

DIRECT YOUR OWN LIFE

**EFREN RAMIREZ
CHRIS BARRETT**

***HOW TO BE A STAR IN ANY
FIELD YOU CHOOSE!***

KAPLAN

PUBLISHING

New York

This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information in regard to the subject matter covered. It is sold with the understanding that the publisher is not engaged in rendering legal, accounting, or other professional service. If legal advice or other expert assistance is required, the services of a professional should be sought.

© 2008 by Efren Ramirez and Christopher Barrett

Photographs by Jessica Hasselbusch

Published by Kaplan Publishing, a division of Kaplan, Inc.
1 Liberty Plaza, 24th Floor
New York, NY 10006

All rights reserved. The text of this publication, or any part thereof, may not be reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission from the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

June 2008

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

ISBN-13: 978-1-4277-9766-7

Kaplan Publishing books are available at special quantity discounts to use for sales promotions, employee premiums, or educational purposes. Please email our Special Sales Department to order or for more information at kaplanpublishing@kaplan.com, or write to Kaplan Publishing, 1 Liberty Plaza, 24th Floor, New York, NY 10006.

Dedication

For you, the reader

Contents

Introduction	ix
ACT I: Pre-Production: Create Your Life Script	1
CHAPTER 1: Develop Your Life Script	3
CHAPTER 2: Edit Your Life Script	27
CHAPTER 3: Let Fun Unlock Your Creativity	47
CHAPTER 4: The Pitch: Turn a No into a Go	63
ACT II: Production: Make a Plan and Build	
Your Team	79
CHAPTER 5: Make Your Plans (and Your Budget) for Success	81
CHAPTER 6: Assemble Your Cast and Crew	105
CHAPTER 7: Schedule Your Time	121
ACT III: Post-Production: Debut Your Dream	137
CHAPTER 8: Ready, Set, Shoot!.	139
CHAPTER 9: Putting Your Unique Dream Together	159
CHAPTER 10: Get Ready to Show the World Who You Are	175
Afterword	193
Acknowledgments	203
Index	205
About the Authors	211

Introduction

Just a few years ago, we were learning the ropes at the Sundance Film Festival in Park City, Utah. Chris, a young entrepreneur, was featured in the Canadian documentary *The Corporation* as the world's first corporate-sponsored college student, and he traveled from the East Coast to see his film premiere to an American audience. Efren, a young actor who had long been struggling for his big break, traveled from the West Coast to show off his starring role in the "small" indie film, *Napoleon Dynamite*. At the festival, we each had remarkable experiences. *The Corporation* won high acclaim and the World Cinema Documentary Award, and *Napoleon Dynamite* won a standing ovation and a distribution deal that would launch the film into the hearts of millions of adoring fans across the country.

We both seemed to have won the lottery with the successes of our films at Sundance. Chris was an entrepreneurial college kid, and his partnership with First USA to teach financial responsibility to young people prompted

The Corporation's producers to feature him in their film. Efen had been practicing the art of performing for years, yet he had earned only small, sporadic roles until he turned down a part in a movie with a \$100 million budget for the lead in an independent film. By opening ourselves up to every humble opportunity, we struck a gold mine of opportunities when our projects blew up at one of the biggest film festivals in the world. But our success wasn't happenstance; as you will see through the pages of this book, we had been moving toward these achievements for years; we had been directing our own lives.

The two of us met at that 2004 Sundance Film Festival while having a blast at all of the parties, screenings, and events. Though we were very different people from completely different backgrounds, we had a lot in common: We were each enjoying the fruits of our hard work and our willingness to be a part of something special.

One of the most important things we have done with our experience was to share our secrets for success with students on high school and college campuses across the country. By talking with these students, it became clear to us that many young people have no faith in their ability to achieve their dreams. Whether they have been discouraged by their families, dissuaded by their friends, or disillusioned by their teachers, most people think that being able to direct their own lives is just a fantasy. Many believe that real life means working 9 to 5. As we listened to these students, we discovered some key points about achieving dreams that anyone can learn and integrate into his or her life. As these principles became clearer, we decided to share them with others through this book.

We want you, our reader, to learn that life isn't lived within the confines of a career; rather, living a successful life means embracing the limitless world of opportunities and allowing yourself to explore any endeavor.

