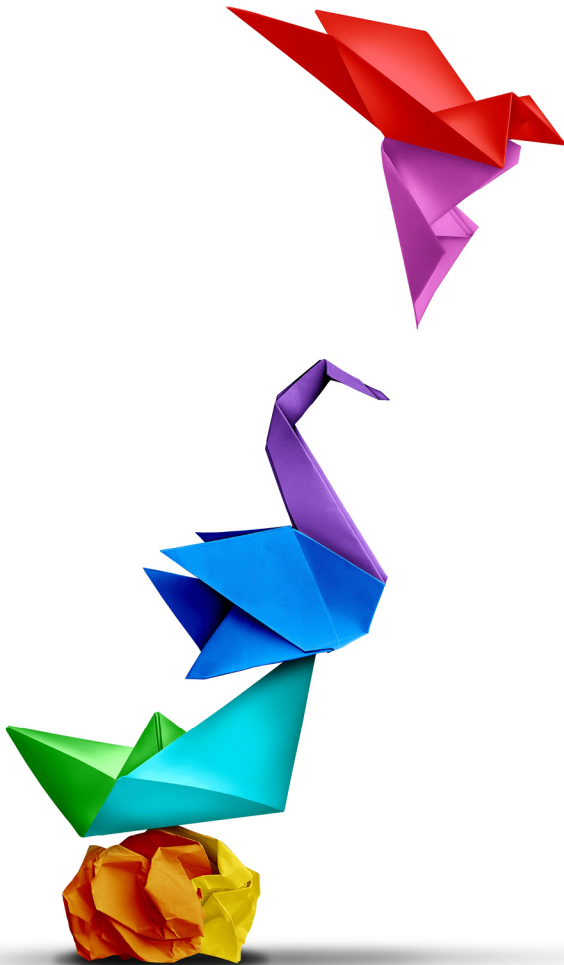


# BECOME

**Unleash the Power of Moral Character and  
Be Proud of the Life You Choose**



**FRANK SONNENBERG**

# Praise for **BECOME**

“*BECOME*, by Frank Sonnenberg, encompasses all that is good and honorable in this world. These inspiring pages hold the elusive elixir we all search for in life...the key to lasting happiness and primary greatness. This rare gem is not to be found by following the loud and enticing voices ‘out there.’ Instead, Frank beautifully shows how your conscience will not only lead you to enduring principles but will also give you the needed power to face your fears, honor your commitments, and treat others with kindness. A tremendously fruitful read!”

**STEPHEN M. R. COVEY**

***The New York Times* and #1 *Wall Street Journal* bestselling author of *The Speed of Trust* and *Trust & Inspire***

“Built on a bedrock of integrity, character, and conscience, *BECOME* empowers you to lead a more centered life. It will make your life — and the lives of those around you — better. Bravo!”

**JOHN BALDONI**

**Member of Marshall Goldsmith’s 100 Coaches and author of 16 books on leadership including the *Grace Trilogy***

“I love this book! It offers a treasure trove of ideas, examples, wisdom, and commonsense stories and principles. Anyone seeking to live a better life — to be a better human — should read it.”

**ANNETTE FRANZ**

**Founder and CEO, CX Journey Inc., and member of the *Forbes Coaches Council***

“Moral character is at the heart of everything we do, everything we create, and everything we leave to future generations. *BECOME* belongs in every boardroom — and living room — in the country.”

**THOMAS A. CAPONE**

**CEO, North American Distance Learning Association**

# Praise for **BECOME**

“*BECOME* is an incredibly important book. Frank Sonnenberg reveals how moral character puts you on the winning side of life. Brilliant!”

**DR. OLEG KONOVALOV**

**Called “the da Vinci of Visionary Leadership,” and one of the top global leadership experts**

“Frank Sonnenberg’s *BECOME* brilliantly merges wisdom with actionable insights, guiding readers toward personal excellence and integrity. It presents a compelling invitation to lead a purposeful life and to make a meaningful impact.”

**SKIP PRICHARD**

**CEO, OCLC, Inc., and Wall Street Journal bestselling author of *The Book of Mistakes: 9 Secrets to Creating a Successful Future***

“*BECOME* challenged me to reflect on my life and renewed my vigor to become the person I truly admire. Frank Sonnenberg’s writing exudes passion, clarity, and unfiltered honesty that’s downright exhilarating!”

**DAN ROCKWELL**

**“Top 50 Leadership and Management Experts” — Inc.com and coauthor of *The Vagrant: The Inner Journey of Leadership***

“I am deeply grateful for the valuable life lessons my parents shared with me. If you’re looking for a resource to inspire and shape your children’s moral character, I wholeheartedly recommend this book.”

