

## THE BIG IDEAS

### **The Elephant in the Room**

Let's name it.

### **I Never Made It to the NFL**

A lesson on the fundamentals.

### **Dream Big**

What's your moonshot goal?

### **Earnest**

Is better than hip.

### **Think Negatively**

To achieve positively.

*"Time is all you have. And you  
may find that one day you  
have less than you think."*

~ Randy Pausch

# The Last Lecture

BY RANDY PAUSCH · HACHETTE BOOKS © 2014 · 352 PAGES

"I have an engineering problem. While for the most part I'm in terrific physical shape, I have ten tumors in my liver and only a few months to live.

I am a father of three young children, and married to the woman of my dreams. While I could easily feel sorry for myself, that wouldn't do them, or me, any good.

So, how to spend my very limited time?

The obvious part is being with, and taking care of, my family. While I still can, I embrace every moment with them, and do the logistical things necessary to ease their path into a life without me.

The less obvious part is how to teach my children what I would have taught them over the next twenty years. They are too young now to have these conversations. All parents want to teach their children right from wrong, what we think is important, and how to deal with the challenges life will bring. We also want them to know some stories from our own lives, often as a way to teach them how to lead theirs. My desire to do that led me to give a 'last lecture' at Carnegie Mellon University.

These lectures are routinely videotaped. I knew what I was doing that day. Under the ruse of giving an academic lecture, I was trying to put myself in a bottle that would one day wash up on the beach for my children. If I were a painter, I would have painted for them. If I were a musician, I would have composed music. But I am a lecturer, so I lectured.

I lectured about the joy of life, about how much I appreciated life, even with so little of my own left. I talked about honesty, integrity, gratitude, and other things I hold dear. And I tried very hard not to be boring. This book is a way for me to continue what I began on stage."

~ Randy Pausch from *The Last Lecture*

Have you seen [Randy Pausch's "Last Lecture" YouTube video](#)?

Over 20 million people have and, if you're one of them, you know just how magnetically inspiring Randy is.

If you \*haven't\* seen the video yet and don't know who Randy Pausch is, here's the short story...

Randy was a Professor of Computer Science at Carnegie Mellon University. He was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. When it became terminal, he gave his "last lecture." The talk was recorded. It went viral. He wrote [this book](#) with Jeffrey Zaslow as a follow-up to that talk.

The book features fifty-three micro chapters—each telling a different story from Randy's life. It's packed with wisdom and I'm excited to share some of my favorite Big Ideas so let's jump straight

in!

btw: Randy kind of reminds me of a mix of NASA astronaut Chris Hadfield (check out our Notes on [An Astronaut's Guide to Life on Earth](#)), former Notre Dame philosophy professor Tom Morris (check out our Notes on [True Success](#), [The Stoic Art of Living](#), [Plato's Lemonade Stand](#) and more...), Stanford Professor of Engineering Bernard Roth (check out our Notes on [The Achievement Habit](#)) and Mister Rogers (check out our Notes on [The World According to Mister Rogers](#), [Many Ways to Say I Love You](#), and [You Are Special](#)).

And, the fact that this book was based on a talk that went viral reminds me of Admiral William McRaven and his book [Make Your Bed](#).

## THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

*"Too many people go through life complaining about their problems. I've always believed that if you took one-tenth the energy you put into complaining and applied it to solving the problem, you'd be surprised by how well things can work out."*

~ Randy Pausch

"I thanked the audience for coming, cracked a few jokes, and then I said: 'In case there's anybody who wandered in and doesn't know the back story, my dad always taught me that when there's an elephant in the room, introduce it. If you look at my CT scans, there are approximately ten tumors in my liver, and the doctors told me I have three to six months of good health left. That was a month ago, so you can do the math.'

I flashed a giant image of the CT scans of my liver onto the screen. The slide was headlined 'The Elephant in the Room,' and I had helpfully inserted red arrows pointing to each of the individual tumors.

I let the slide linger, so the audience could follow the arrows and count my tumors. 'All right,' I said. 'That is what it is. We can't change it. We just have to decide how we'll respond. We cannot change the cards we are dealt, just how we play the hand.'"

Randy says he won the parent lottery.

His dad was literally a hero. He earned a medal for heroism in World War II and, was so humble, that he NEVER even told his son about it. He was also a witty and wise human.

As Randy playfully quips: When's there an elephant in the room, name it.

The elephant in the room with Randy and the hundreds of people there to hear his last lecture on "Really Achieving Your Childhood Dreams"? His late-stage pancreatic cancer.

So...

He threw up that slide of his CT scan with helpful red arrows pointing to each of his ten tumors as he let them all know he had months to live.

