

Build Your Own Road

**How You Get Where You Want to Go...
The Way You Want to Get There**

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Dedication

IN MEMORY OF Dennis Michael Lyden
My brother, my friend and a courageous man, who gave his life in
Vietnam in March 1966.

With a special love to my parents, Muriel and Lawrence Lyden.

Foreword

“Those not interested need not apply.” The subtlety of the want ad line generally escapes our thoughts relative to employment, but Lois Wolfe-Morgan’s *Build Your Own Road* does not have to be interpreted. While this line shouts the obvious, we generally have to stop and think through it to get the message, which is very similar to road building commitments.

Lois and I had a unique opportunity to share some of our professional career together. Her creativity, intuition and professionalism is so refreshing as you will quickly identify in this book. As we shared our careers, we also shared our personal road building in a very supportive and developing way. We really became mentors for one another, and we have continued that support in spite of our professional lives leading in different directions. We frequently reminded each other of road building strategies with the following quips: Happiness (anger, fear, etc.) is a choice; Happiness is not a station in life, but a manner of travel; Don’t wait for it to happen, make it happen.

Building your own road is a matter of choice, but it is different than other life development experiences, i.e., formal education or basic training in the military. Once you have completed basic training or your formal education you don’t return for repeat performances, when it’s done, it’s done. But everyday living sends you back for basic training every once in a while. Unless you have control of building your own road, life’s events can confuse us with what road we are traveling—maybe it is someone else’s road.

Read *Build Your Own Road* with an open mind. Try it, you’ll like it. It gives a new sense of purpose. It is a great privilege for you to become acquainted with my very good friend and associate.

George H. Oliver
Dean
School of Business
Harding University

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Overview

Life is like a road. It can be smooth or rough, straight or crooked, short or long and dull or interesting.

We are like road builders, because we build our own “roads” in life. Our lives are what we make them. Sometimes, we have to change our plans or directions to accommodate various situations that we either can’t avoid or we choose to evade. But isn’t that like the road builder who designs highways to avoid certain obstacles?

As travelers, we can reach any destination we choose by taking the right roads. But isn’t the same true of life? By taking the right “paths,” or courses of action, we can reach any vision of success that we might hold.

Many people plod along through life without a plan for success. Or, worse yet, they operate on some else’s plan — then they wonder why it seems so unfulfilling to them. By failing to design their own roads, they are cheating themselves out of much of the joy that life has to offer.

Two Components of Success

To achieve a vision of success, whatever it might be, there are only two requirements to fulfill.

- (1) **Define the vision.** Without such a vision, you’ll have nothing to reach for. Life can become awfully boring when we haven’t determined what it takes to motivate us. Defining our own visions of success can make us excited about pursuing them.
- (2) **Design your road.** Whatever your vision, there is a way to achieve it. But you’ll have to plot the course and build the road leading to it. No one can or will do it for you.

That’s the essence of true success. It might seem simple, but it’s not necessarily easy. That’s one reason the world is full of frustrated people. They either have no vision of success, or they’ve never taken the time to design roads leading to it.

Yet, every day, we build our roads a little farther in some direction—whatever direction we might happen to be heading. Often, we don’t know what direction our road is going. Yet, we keep right on building.

If you don’t know where you’re going, how do you know you’ll want to be there when you arrive? Unfortunately, many people have built roads taking them precisely where they didn’t want to be, simply because they never determined where they wanted to go in the first place.

Following Other People's Roads

The majority of people allow others to design their roads. They follow paths that are more or less designed by their employers, spouses, friends and, to some extent, their children. Certainly, there's nothing wrong with allowing valued people to have input into the direction of our life roads, provided that we have final approval.

For example, there's nothing wrong with working for someone else, provided that it's the career direction you want to take. But if your job isn't satisfying you, you're probably building the wrong career road. There's nothing wrong with acting to please spouse, friends and children, provided that you, too, derive satisfaction. It's easy to try to be all things to all people—and fail miserably. If your needs and desires rank low on your list of priorities, it's time you turned your road around.

Life is sort of like a game. There's only one life per player. And if, by the end of the game, we haven't experienced sufficient satisfaction and fulfillment that comes with pursuing meaningful ambitions, we lose the game.

You have only one chance at road building. And if you're not building your road toward the destination of your choice, you're playing a losing game. Yet, I've learned from people who have attended my seminars that many of them feel they don't know how to begin building in the direction of their choice.