This is what it means to direct your own life: Dream big, work hard, and be open to opportunities. Don't wait for someone to present an opportunity to you—be the director, screenwriter, and producer of your own choices, decisions, and direction.

Directing your own life is not just a fantasy. You *can* make a life out of your dreams. If you are unsure what you want to do with your life or you don't know how to accomplish your dream, *Direct Your Own Life* is for you.

Direct Your Own Life is a collection of battle stories, advice, and hands-on steps you can take to overcome your fears of failure, find direction, and accomplish your dreams. We've shared stories from our own lives and experience and presented some stories from other young people who are living their dreams.

In the pages of *Direct Your Own Life*, you'll discover that living a successful life means embracing the limitless world of opportunities and allowing yourself to dream. The only way you can give back to the world is to make yourself happy first. We can't wait to see what dreams you come up with—and to see you achieve those dreams. If two regular guys like us can do it, you can, too.



ACT I

PRE-PRODUCTION:

CREATE YOUR LIFE SCRIPT

CHAPTER 1

Develop Your Life Script

Every movie starts with a script. But how does a script get written? Well, you need Final Draft (a screenwriting program), a Word document, or a piece of paper. But much more importantly, you need an idea.

Where does the idea come from? From brainstorming, talking, questioning, and staying open to life and all it has to offer. Some scripts are inspired by a person, real or imagined; others by events or phenomena that happen in real life. Every script contains description, stage directions, and dialogue, which amount to a plan that the cast and crew share to make a film.

We all have a story to tell. You are the screenwriter of your own life. So at this point in your life, when you are “figuring it out,” it’s absolutely necessary that you brainstorm ideas about what you want your life and work to be about. When you discover the idea for your life—what your dream is—you literally uncover your life’s purpose.

CHRIS: One morning while relaxing at the hotel before our next college tour, we saw Tiger Woods give a press conference on TV. He was wearing his Nike logo hat and talking about his latest golf tour. Luke and I looked at each other and said, “That’s it!”

You’re always surrounded by inspiration, but do you know it when you see it? For example, how many times have you watched an airplane as it crosses the sky? Have you ever imagined becoming an airline pilot, a flight attendant, or a travel agent? Inspiration is all around you, if you know where to look. To find it, you must go out and experience life with your eyes wide open.

If you don’t know how to find inspiration, your first step is to start looking for it. Because we do that all the time, we’re going to help you find the ideas to use in your life script. Whatever you want to do, there’s absolutely no reason why you can’t do it—and a lot of reasons why you can.

Look for Raw Material

An idea for your life script might be right in front of you. Ask yourself, “What do I enjoy?” Let’s say you enjoy doodling in your spare time. How would you feel about making drawing more than just a hobby? Or maybe you enjoy playing video games and telling other people how to beat Slash’s avatar in Guitar Hero III. Think about how gratifying it would be to turn all of those hours you spend in front of your Nintendo

Wii into a career. Perhaps you like camping and the outdoors. Discovery might be the most important part of your life. Try to identify your passions. Make a list!

Once you have identified a few of your passions, go deeper. For example, if you love food, do you want to become a chef? A restaurant critic? An exporter/importer of foods from around the world? A cookbook writer? An inventor of kitchen appliances? The possibilities surrounding each idea are literally unlimited, even though they all start from the same place.

EFREN: The first time I tried acting in high school, I knew that I had found something that helped me express myself, and a dream was born.

Naming what you enjoy doing is the first step toward living the life that you want. Remember waking up as a kid and looking forward to a special day, such as the last day of school, Christmas morning, or the first day of a vacation? By identifying and choosing to do what you love, every day suddenly becomes that special day, because every day you'll get to do exactly what you want. This feeling—and not money—is the most fulfilling reward you'll ever receive for hard work.

Getting paid to do what you want is nice, and everyone needs to make a living. But what's more important than money is doing what makes you happy. Chances are, the happier you are while you're working, the more and better work you'll do. And most times, that translates into being

paid more. The goal here is to focus on making yourself happy; rewards will come the more you believe in your work, as Efren learned when he turned down a studio picture for a lead role in an unknown, independent, low-budget project called *Napoleon Dynamite*.



DIRECTOR'S NOTES: If the idea of getting paid to do something you enjoy sounds like your dream job, congratulations! You just discovered your purpose in life.

