

FOUNDING EDITION

EARN YOUR HARD™

*CHOOSE THE HARD
THAT BUILDS YOU.*

EDEN RODRIGUEZ

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CHAPTER 01

FIT IN

Before I Tried to Fit In

Before I ever became the class clown, my dad put me in a wrestling room I did not choose.

I was around nine when he saw kids training outside and signed me up for Spazz Wrestling. I did not walk in there because wrestling was my dream. At that age, I was not thinking about discipline, confidence, or becoming a better version of myself. I was a kid following my dad into a warehouse.

The place felt like a dungeon to me. Black wrestling mats covered the floor with a red circle in the middle. Long ropes hung from the ceiling. The garage doors stayed open, and in the summer the heat came straight inside. The coach had a whistle. Old-school hip-hop, breakdance music and Jamaican songs played while he yelled instructions. There was nowhere to disappear.

There was a conditioning drill called the burner: sprints, bear crawls, seal walks and army crawls. We duck-walked across the room carrying a heavy medicine ball. We held planks and push-up positions while the coach watched to make sure nobody lifted their body or broke early. When the workout got hard, I looked toward my dad on the side of the mat. I wanted him to get me out of there.

He did not.

He was right there on the side of the mat, and the coach was watching every rep. I was safe. I just wasn't comfortable.

At the time, it felt like I had been thrown to the wolves. Quitting did not feel like an option. I did not understand why my dad would leave me in something that hard when I clearly wanted out.

Years later, I understand it differently. That room showed me what it felt like to be uncomfortable and keep moving. But it also taught me something I had to correct later: pain by itself is not proof that something is good for you. At nine, I only knew that the whistle blew and I had to finish the next drill.

Today, I help coach younger kids at Spazz, in the same room I once wanted to escape.

WHAT I LEARNED

Being uncomfortable isn't the same as being in danger. The adults who love you won't always rescue you from hard things, but they will keep you safe.

Then COVID happened, and the structure I had known disappeared.

Wrestling stopped. My elementary school closed too, so all of a sudden I wasn't seeing the same friends I had grown up with. I ended up going to a small private Christian school. Honestly, fifth grade wasn't that bad. The school was relaxed, everyone was pretty nice, and I met some new people.

I became friends with this one kid, and one of the things we did all the time was eat.

Like, a lot.

So naturally, I started gaining weight.

At the time, I didn't really care. I was young. I wasn't looking in the mirror thinking about my body or wondering who I was supposed to become. I was just living my life.

But over time, I definitely became more shy and less confident.

Then sixth grade came. That's when things really started changing for me.

I remember being nervous about everything. Talking to people. How I looked. How I sounded. Whether people thought I was weird.

I was really into anime at the time, and for whatever reason, I convinced myself that meant I was "emo." I remember telling my parents that.

I was basically like, "I'm emo. I don't have any friends. Nobody wants to be my friend."

Looking back now, it's kind of funny hearing myself say it. But it wasn't funny to me then. I actually felt that way.

I felt alone. I was anxious. I didn't like how I looked. I didn't really know who I was. And more than anything, I just wanted some friends.

Then I met the "cool kids." Or at least who I thought were the cool kids.

They were the kids who would mess around in class, make everyone laugh, and get attention. At the time, I thought that was what being cool looked like.

So I started hanging around them. The problem was, I didn't really feel like I fit in with them either. I felt like I had to give them a reason to keep me around.

And apparently my solution to that was to make myself look ridiculous.

I would make noises in class, mess around, say stupid things, and basically do whatever got a laugh. If they laughed, I felt like I was doing something right.

WHAT I LEARNED

Attention isn't the same as respect. People laughing at you isn't the same as people liking you.

I became the class clown.

I started getting in trouble. My parents would find out. They'd get mad. Sometimes they'd take my phone away.

And I get it. From their perspective, their kid was going to school and randomly deciding to act out. But taking my phone didn't really change what was happening, because my phone wasn't the reason I was acting that way.

My parents weren't in school with me. They couldn't see what was going through my head when I walked into a classroom or tried to figure out who I was going to sit with. They didn't feel how insecure I was.

And I wasn't exactly coming home and explaining all of this either. I don't even think I fully understood it myself.

I thought I was being cool. I thought I was finally becoming somebody people liked. But really, I was just becoming a follower.

It doesn't happen all at once. It's little things. You do something you normally wouldn't do. People like it. So you do it again. Then again.

And after a while, you don't even realize how much you're changing yourself just to make other people happy.

WHAT I LEARNED

You become like the people you hang around. Choose friends who pull you toward the person you want to be.

What I Didn't Understand

At the time, I thought confidence and approval were basically the same thing.

If people liked me, I felt good about myself. If people laughed at what I did, I felt cool. If I felt included, I felt confident.

But that's not really confidence. Because the second those people stop giving you that approval, what do you have left?

Now I look at being "cool" completely differently.