Sigh.

Then, before giving his inspiring talk and modeling the very wisdom he was talking about, he channeled his inner, wise Stoic and reminded us that, although we can't change the cards we're dealt, we CAN decide how we're going to play the hand.

Although he also made the point that his talk WAS NOT about cancer, I'm going to take a moment and talk about cancer.

As you may know, several years ago my brother was also diagnosed with late-stage pancreatic cancer—which, as you may also know, is among the very worst cancer diagnoses you can get.

I immediately read (and created Notes on) ten of the leading books on the subject and did everything I could to help my brother and his family with YOU and YOUR family in mind as I did so. I also created two classes on the subject: [Conquering Cancer 101](#) and [Conquering Cancer 102](#).

Although we lost my brother after a two-year battle, I have been told by many members of our community that these Notes and classes have been powerful aids for them on their journey through their own or a loved one's cancer diagnosis and I hope you find the wisdom empowering

and encouraging if you and/or your family go through a similar experience.

Check out our collection of Notes on: [The Metabolic Approach to Cancer](#) by Dr. Nasha Winters, [Anticancer](#) by David Servan-Schreiber, [Cancer as a Metabolic Disease - Book](#) (and - [Journal Article](#)) by Thomas N. Seyfried, [Radical Remission](#) by Kelly A. Turner, [Tripping over the Truth](#) by Travis Christofferson, [Keto for Cancer](#) by Miriam Kalamian, [Outside the Box Cancer Therapies](#) by Mark Stengler and Paul Anderson, [The Truth in Small Doses](#) by Clifton Leaf, and [The Emperor of All Maladies](#) by Siddhartha Mukherjee.

Now that we've introduced the elephant, let's take a deeper dive into Randy's wisdom...

*"Experience is what you get when you didn't get what you wanted. And experience is often the most valuable thing you have to offer."*

~ Randy Pausch

## I NEVER MADE IT TO THE NFL

"My romance with football started when my dad dragged me, kicking and screaming, to join a league. I had no desire to be there. I was naturally wimpy, and the smallest kid by far. Fear turned to awe when I met my coach, Jim Graham, a hulking six-foot-four wall-of-a-guy. He had been a linebacker for Penn State, and was seriously old-school. I mean, *really* old-school; like he thought the forward pass was a trick play.

On the first day of practice, we were all scared to death. Plus he hadn't brought along any footballs. One kid finally spoke up for all of us. 'Excuse me, Coach. There are no footballs.'

And Coach Graham responded, 'We don't need any footballs.'

There was a silence, while we thought about that...

'How many men are on the football field at a time?' he asked us.

Eleven on a team, we answered. So that makes twenty-two.

'And how many people are touching the football at any given time?'

One of them.

'Right!' he said. 'So we're going to work on what those *other* twenty-one guys are doing.'

Fundamentals. That was the great gift Coach Graham gave us. Fundamentals, fundamentals, fundamentals. As a college professor, I've seen this as one lesson so many kids ignore, always to their detriment: You've got to get the fundamentals down, because otherwise the fancy stuff is not going to work."

That's from a chapter-story called "I Never Made It to the NFL."

Although Randy didn't fulfill his childhood dream to make it to the NFL, he did fulfill a bunch of others including working for Disney and contributing to the *World Book Encyclopedia*. And, apparently he often tossed a football up in the air while in his office and I imagine he did so while thinking of his great, old-school Coach.

*"So that was a setback. But I kept my mantra in mind: The brick walls are there for a reason. They're not there to keep us out. The brick walls are there to give us a chance to show how badly we want something."*

~ Randy Pausch

Of course, I can't read a story about an old-school coach preaching the fundamentals without thinking about THE greatest coach of them all: John Wooden. The cornerstone of our ENTIRE Heroic philosophy is based on his wisdom. We talk about him all the time. Most recently, we talked about him in Ryan Holiday's new book [Discipline Is Destiny](#). Here's how Ryan tells one of my all-time favorite stories:

"Even though they were some of the best recruits in the nation, even though they'd been doing this nearly every day for their lives, Coach Wooden started his very first team meeting at the beginning of each UCLA season with a simple exercise.

'Men,' he said, 'this is how you put your shoes and socks on.' This, certainly, was not what they expected. Not the kind of instruction they thought they'd get from one of the winningest coaches in the history of sports. But it was actually exactly what they needed, and as they eventually

*came to understand, the real secret to success both on the court and in life. Of course, we all think we're past this.*

*We have something more important to think about. We want something more exciting to do. Less basic, less fundamental.*

*We want to really challenge ourselves, not waste time running through some checklist, stretching before a workout, reading the instructions instead of diving in. But that's the point: We're fit to tackle the big problems only if we do the little things right first."*

How are YOUR fundamentals?