In the game of road building, there are no "rules," other than being able to live with the choices you make. Naturally, society will see to it that your road takes a dramatic turn if you're caught breaking the law. And, like any other decision, you will live with the consequences.

Of course, I'm not encouraging you to take up a criminal life. I'm just trying to point out how free you are to choose your approach in life. The only rules in this game are up to you.

I've discovered while conducting seminars that most people have dreams and ambitions they'd like to pursue. It's just that they've gotten so "locked-in" to the business of road building in the wrong direction that they can't seem to change directions. They frequently say they're going to pursue new routes as soon as their bills are paid and their children are grown. But we who know better realize that there will always be bills, and that our children don't ever completely grow up as long as we're alive. These are just convenient excuses to keep building what we have already started.

These people might have good intentions about building their roads in new directions. But good intentions won't get them anywhere. As they say, "The road to hell is paved with good intentions."

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If you want your road to go in a different direction from which it is now heading, you will need more than good intentions. First, you will need **potential**, which, if you're breathing, you already have. Second, you'll need a willingness to consider new **possibilities** for your life. The fact you're reading this book indicates you have that, too.

The only other thing you will need is a **process** that will help you plot the course of your future road. And you've got that, too, because it's in the pages that follow.

This Book Will Help You Make a Start

The process detailed in this book reflects my own experience in road building. I became interested in public speaking and conducting seminars during the 19 years I held various positions with the U.S. Department of Defense. I currently have a over 20 years experience as a speaker and trainer. In 1984, I founded Wolfe Associates, Inc., and became an independent contractor dedicated to enhancing organizational and personal growth within corporations, institutions and various agencies.

I reached my destination by building my own road. This book will tell you how to build yours—and I stress the word, "how." I cannot and will not tell you in what direction to build. That choice is entirely up to you.

Before you can make any choice regarding the direction of your road, it's important to determine who you are. The first section of the book explores the significance of your self-esteem and how we act consistently with it. It also explains how people often resign themselves to unfavorable circumstances, rather than work to create new ones. Also covered is the concept of a "best self" and how you can develop yours, along with the power of positive thinking and how it can generate a feeling of well-being even on "dirt" days.

The second section deals with building your own road. In it, I'll discuss determining your destination—defining success on your own terms—and developing a plan that will help you build your road as you choose. Of course, there are risks with road building, and sometimes, you'll make mistakes that can set you back. I'll explain how risks are necessary for progress, and how mistakes often are our best teachers. I'll discuss the importance of having role models and how they can help us build our roads. There is also a chapter on the magic that

results from the pursuit of self-defined success, and how this magic can make us happier with our lives. The section concludes with a chapter explaining why road building is never finished, and why we should continue building our roads in our chosen directions.

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The final section of the book deals with leadership—the disciplines necessary to keep us building our roads and to help us lead others as they build theirs.

No matter what you do in life, you will build your own road. Whether it goes in the direction you would like, depends on whether you are in charge of its construction. If you feel you aren't, or that you could at least be in more control than you already are, then this might be one of the most important books you'll ever read.

Why not get started now? Your road won't wait.

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Part One

Determining Who You Are

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Chapter One

Self-Esteem—The Key to Your Past and Future

If you don't matter to you, it's hard to matter to others.

—Malcolm Forbes

No matter who you are and what you have done in life, you have been traveling a road that you've built. Perhaps you're already aware of this. And then, perhaps you're not.

This book is about building roads, and I'm going to tell you how it's done. But first, it's important that you realize that the road you have traveled to this point in life has been of your own making. Whether you're pleased with your life, but would like more than you've been getting, or are outright unhappy with your past, the road you traveled was yours. No one has forced you to travel it, and no one can force you to travel a road you do not want to take. It's vitally important that you understand this, because once you've accepted this concept, then you also can accept the responsibility for changing your direction.

For example, if you quit high school in your teen years, you chose that road. If you graduated and went to college, you chose your road. If you got married and had children, you chose your road. If you never married, or got a divorce, you still chose your road. If you've been successful in your career, it's because you chose the right road. If you failed, it's possibly because you've chosen the wrong road.