To me, it's way cooler when somebody knows who they are and doesn't completely change themselves depending on who's standing around them.

Of course I still care sometimes.

But there's a big difference between caring about someone's opinion and letting their opinion control you.

What eventually helped me wasn't waking up one morning and magically having confidence. I had to start giving myself reasons to believe in myself.

Before any of that could happen, I had to realize I couldn't keep becoming whatever everyone else wanted me to be.

Your Turn

Is there anybody in your life right now that you act differently around just because you want them to like you?

Have you ever done something you didn't really want to do because you wanted to fit in?

Is there someone whose opinion affects you way more than it probably should? Why?

What's something about yourself you've tried to hide because you thought people might judge you for it?

What does being "cool" actually mean to you?

If you stopped worrying about impressing people, what's something you'd do differently?

Try This

For one day, pay attention to why you're doing things.

Before you say something, post something, or do something just because everyone else is doing it, ask yourself:

Would I still do this if nobody was here to see it?

CHAPTER 02

ONE DECISION

In seventh grade, things had changed a little. I hadn't.

My popularity increased, but I was still trying to figure out where I belonged.

My group of friends did cross country, so I thought, Alright, I'll do it too.

And dude. I hated it.

I was bad at running. I wasn't in great shape, and running every day was definitely not something I would've chosen to do by myself.

But my friends were there, so I kept showing up.

Eventually the running started getting easier. I had more energy. I started feeling better.

Even though I originally joined cross country because of other people, it gave me my first little taste of what it felt like to actually work toward something.

That year, I also met Coach Cory. Back then, I just knew him as my science teacher. I didn't know yet that he would become one of the adults who changed my path.

Something Needed to Change

Fast-forward to eighth grade.

I remember sitting at home one day and thinking: Dude, what am I actually doing with my life?

Around that time, I started hearing more stuff online about mental toughness, discipline, and doing something with your life.

I remember hearing a question that made me think: If my life ended right now, would I be proud of what I did with it?

It didn't magically change my life. It just made me think.

What was I working toward? What was I proud of?

Build 30 Days of Proof

Now do the work. Every day, check whether you followed the promise or plan you made. On some days that might mean taking action. On other days it might mean resting, preparing, or staying with the schedule you chose.

DAY 1 ☐	DAY 2 ☐	DAY 3 ☐	DAY 4 ☐	DAY 5 ☐
DAY 6 ☐	DAY 7 ☐	DAY 8 ☐	DAY 9 ☐	DAY 10 ☐
DAY 11 ☐	DAY 12 ☐	DAY 13 ☐	DAY 14 ☐	DAY 15 ☐
DAY 16 ☐	DAY 17 ☐	DAY 18 ☐	DAY 19 ☐	DAY 20 ☐
DAY 21 ☐	DAY 22 ☐	DAY 23 ☐	DAY 24 ☐	DAY 25 ☐
DAY 26 ☐	DAY 27 ☐	DAY 28 ☐	DAY 29 ☐	DAY 30 ☐

Those aren't just checkmarks. They're proof that you kept showing up.

But don't turn the checkmarks into another way to beat yourself up. The goal isn't a perfect-looking page. The goal is learning what happens when you keep your word to yourself.

For Parents and Mentors

This book is written for young people, but it works best when an adult is nearby. You don't need to teach it. Read a chapter, then ask one question and listen.

Each chapter includes "What I Learned" boxes, where Eden names the lesson inside his story. Here they are by chapter, with one question to start a conversation.

Chapter 1: Fit In

You become like the people you hang around. Attention isn't the same as respect.

Ask: Who do you feel most like yourself around?

Chapter 2: One Decision

Being bad at something first is normal. What you do when nobody is watching shows up later. Be careful what you watch.

Ask: What's something you're bad at right now that you'd like to get better at?

Chapter 3: Rock Bottom

Adults who say "slow down" can see what you can't. Decide ahead of time what you'll do under pressure. Your body's signals matter.

Ask: If friends pushed you to do something you didn't want to do, what would you say?

Chapter 4: Climbing the Rocks

Make the next good decision. "Not yet" isn't "no." Own your mistakes. Recovery is part of training.

Ask: What's one small thing you could do tomorrow to start over on something?

Chapter 5: Building It Is My Hard

Protect your time. Don't wait until nobody could laugh at you.

Ask: What distracts you most from the things you care about?

END OF PREVIEW

What happens next?

Eden goes back to the wrestling room he once wanted to escape.
He is bad at it. He keeps showing up anyway.

Then he gets something wrong, falls off, and has to rebuild.
That is where the real lessons are.

IN THE FULL BOOK

- **10 short chapters** of Eden's real story
- **18 "What I Learned" boxes**, the lessons he wishes someone had told him sooner
- **69 places to write**, so your child does the work as they read
- **The 30-day promise and tracker**, where the book becomes their story
- **A page for parents and mentors**, with one conversation question per chapter

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