Eating. Moving. Sleeping. Breathing. Focusing.

Let's dominate those fundamentals. TODAY.

P.S. When I think of an old-school coach with grit, I think of one of my new favorite books: [\*Old School Grit\*](#) by Darrin Donnelly—a fable featuring a guy who reminds me of Randy's Coach only that character is an NCAA basketball coach. I think you'll love that and the whole "Sports for the Soul" series including: [\*Think Like a Warrior\*](#), [\*Relentless Optimism\*](#), [\*Victory Favors the Fearless\*](#), [\*Life to the Fullest\*](#), and [\*The Turnaround\*](#).

And, while we're talking about Notes on great fiction, have you checked out our collection on Harry Potter? We've got Notes on all seven of J.K. Rowling's classics: [\*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone\*](#), [\*Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets\*](#), [\*Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban\*](#), [\*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire\*](#), [\*Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix\*](#), [\*Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince\*](#), and [\*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows\*](#).

*"A lot of people want a shortcut. I find the best shortcut is the long way, which is basically two words: work hard."*

~ Randy Pausch

## DREAM BIG

"Men first walked on the moon during the summer of 1969, when I was eight years old. I knew then that pretty much anything was possible. It was as if all of us, all over the world, had been given permission to dream big dreams. ...

I understand the arguments about how the billions of dollars spent to put men on the moon could have been used to fight poverty and hunger on Earth. But, look, I'm a scientist who sees inspiration as the ultimate tool for doing good.

When you use money to fight poverty, it can be of great value, but too often, you're working at the margins. When you're putting people on the moon, you're inspiring all of us to achieve the maximum of human potential, which is how our greatest problems will eventually be solved."

That's from a chapter called "Dream Big."

In our Notes on [\*Living Untethered\*](#), we talked about the fact that the Sun is 93 MILLION miles away and the fact that it takes 8 minutes and 20 seconds for its light to reach us.

We also talked about the STAGGERING fact that the \*next\* closest star is 4.2 LIGHT YEARS away—which, if my math is right, is 24,690,000,000,000,000. That's 24 QUADRILLION miles away. And... While we're blowing our brains up with crazy numbers... Did you know that there are 200 BILLION stars in our Universe? Wrap your brain around the space to hold all THAT!

So... When I read that passage, I immediately thought to myself, "How far away is the moon?"

Enter: Google search query... Answer: 238,900 miles.

Think about sending someone to WALK ON THE MOON in the 1960s. That's crazy. If we can do THAT... then, I completely agree with Randy: "pretty much anything is possible."

I LOVE this line as well: "*Inspiration as the ultimate tool for doing good.*" <- For our purposes, this is why I'm CONSTANTLY challenging YOU to be that (radiant exemplar!) inspiration for

your families and communities. Who we are will *always* speak more loudly than any lecture we give—which is precisely why Randy’s last lecture was so wonderfully popular.

Practically speaking... I searched my Mac for “moonshot” to find some parallel wisdom.

I found this gem on goal setting from Brian Cain’s [The 10 Pillars of Mental Performance Mastery](#): “Setting big goals is great, but they have to be the right goals or they become traps. Financial goals must be secondary to family goals or you won’t have any family to set goals with. You also need to have telescope and microscope goals. Telescope goals that you can see off into the future, and then you must reverse engineer a process back to your microscope and execute on your microscopic daily goals. Telescope goals are 1, 3, 5+ years into the future and the microscope goals are what you will do in the next 24 hours to move towards your telescope goals. Remember, inch by inch, goal setting is a cinch and yard by yard, it’s hard.”

Here’s to our telescopic moonshot goals brought to life by our microscopic daily excellence!

*“If I could only give three words of advice, they would be ‘tell the truth.’ If I got three more words, I’d add: ‘All the time.’”*

~ Randy Pausch

## EARNEST IS BETTER THAN HIP

“I’ll take an earnest person over a hip person every time, because hip is short-term. Earnest is long-term.

Earnestness is highly underestimated. It comes from the core, while hip is trying to impress you with the surface. ...

When I think of someone who is earnest, I think of a Boy Scout who works hard and becomes an Eagle Scout. When I was interviewing people to work for me, and I came upon a candidate who had been an Eagle Scout, I’d almost always try to hire him. I knew there had to be an earnestness about him that outweighed any superficial urges toward hipness. ...