Of course, I understand that some events present themselves which, more or less, dictate the course of our lives. For example, during the 1960's, many young men were conscripted into the armed forces to fight the Vietnam conflict. A young soldier of that era might argue that his road was chosen for him by the powers that be—the U.S. government. To a point, this might be true. Yet, each and every young man still had the right and privilege to choose his own road—either to comply with the draft, seek refuge in Canada or go to prison. Three different roads diverged for those young men. Each took the road he chose, whether it was selected as the most attractive option or the least unpleasant alternative, as he perceived it.

Others might argue that roads can be dictated for them by other people. The last son or daughter to leave home might feel pressured to remain to care for aging parents. Yet, the offspring has the right to choose his or her own destiny—to stay or remain, depending on which option is perceived to be the most pleasant.

Bearing this in mind, I'd like to point out that all of us choose the roads we want in life. Sometimes, our choices might be tough—whether to go on vacation or stay home to see a visiting relative we haven't seen in five years and, if we don't stay home, won't see for another five. But we choose the road we want to take. It's not a question of whether we're selfish or unselfish, because there's no such thing as being selfish when it comes to doing what we want. You might say that—given the previous option—you might stay home to visit the relative because you wouldn't want to deal with the fallout from other relatives who might criticize you had you gone on vacation. Even so, you opted for the situation that would cause you the least pain and, as a result, the most pleasure. **We choose whatever roads we take because they seem to be the most attractive option at the time.**

So why do we choose certain roads over others? Why would one person go to Vietnam, while another went to Canada and still another goes to prison? Why would one person opt to live at home to care for aging parents when another wouldn't even consider the thought? Why would one individual go on a vacation while another would stay home to visit Uncle Bob and Aunt Alice?

The answer to this question will explain why you've traveled the road you've chosen in life. But most importantly, it will determine the future course of your current road. Your road isn't built for you upon your birth. It's not a predestined path that's absolutely unavoidable.

We build our own roads every day of our lives. And we build them consistent with our self-esteem.

Your Self-Esteem Is Your “Blueprint”

We form opinions of other people as we meet them, and these opinions are strong factors for how we relate to others. If we think of someone as being friendly and open, we'll most likely be friendly and open with them. If we consider someone cold and aloof, we'll probably give them the same treatment.

Sometimes, these opinions might be wrong. But we still act on them. Many times, we may think of someone as being cold and aloof, and we treat them so, only to change our opinion later as we get to know the person better. Then we change the way we treat them. In other words, opinions may or may not be accurate, but we'll act on them anyway.

So what's your opinion of yourself? Whatever it is, that's your self-esteem.

We form our self-esteem based on all the opinions we have of ourselves. And, like we do with others, we treat ourselves—and build our roads—on that basis.

If we see ourselves, for example, as incapable of living a productive existence, we might build for ourselves roads of hopelessness, criminals or derelicts. But if we see ourselves as productive and responsible, we'll build for ourselves the roads of successful, deserving, hope-filled people.

But those are generalized statements. Actually, self-esteem plays an important role in every action we take. Even if we are responsible and productive, we might fear venturing out in new social situations if we see ourselves as socially inept. Or we might be near the top on a wide variety of social invitation lists, yet live the lives of *personas non grata* (unwelcome people) at home because we don't see ourselves as family oriented.

People act consistently with their self-esteem. That's the way it has been, and that's the way it always will be. If the road that's behind you has caused you pain and remorse, look at your self-esteem for the reason.

But now for the good news. If you don't like the road you've built for yourself, you can change it, because **self-esteem is not inherited**. It is self-created, which means it can be changed.

As I look back, I recognize that I, too, suffered from a low self-esteem. It was similar to being imprisoned. Whenever I thought I might like to do something, make a change in my life, job, appearance, buy a new car, change the wallpaper, I would ponder over "what would others think?" These others included my dad, mom, spouse, neighbor, friends, associates, and people I never even met. It was enough to scare the thought right out of me—the fear, the risk—low self-esteem in action.

I was trapped with the questions, "Would they like me, would they respect me, would they hate me...?" Then, "What if I fail, what if I succeed, what if I...?"

The road of low self esteem is a deadly road. I chose to get off that road by changing my attitude. Now I know that:

- It doesn't matter if others see you as a success or failure; what matters is how you see yourself, how you view each success and challenge and what you learn from the experience.
- It makes no difference how much others love you if you don't love yourself.
- It's not what others think of you; it's what you think of you.