Take Inspiration from Others

Before a screenwriter even starts thinking about writing a movie, he asks himself this crucial question: “What’s my screenplay about?” Sometimes that’s not such an easy question to answer. Often, writers look for inspiration in other movies they’ve seen. Then they decide how their movie idea is both similar to and different from already existing movies.

You can apply this same principle in your own life. Start by looking at other people’s stories. Begin with the people around you—people you know personally, strangers you happen to see during the day, or people you see on television or read about in magazines and newspapers. Really look at them. How do they make a living? How do they spend their days? What is important to them? Which parts of their lives do you admire? Which would you like to have for yourself? Which parts of their lives do you dislike and want to avoid?

Here's a tip: as you evaluate other people's lives, instead of focusing on what they have, focus on what they do. Let's say you admire a famous movie star. For fun, let's say you admire Angelina Jolie. There are many who would want her fame, her power, her lifestyle, even her family. But Angelina could not have succeeded as a movie star without first dedicating her life to acting. If you think you might want to be an actor, you have to consider how it would feel to devote your life to acting, not how it would feel to have money and fame.

Of course, being a famous actor certainly will make you a lot of money, but to become good enough to command \$8 million a picture, you have to put in a lot of time, effort, and hard work. Many will pour more time, effort, and hard work into an endeavor and not see very much money for it. Ask yourself, "Would I love to do this even if I were paid nothing?" If your answer is no, let the idea go. Be honest—you don't love your idea without the fantasy of a big paycheck attached to it. And if you don't love your dream independently of how much it could pay, your effort will be forced, your work will be poor, and you won't make any money anyway. Leave that life to those who can truly answer yes.

If you are honest with yourself as you observe others' lives, you will find the vocation or lifestyle that you would love no matter what the paycheck is. Remember, you don't want just any dream; you want *the* dream that will make your life the best it can possibly be. Finding out what you don't want to do is important, too, because each time you react negatively to what other people do ("I wouldn't want to travel for my job" or "I don't want to work in an office"), you're one step closer to finding what you do want to do.

The more you find out how others are living their dreams, the more likely you'll find a life that looks like what you want your own life to be. Don't worry if you don't see your own life resembling the lives of others. Our lives don't look exactly like anyone else's: Efren pursues the roles that are right for him, and Chris lives a life that is not defined by a 9-to-5 job. That's what we've chosen.

Remember that if you can't find anyone doing the thing you'd love to do (in this book or in your life), that doesn't mean what you want doesn't exist. It simply means that you need to start looking beyond the world around you. This is where your imagination takes center stage.



DIRECTOR'S NOTES: To find inspiration for your dreams, focus on what other people do, not on what they have.

Use Your Imagination

If, after you've observed as many people's lives as you can, you still don't have an idea of what direction your life script should take, tap into your creative side and start making things up.

CHRIS: My friend Luke and I wanted to go to college far from our hometown, but we didn't know how we could afford it. From that problem, we came up with a solution that shaped our lives in amazing ways.

Lots of people are born into a world where they feel their options are limited. Maybe they don't know anyone who is doing something they would want to do, or maybe there seem to be too many barriers to exploring a new idea. But this doesn't mean that they, or you, have to give up on living a satisfying life. The first step toward that life is using your imagination. Expanding your mind and world are essential to achieving success. The journey is all part of the process.

Let's try some brainstorming. Do you want to run your own restaurant? Design your own clothing line? Run the Boston Marathon? Sell an invention? Write a novel or screenplay? Travel around the world? Write and sell a computer program?

Don't worry if your idea sounds far-fetched or impossible. Don't worry if it takes you out of your neighborhood or hometown. Remember, all ideas, like all movies, start in the imagination, and your imagination is unlimited unless *you* impose limits.

Developing your imagination is something you can do for free. It can be as easy as sitting on a park bench and watching strangers pass by. What does that woman with the tiny dog in a designer purse eat for breakfast? Where is that short, bald guy going so quickly? Everyday occurrences can jolt you into a creative reverie, if you just let them. Some will even give you ideas for your life script.

Be Willing to Change

Even if you aren't quite sure what you want to do with your life, one thing is certain: you'll need to change. For more

options to become available to you, you might need to do the following:

- Learn new habits (and get rid of old ones).
- Meet new people (and get rid of your shyness).
- Live in new places (and get out of your comfort zone).