Fashion, by the way, is commerce masquerading as hip. I’m not at all interested in fashion, which is why I rarely buy new clothes. The fact that fashion goes out of fashion and then comes back into fashion based solely on what a few people somewhere think they can sell, well to me, that’s insanity.”

Earnest. <- I love that word.

When I searched the ol’ Mac for references to THAT word, what did I find?

I found this gem from Chris Hadfield’s [An Astronaut’s Guide to Life on Earth](#): “My kids are endlessly amused by what they see as my earnestness. For years now they have played a game they call ‘The Colonel Says,’ which involves parroting sayings of mine that they find particularly hilarious. My son Evan’s personal favorite, which I barked at him from beneath the family car I was trying to fix: ‘No one ever accomplished anything great sitting down.’ Recently, they’ve joked about creating a ‘Colonel Says’ app that would spit out sayings appropriate to any situation. It’s a great idea, though I think you’d only need one: ‘Be ready. Work. Hard. Enjoy it!’ It fits every situation.”

Then I found this gem from my notes on Samuel Smiles’ old-school classic called [Self-Help](#): “Buxton was no genius – not a great intellectual leader nor discoverer, but mainly an earnest, straightforward, resolute, energetic man. Indeed, his whole character is most forcibly expressed in his own words, which every young man might well stamp upon his soul: “The longer I live,” said he, “the more I am certain that the great difference between men, between the feeble and the powerful, the great and the insignificant, is ENERGY – INVINCIBLE DETERMINATION – a purpose once fixed, and then death or victory! That quality will do anything that can be done in this world; and no talents, no circumstances, no opportunities, will make a two-legged creature a Man without it.”

I also found this Buddha gem from [The Dhammapada](#): “Earnest among those who are indolent,

*awake among those who slumber, the wise advance like a race horse, leaving others behind... The earnest are always respected, the indolent never."*

I'm with Randy. I'll take EARNEST over hip all day, every day.

P.S. Fun fact: Our Head Coach Michael is an Eagle Scout. And, so is our head of operations, Patrick. Those two guys are the living embodiment of what it means to be earnest.

*"Everyone has to contribute to the common good. To not do so can be described in one word: selfish."*

~ Randy Pausch

## THINK NEGATIVELY

"Another way to be prepared is to think negatively. Yes, I'm a great optimist. But when trying to make a decision, I often think of the worst-case scenario. I call it 'Eaten By Wolves Factor.' If I do something, what's the most terrible thing that could happen? Would I be eaten by wolves?"

One thing that makes it possible to be an optimist is if you have a contingency plan for when all hell breaks loose. There are a lot of things I don't worry about because I have a plan in place if they do. I've often told my students: 'When you go into the wilderness, the only thing you can count on is what you take with you.' And essentially, the wilderness is anywhere but your home or office. So take money. Bring your repair kit. Imagine the wolves. Pack a lightbulb. Be prepared."

When I read that passage, I knew *exactly* what parallel wisdom I'd go to...

Chris Hadfield has a chapter in HIS book called "The Power of Negative Thinking" where he tells us the same thing.

Here's how he puts it: "A lot of people talk about expecting the best but preparing for the worst, but I think that's a seductively misleading concept. There's never just one 'worst.' Almost always there's a whole spectrum of bad possibilities. The only thing that would really qualify as *\*the\* worst* would be not having a plan for how to cope."

Of course, Gabriele Oettingen would approve. In her GREAT book [Rethinking Positive Thinking](#), she scientifically confirms the power of this wisdom.

In short (as we've discussed), it's not enough to simply visualize your life unfolding perfectly. Gabriele tells us we need to "mentally contrast" that ideal vision with the obstacles that may get in the way of us attaining our goals. It's EXACTLY what Chris says: "Anticipating problems and figuring out how to solve them is actually the opposite of worrying: it's productive."

When we're willing to rub our ideals up against reality, we can plan appropriately. THAT leads to a true, deep confidence because we know we're ready to deal with whatever life throws at us. That's the power of wise thinking and planning. Remember to WOOP!

And... That's a quick look at this great little book.

Let's remember just how preciously brief our lives are. May we all create a life worthy of an inspiring Last Lecture, Hero!

B

**Brian Johnson,**  
*Heroic Philosopher CEO*

## About the Author of This Note

BRIAN JOHNSON



Brian Johnson is the Founder + CEO of Heroic. He's spent half of the last 25 years as a Founder/CEO and the other half as a Philosopher. Brian loves integrating ancient wisdom and modern science to help YOU become the best, most heroic version of yourself so we can create a world in which 51% of humanity is flourishing by 2051. Learn more at [heroic.us](http://heroic.us).

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