- It makes no difference whether others respect you if you don't respect you.
- It doesn't matter whether others like you if you do not like yourself.
- If you hate yourself, it makes no difference that others hate you, too.

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All of us have a choice—the choice to imprison ourselves, or the choice to be our best self. Consider the idea that we are our own judge, jury, guard at the prison gate and our own prisoner and the warden, then we also hold the power to determine the amount of freedom we have at this very moment.

The key to freedom is our own well-developed and well-defined level of self-esteem. Freedom begins with you. Freedom begins with love of self, commitment and sustained interest in building your own road.

The building of your road starts when you:

- Know what you know
- Take action and make choices
- Stop value judging yourself and others
- Know your developed areas
- Respect yourself as a person of true value
- Know that each day brings many successes
- Love yourself
- Give genuine love to others
- Forgive yourself and others
- Live, laugh, learn, love, and listen

Self-Talk Builds Self-Esteem

All of us talk to ourselves. It's only when we talk to ourselves out loud that other people start to wonder about us. When it's done through thought, our self-esteem is affected.

If our opinions of ourselves comprise our self-esteem, then our self-talk is nothing more than opinions of our individual actions and behaviors which, taken collectively, influence our self-esteem.

Self-talk starts early in life, and is full swing by the time we're in our teens. Our self-talk is what talks us either into or out of doing what we want to do. For example, a teenager wants to ask someone out for a date. Yet, the teen is filled with doubts and acknowledges through self-talk that he or she isn't interesting, charming or

attractive enough for the other person to accept the invitation. The teen becomes convinced of this, decides not to offer the invitation and develops a devalued self-esteem in the process. Although it might seem juvenile, you and I both know people who subscribe to this type of thinking, even though they are well into adulthood. They are living with the negative or low self-esteem they created years ago.

We can also allow our self-esteem to be adversely affected by negative comments from others. Sometimes, criticism is necessary to maintain a

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relationship, whether it's socially or career based. But destructive remarks meant to wound more than help can be devaluing to our self-esteem. When we take seriously the negative comments directed to us from someone we perceive as important—whether or not we actually admire them—it's as if we made the negative comment ourselves. For example, we might not like our parents, siblings or co-workers. Yet, we very well might take seriously what they have to say about us because they play significant roles in our lives. If and when you hear negative remarks, consider the source, and be careful how seriously you take the comments. Decide for yourself whether they are true.

So if we can create our own negative self-esteem, then doesn't it stand to reason that we can create positive self-esteem, too? You'd better believe we can. In fact, the job is entirely up to the individual. You're the only person who can change your self-esteem for the better.

It's All in the Mind

To better understand how we create our negative and positive self-esteem, let's take a quick look at the human mind. It is divided into left and right hemispheres. The left hemisphere is known to hold the conscious mind. It is in charge of analytical functions such as thinking, speaking, reading, writing, arithmetic, planning, organizing, and judgment. The right hemisphere holds the subconscious mind, which provides creativity, sensory information, images, visualization, emotions, intuition, and insight. Separating the two hemispheres is a membrane called the corpus callosum, which is responsible for sending messages between the two sides.

The subconscious mind is a storehouse for all the information we've ever learned, be it in the classroom or through actual experience. Of course, everything we learn is experienced first in the conscious mind. From there, it is recorded in the subconscious. Nothing we learn is ever

really forgotten. It's all stored in the subconscious mind. Some of it might be effectively "buried" until an occurrence or an event brings it to mind.

For example, a song we sang as children might be seemingly forgotten for years. Then, one day, we hear the song on the radio, and instantly, we find we not only remember the song, but we can recall every word of it. In this case, the song was buried in the subconscious mind until the playing of the song was experienced in the conscious mind. At that point, the corpus callosum sent the message to the subconscious, which responded with the stored information—the music and lyrics.

Now, when we pass either positive or negative judgment on ourselves for

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an action or behavior, the judgment is first experienced in the conscious mind, then it is relayed to the subconscious mind, where it stays forever. It doesn't matter whether our judgment is accurate or fair. The subconscious mind doesn't make judgments. Remember, that's the job of the conscious mind. It accepts everything as true.

Our subconscious controls our images. And the more we fill it with judgment, the greater those judgments will influence our self-esteem and as a result, the roads we build.

Simply stated, if we think we're incompetent, we probably will be. But if we think we're responsible and capable, we'll probably possess those traits, too or at least work toward acquiring them.