Change is inevitable, and the difference between successful and not-so-successful people isn't whether they change or not but whether they choose to change or just let change happen to them. Learn to embrace the possibility of change. It isn't always comfortable at first, but in the long run, change can take you to wonderful places. Chris often goes out of his comfort zone to meet new people, and they have often helped him to further develop his life script.

Every time Hollywood makes a new movie, the director, actors, and film crew have to travel to new locations that they've never seen before. When you start pursuing your dreams, whatever they might be, your life will have to change and take you to new places you've never seen before, too. Don't be scared; be excited. Your life is about to take a major turn toward bigger and better things, and the best part is, you'll be the one in control. In Efren's case, the role in *Napoleon Dynamite* took him from East Los Angeles to Preston, Idaho.

Any dream worth achieving is probably going to take time to reach. But if you truly enjoy what you're doing, does it really matter?



DIRECTOR'S NOTES: Whatever you want to do, there's no reason why you can't do it.

Develop Your Idea into a Story

In Hollywood, every movie starts out with an idea, but that idea is useless until it's turned into a script. A script is exactly what you need for your own dreams. Every dream gives you a direction, but you need a script, or plan, that shows you how to get there. A good script is like a great ride: it gets you where you're going and shows you a good time along the way.

You don't have to be a Pulitzer Prize-winning author to create the script of your own life. We'll help you. And don't worry—there is no “right” script. Two different people can pursue the same dream but get there using two different paths. For example, we launched a production company together, but one of us started as an entrepreneur and the other started as an actor.

You've already made a list of the things you enjoy doing, identified and researched the lifestyles of people you admire, and stretched those imagination muscles. Now it's time to start writing.

1. Define what you want in as much detail as possible.

Striving for a dream is like aiming at a target. The more specific your dream, the sharper your aim can be and the more likely you'll hit the target. It's easier to hit the bull's-eye if you

see it clearly, but how can you hit the bull's-eye if you don't even know what target you're shooting at?

Let's talk about how to focus your goals. Suppose you love sports. Which sport do you love the most? If you love baseball, get even more specific and ask yourself what you love most about baseball. Is it watching the game? Following your favorite players? Reading about baseball history? Playing shortstop? You could take a hundred different baseball fanatics from all around the world and find a hundred different reasons why they each love baseball.

EFREN: When I have to memorize a script, I tape notes alongside it, breaking down the character and every detail of the script into its simplest form, so I know I really understand it.

Get as detailed as possible to figure out why you love what you do. If you tell people you want to become a doctor, mention what type of doctor you'd like to be. There's a big difference between being a general practitioner and an open heart surgeon—different day-to-day routines, different specialties, different problems.

Once you've nailed down some of the specifics of your dream, share it with others. In doing this, you'll gain more confidence that you can actually achieve it, and you'll also get a chance to hear how it sounds "out in the world." Do you feel ridiculous or powerful? Don't be surprised if you feel vulnerable when you share your dream with others. You will learn a lot by forcing yourself to say what you want.

In Hollywood, nobody makes a movie until they have a clear idea what scene they're going to film first. But it is just as important for the filmmakers to know what they are going to film *last*; they need a complete plan from start to finish so they can gather the right people, equipment, and materials to shoot the movie as quickly and efficiently as possible. Like the big studio heads, you need a clear, distinct image of what your dream is so you can develop a plan to get there as quickly and efficiently as possible.

**2. When you write the script for your dream,
start from the end and work your way
backward.**

If you start writing your life script from where you are now, you might get distracted by the obstacles you think are in your way and never get to the fun part where you get to articulate your ultimate goal.

Suppose you want to become a doctor (we'll stay general here and leave researching how to become an endocrinologist up to you). By starting with your completed dream and working backward, the basic outline of your life script might look something like this:

5. Become a doctor.
4. Get accepted to and complete a residency program.
3. Graduate from medical school.
2. Get accepted to medical school.
1. Get good grades and take the right courses to increase chances of getting accepted into medical school.

Now let's look at how much more focused your script gets if you narrow the focus of your dream from just being "a doctor" to being a specific type of doctor, such as a heart surgeon.

6. Become a heart surgeon.
5. Do a cardiology residency at a hospital that specializes in heart surgery.
4. Graduate from a medical school with strong cardiology resources.
3. Get accepted into a medical school.
2. Research medical schools and find out which ones might offer the best guidance toward pursuing heart surgery.
1. Get good grades and take the right courses to increase chances of getting accepted into medical school.

