers, in newsreels that played before shows at the movie house.

There were pictures of the Golden Gate Bridge and those Cadillacs with the big tail fins driving down massive six-lane highways. I watched movies made in Hollywood and rock 'n' roll stars on talk shows filmed in New York. I saw the Chrysler Building and the Empire State Building, which made the tallest building in Austria look like a toolshed. I saw streets lined with palm trees and beautiful girls on Muscle Beach.

It was America in surround sound. Everything was big and bright. For an impressionable kid like me, those images were like Viagra for dreams. They should have come with a warning, too, because the visions of life in America they aroused did *not* go away after four hours.

I knew: this is where I belong.

Doing what? I had no clue. Like I said, it was a broad vision. The picture was very fuzzy. I was young. What did I know? What I would learn, though, is that some of the strongest visions emerge like this. From our obsessions when we're young, before our opinions about them have been affected by other people's judgments of them. Talking

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about what to do when you're dissatisfied with your life, the famous big wave surfer Garrett McNamara once said that you should "go back to when you were three, figure out what you loved doing, figure out how to make that your life, then make the road map and follow it." He was describing the process for creating a vision, and I think he's absolutely correct. It's obviously not that easy, but it is that simple, and it can begin by looking back in time and thinking very broadly about the things you used to love. Your obsessions are a clue to your earliest vision for yourself, if only you had paid attention to them in the beginning.

Look at someone like Tiger Woods showing off his putting skills on *The Mike Douglas Show* when he was only two years old. Or the Williams sisters. A lot of people don't know this, but their father, Richard, exposed all five of his kids to tennis when they were young, and they all had talent. But it was only Venus and Serena who showed passion for the sport. *Obsession*. And so tennis became the framework for how they grew up and how they saw themselves.

It was the same for Steven Spielberg. He wasn't a big movie fan when he was a boy. He loved TV. Then one year his dad got a little 8mm home movie camera for Father's

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Day to record their family road trips, and Steven started to mess around with it. Around the same age I was when I was first learning about America, Steven discovered moviemaking. He made his first movie when he was twelve years old. He made one to earn a merit badge for photography in the Boy Scouts when he was thirteen. He even took the camera with him on Boy Scout trips. For Steven, who had just moved with his family all the way across the country from New Jersey to Arizona, movie-making gave him his first bit of direction.

It wasn't moving to Hollywood. It wasn't winning an Oscar for Best Picture or Best Director. It wasn't being rich and famous or working with glamorous movie stars. Those more specific ambitions would all come later. In the beginning his vision was simply to make movies. It was big and broad, like it was for Tiger (golf), Venus and Serena (tennis), and me (America).

This is perfectly normal. For most of us, it's necessary. Anything more detailed gets too complicated too quickly, and you get ahead of yourself. You start missing important steps on the road map. Having a broad vision gives you an easy, more accessible place to start from when it comes to figuring out where and how to zoom in.

That doesn't mean you get narrower with your vision,

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