So let's put all of this together. We can make our self-esteem to be anything we'd like it to be. And that means that the road ahead of us can

go in any direction we'd like—all through the power of self-talk!

Props and Crutches Won't Replace a Strong Self-Esteem

When people don't feel good about themselves, they often evaluate themselves through "props" and "crutches" that they associate with their self-worth. This is called externalized self-esteem—when an individual's self-worth hinges on possessing certain items or associating with certain people. When I was in school, it used to be called the "in crowd" syndrome.

Too many people don't look within to bolster their self-esteem. Instead, they look outside of themselves. Some people with low self-esteem may find identity through material items. Elegant homes,

luxury cars and designer clothes are popular with people who feel the need to affix their identity to objects that can be displayed to all who meet them. (This is not—I repeat *not*—to say that all people with elegant homes, luxury cars or designer clothes operate with weak self-esteem.)

When we're secure with our own identities, we can appreciate the material things of life, because we know we'll still be ourselves, even if we lose them. However, people who are not secure with themselves see the loss of such items as a loss of identity. It's as noted psychologist William James, often referred to as the father of psychology, said: "Lives based on having are less free than lives based either on doing or being."

When we base our self-worth on what we are and what we are capable of doing, then our self-esteem is internalized, or based on our character—the only solid measure of true self-esteem.

People with externalized self-esteem often build roads that reflect an intense pursuit of material items or relationships they perceive will raise

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their self-esteem. People with internalized self-esteem design their roads to lead to happiness and fulfillment. The friendships and material possessions they accumulate along the way are just "icing on the cake."

We All Have Value to Ourselves

Sometimes, people get their value and their worth mixed up. All people have value, regardless of what they do or who they are. The miracle of birth might be a common miracle, but it's a miracle nonetheless. **Each person who has ever lived is a unique being.**

An individual's assessment of his or her own value is based on their level of self-esteem. This means that people with low or negative self-esteem perceive themselves as having little if any value. When that's an individual's self-opinion, chances are he or she will have little value. But individual value can be raised by raising self-esteem. Self-esteem increases when we believe—truly believe—we are worthy of our pursuits in life.

Worth is an entirely different matter. Our worth is based on our talents, skills and abilities. Our employers or clients value us to the extent of our contributions to a company, the family, society, a club or church.

Too often, we confuse our worth as perceived by others with our true value. When we do this, our self-esteem becomes externalized.

We permit it to rise and fall, depending on what others think about us. The direction of roads built by people who confuse value with worth often is dictated by others. And that's no way for an individual to build a road that he or she, alone, must travel.

Only when we can distinguish between our value and worth can we build roads that will take us where we want to go.

Barriers to Achievement

Roadblocks are frustrating when you're trying to get where you want to go. This is true with actual highways, and it's true for the roads that we build for ourselves. When we can't achieve or attain what we want, we have been effectively delayed by a roadblock.

There are two types of roadblocks that serve as barriers to achievement.

(1) **Externally imposed.** These are factors beyond our control. For

example, an individual aspires to a higher position in his or her company, but management decides to fill the vacancy from out-side. A runner wants to compete in a marathon, but breaks a leg two weeks before the race. A vacation must be postponed or

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canceled because a family member becomes too ill to travel. When our plans are ruined by external forces, we can consider these roadblocks that life throws at us, and it's up to us to determine whether to wait for the block to be lifted or to build our road in another direction.

(2) **Self-imposed.** These are factors that are within our control but, for whatever reason, we consciously or subconsciously choose not to control them. For example, we don't finish assigned work on time because we procrastinate. We don't undertake a certain project because we are intimidated by its magnitude. We shy away from new endeavors because we feel we aren't qualified or capable of meeting the challenge. Of course, self-imposed barriers are roadblocks of our own making.

The more self-imposed roadblocks we create, the lower our level of self-esteem. We can't help but deal with external roadblocks that life or other people throw at us. But **life is simply too short to build a road**

that falls short of our destinations because construction was frequently delayed by self-imposed roadblocks. Whenever we impose roadblocks to our achievement, we restrict our achievement and our enjoyment of life.

Remember that only you can build your road. And remember that no one else is better qualified than you to build it.

So before we talk about your future, let's take a look at your current situation—your personal state of affairs, which is the topic of the next chapter.