Notice that both scripts lead to the same type of goal. However, if your real dream is to become a heart surgeon and you just follow the script to become a doctor, you'll get close to your dream, but you may not get as close to your dream as quickly as you should.

When you define a specific dream and make an outline of your script, you will not only identify the steps that will get you where you want to be, but you will clearly see the first steps you can take right now to start on your path.

No matter how big your dream may be, there's always something you can do right now to bring it one step closer to reality. So what are you waiting for? Your dream (and the rest of your life) is waiting.



DIRECTOR'S NOTES: Every dream gives you a direction, but you need a script, or plan, that shows you exactly how to get there.



FOLLOW YOUR HEART

Efren

Long before anyone knew me as “Pedro” from *Napoleon Dynamite*, before you could see my face on T-shirts in Target and Wal-Mart, I remember getting dressed while memorizing my lines. I would put a large sweatshirt over my clothes and say good-bye to my parents. I had to walk down several blocks so I could catch the bus out of East L.A. through Glendale into Studio City, just so I could read for a part or go to the Samuel French bookstore right before going to my acting classes. Then I would take the bus back home. I remember sitting in the back of the bus with my Shakespeare book in my hand or a play or a scene for an audition, and being approached by homeboys asking me where I was from. I told them that I was an actor. They’d ask me what movies I had been in. I really hadn’t done anything yet, and to that answer, they would say that I wasn’t an actor.

At the time it was hard for me to hear that, but in retrospect, I was driven to do something that I loved. In some ways it was an escape; in some ways it was a way of expressing myself. I’d get home late at night and my mom would have saved dinner for me. They didn’t understand really what I was

doing but what they did know was that I was staying out of trouble, which made things easier for them.

Yes, I was tired. Yes, I had to read a lot. Yes, I had to know my way around Los Angeles. Yes, I had to have several jobs to not only help my parents make the rent, but to pay for my acting classes, my books, the bus, and my head shots. I took it as it came. I never thought about being a star. I hadn't thought about traveling the world. I studied the different techniques of acting out of curiosity and necessity. Acting cannot be taught, but the technique can be. The technique is there simply to get the actor connected in the moment, whatever that may be. The interesting thing is to look at a character in a moment, and to be in a moment, one has to accept the moment. And sometimes that is not easy.

I'd had a few small roles and was slowly building my "acting credits" while doing side jobs to pay the rent. But I was barely getting by.

Of course, when it rains, it pours—and one day I got drenched!

Like a one-two punch, my agent called and said I was being considered for two different movies. One was for a part in the Disney movie *The Alamo*, sharing the screen with big-name stars like Billy Bob Thornton and Dennis Quaid. It was a supporting role to be shot in Texas for about six weeks. This was a huge break for any actor.

And then there was the second one, a lead role in an independent, low-budget film starring actors that nobody had ever heard of. This second film would definitely not be considered an actor's big break.

But even though the role in *The Alamo* seemed the obvious choice, I read the script for the independent movie anyway. I wasn't looking for my big break; I wanted to find my greater challenge. The script for the independent film was different in style from what I had read before. Not only was the part bigger than the one in *The Alamo*, but it offered me an opportunity to take on a lead role.

The problem was choosing between a big studio picture as opposed to an independent film. The one would give me face time and maybe even a premiere and possibly a chance to meet more people who could further advance my career. The other would mean having either hot dogs or hamburgers for dinner — again.

My hardworking parents had sacrificed so much for the sake of the family, it was difficult to take on this independent film that was to shoot for 21 days without offering much. But I couldn't help it. It was a lead role in a movie, and that was important to me. I finally told my parents what I was thinking. I'll never forget what my father told me: "*Follow your heart.*"

I felt silly for ever doubting my conscience. And so I accepted the part in the "smaller" picture, and that's when everything changed. You may have heard of this independent, low-budget movie called *Napoleon Dynamite*, which has gone on to make over \$44 million in theaters and over \$200 million in DVD and product sales. I was finally able to pay my parents back for all they'd done — by helping them to buy a house. In turn, I bought myself a house and started a production company with Chris and several other partners called Powerhouse Pictures Entertainment.



HOW I BECAME THE FIRST CORPORATE-SPONSORED COLLEGE STUDENT IN AMERICA

Chris

No dream, no idea is too crazy to pursue. I'm living proof. The summer before my senior year of high school, my friend Luke and I visited California from the East Coast to look at colleges. Our goal was to attend school on the West Coast for a change of scenery. We felt it would broaden our horizons, plus it would be great to live in warm weather year-round. After visiting top schools like the University of Southern California, Stanford, Pepperdine, and the University of California—Los Angeles, we got sticker shock at the cost of attending these colleges. All we could picture was years of student loans and then graduating with a crushing debt. The other option was to go to a local state university at home that cost one-third the price—but our dream was California.

One morning, while relaxing at the hotel before our next college tour, we saw Tiger Woods give a press conference on TV. He was wearing his Nike logo hat and talking about his latest golf tour. Luke and I looked at each other and said, "That's it! Why don't we get sponsored to go to college? We could wear the logo of a company 24/7 and become spokesguys for the company, which would allow them to reach out to a very lucrative market—college students!"

We had a plan. The next question was, "How can we convince a corporation to sponsor us?" That's when we got

the crazy idea to advertise ourselves for sale on our own website called *www.chrisandluke.com*.

Within a week after we had returned home from the West Coast, we had our website up and running. It explained how we would advertise a company on our car, clothes, and surfboards. We had pictures stating we would eat a company's cereal, even if we weren't hungry, or fly in a company's planes, even if we didn't need to go anywhere.

Next, we designed custom T-shirts that read:

YOUR AD HERE
www.chrisandluke.com

Luke and I had no idea what would happen once we announced the site. Perhaps local media would think it was a good idea and interview us, but would national media respond?

To our amazement, within 24 hours of launching the story, morning rock radio shows began calling to interview us. What had started as just a "fun idea" was now becoming a reality. We told the radio hosts that we would be "spokesguys" for a company that was seeking to open or expand their college marketing. However, we would not be "spokesguys" for any company dealing with tobacco, sex, alcohol, or drugs. We wanted to make sure this was a mainstream campaign and one that could really help students.

Within a week, we had appeared on over 150 radio shows, and more were calling to book interviews with us. Then the local newspapers started requesting interviews and photo

shoots. Once those stories ran, television stations started calling us. Soon we appeared on local TV shows on ABC, NBC, CBS, and Fox.

After the local media aired our story, the national shows and publications picked it up. As we were finishing our senior year in high school, national magazines like *People*, *TEEN*, *Cosmo Girl*, and others ran our story. Soon the business sections of Internet publications and national newspapers, like the *New York Post* and *USA Today*, pegged us as “Up and Comers to Watch!” Our typical days soon got very hectic. We’d wake up at 6:00 AM to do a live radio interview and then rush to school. We’d leave at lunch, do more interviews, and then rush back to school.

Then our story broke internationally. A French TV network sent a film crew to interview us, and soon a British and German film crew showed up as well. We even did a long-distance interview by telephone with a radio station in South Africa. The whole idea of two high school seniors being interviewed worldwide seemed so surreal.

In late March of our senior year, Luke and I knew we had to start making a decision about who would be our sponsor. Initially, we thought we would have to reach out to companies to “pitch” ourselves, but in a matter of a few months, because of all the media attention, over 20 companies, both large and small, had called us, including AT&T and HotJobs. But we felt the right deal had not yet come along. Then one morning, we received a call from First USA in Wilmington, Delaware, a Division of Bank One in Chicago. Their marketing department explained that they had read about us in

People magazine and someone from their corporate offices in Chicago had forwarded our website for review. They were intrigued with our concept, as they were developing a national college program about student financial responsibility. This was sounding good.

They further explained that we would *not* be selling credit cards to students but instead teaching students how to be fiscally responsible. We knew that many students entered college with their first credit card in hand. To many, it meant free cash. They'd purchase stuff like cell phones, big-screen TVs, and stereo equipment, only to be shocked when the bills arrived by the realization that they had no way to pay it all back.

Luke and I really liked the idea of helping students learn to be financially responsible. We also liked that we wouldn't have to sell a product. We met with the First USA marketing team. They were all young, recent college graduates who related to us and our goals. Within two weeks, we signed the deal. For maximum impact, we decided to announce our sponsor live on *The Today Show* on the morning of our high school graduation.

We spent the next few weeks in bank and media training to become knowledgeable about every aspect of the bank and its student financial responsibility program. The bank bought us shorts, pants, shirts, and caps with its logo on it, along with coffee mugs for our dorm rooms. It even flew us to Chicago to have a private lunch with James Dimon, CEO of Bank One.

When graduation day arrived, *The Today Show* sent a Town Car and driver to take us to the show so we could arrive by 7:00 AM. We arrived at Rockefeller Center, where Al Roker greeted us as he chatted with the crowd all around. Security escorted us into the NBC studios and took us to the green room, the waiting area for guests before they appear on the show. Luke and I rushed to eat the free bagels, muffins, fruit, cheese, coffee, and juices that NBC provided for all of its guests.

Although we weren't nervous about our appearance, the bank marketing team that came along with us seemed very tense. This would be the first time their bank would be featured on the number one morning show in America, viewed by millions, so they kept reviewing with us the points they wanted us to emphasize about their bank. Joe Rogan, host of the TV show *Fear Factor*, was also on the show that morning. He, too, noticed how nervous the marketing team was and smiled at Luke and me. Just think, a few short months ago we were in California, worried about how we could possibly pay for college, and now here we were eating bagels with Joe Rogan, about to appear on national TV.

We got situated on the set. Ann Curry, who was conducting the interview, walked on the set and greeted Luke and me. Then we heard "in 5-4-3-2-1," and we were live! After a brief introduction, Ann turned to us and said, "Okay, who is the sponsor?"

Luke lifted his shirt, revealing the bank's logo on a shirt underneath, and I said, "We are thrilled to be sponsored by First USA." Later, we found out that the bank marketing team screamed with joy in the green room as we made that

announcement! We explained that our corporate sponsorship deal consisted of our full college tuition, approximately \$40,000 a year each, \$3,000 per semester for expenses, clothes with their bank logo, and surfboards also with their logo. Then we announced that Luke was attending the University of Southern California in Los Angeles and I would be attending Pepperdine University in Malibu.

The segment flew by very quickly, and during the commercial break, we met Matt Lauer and Al Roker. Back in the green room, the bank marketing team congratulated us, and a Town Car took us back home to prepare for our high school graduation.

Our graduation appeared on TV news shows across the country. By 10:00 PM that same night, we had to go back to New York City to prepare for a national satellite media tour early the next morning. We also appeared live on CNN and some local New York City television shows. Within 48 hours of our corporate sponsorship announcement, we had given First USA 50 million media impressions in the form of television, newspaper, and magazine appearances.

That August, CNN, MSNBC, KTLA, and other TV news crews followed us to film two guys from New Jersey, the very first corporately sponsored college students in America, moving into their dorms. Over the next few months, we spoke to college students about financial responsibility. We received a call from *People* alerting us that we had been chosen to be in their year-end issue of “The 25 Most Intriguing People of 2001.” And to think, this all began with nothing more than two high school students trying to find a way to

pay for college. We'd had a dream, and perhaps at the time it was a crazy dream, but we had followed through and made it a reality.

Don't be afraid of pursuing your crazy dream — you never know, it can actually come true!

★ ★ ★

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT'S TASKS

- ☆ Ask yourself what you enjoy doing.
Make a list of your hobbies and interests and think about ways to do them more often and with more commitment. Be as specific as possible.
- ☆ Open your eyes and look at everyone around you.
How do they live their lives? Is there anyone—a member of your family, an acquaintance or colleague, a famous person—whom you think has it all figured out? What does that person spend her time doing? Research the lives you are interested in—ask questions, go to Wikipedia, read biographies . . . do whatever it takes to find out as much as you can.
- ☆ Turn up your imagination.
Be curious; ask questions. Think of the most preposterous ideas you can. Make a list of your “crazy ideas,” being as specific as you can be.
- ☆ Make a “step list.”
Start with a goal at the top, then work backward to where you are now.
- ☆ Talk to people about your goal and the steps to get there.
If it sounds exciting and possible as you say it out loud, you might just have the idea for your life script on your hands!

Thank you for reading a sample of

Direct Your Own Life: How To Be A Star In Any Field You Choose

To purchase the paperback version visit your local book store, or order online right now on Amazon.com or BN.com.

For more information visit: DirectYourOwnLife.com