**DR. ALEXANDRA R. LAJOUX**

**Chief Knowledge Officer Emeritus, National Association of Corporate Directors (NACD)**

“*BECOME* is a must-read for those aspiring to lead a life marked by honor, integrity, and a desire to create a positive impact on the world. It reveals the connection between strong character, improved relationships, and genuine achievements.”

**JOHN SPENCE**

**One of the top business and leadership experts in the world**

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# INTRODUCTION: THE POWER WITHIN — IGNITE THE FORCE OF MORAL CHARACTER

**W**hat price does a leader pay for *not* having the trust and respect of his or her constituents? What does an employee lose by having a careless and unreliable reputation? And, what's the downside of being a friend who's known as a taker? The fact is that moral character puts you on the winning side of life.

*If you don't think that moral character is of incalculable value, you're not thinking.*

## **Beyond Talent: How Moral Character Sets Winners Apart**

If you're a virtuous person or organization, you'll be the recipient of untold benefits in *all* aspects of your life. Consider the following rewards:

**Forge meaningful relationships.** It's not every day that you meet someone who's exceedingly honest, caring, and giving — someone who strives for excellence, lives with honor and integrity, and brings out the best in you. Jim Rohn, entrepreneur and author, said, "You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with." So, make sure you surround yourself with these folks.

**Strengthen leadership performance.** Great leaders achieve success by reaching for the stars, encouraging teamwork, promoting win-win relationships, and demanding everyone's best effort. Formidable leaders win the support of their constituents by earning their trust and respect. This is achieved through powerful ideas, personal expertise, and impeccable integrity rather than through their position or by "pulling rank." You don't win over your constituents because you have an impressive title. The *greatest* leaders put moral character first.

**Supercharge your career.** Personal branding is less a marketing exercise than becoming the best person you can be. That means investing in yourself, living a life of honor and integrity, and adding maximum value where you work.

**Build a thriving business.** Companies with a moral compass do what's right — period! They won't sacrifice a relationship for a mere short-term gain. As such, they don't have to promote their business as much as others, because word of mouth does the selling for them. This translates into a significant competitive advantage.

**Achieve peace of mind.** Some folks are wealthy, but their relationships are poor. They have a big title at work but aren't much of a dad or mom at home. They're successful, but everyone knows how they achieved that success. Maybe that's why they're not sleeping well. What some folks overlook in their quest for power, fame, and fortune is that following your conscience, and having inner peace, clearly outweighs the material rewards received along the way. Sleep well.

**Make yourself proud.** The true reward for living a good life isn't the fame and fortune that comes with success, but rather, it's knowing that you earned it the right way. You held yourself to a high standard and never compromised your ideals. You didn't choose the



easy route, but rather preferred the honorable way. You fought hard to attain your dreams, and you did so with dignity and grace. In so doing, you brought honor to your family, you earned the respect of your friends, and most importantly, you did yourself proud. Bravo!

**Create a meaningful life.** You have an opportunity to define your life as you see fit, or to go with the flow and let it be defined for you. Make a conscious effort to make a difference and strive to become the best person you can be. After all, moral character is the DNA of success and happiness.

## **Be a Good Person... Everything Else Is Secondary**

While the case for being a virtuous person is compelling, it doesn't receive the emphasis that it deserves. In fact, some folks disparage moral character by viewing it as soft and fuzzy. The truth is that moral character is not an abstract, theoretical, idealistic goal forever beyond your reach. Character, or a lack of it, is inherent in every action that you take and affects everything that you do. It's the nerve center that controls your behavior — determining the strength of your relationships, the success of your career, and even the meaning of your life.

If we want to live in a world where there's a clear distinction between right and wrong, where decency triumphs over evil, and where good people finish first, moral character must receive the attention that it deserves.

I sincerely hope this book enriches your journey of self-discovery, as you seek to become the person you were meant to be. Unleash the hidden power of moral character. It can transform your life. Enjoy! :)

# WHAT'S MORE IMPORTANT, PERCEPTION OR REALITY?

**P**eople care so much about their popularity, their appearance, and their status. They care about what people think, whether others approve, and how they measure up. What's more, people buy things to appear successful and even lower their personal standards to gain acceptance. That's a hefty price to pay. But how are you viewed by the person you spend the most amount of time with — yourself?

We spend so much time worrying about our image, and so little time thinking about who we really are. Are you a good person? Are you proud of the way that you live your life? Would you want to be friends with yourself? Would you be happy if your kids followed in your footsteps?

If we spent more time and effort strengthening our moral character, we wouldn't have to worry about the impression that we're making. As John Wooden, the legendary college basketball coach, said, "Be more concerned with your character than with your reputation, because your character is what you really are, while your reputation is merely what others think you are."

*When someone asks you who you're trying to impress  
your answer should always be "myself."*

## Why Do We Care What Others Think of Us?

If reality is more important than perception, why don't folks act that way? People are, by their very nature, social animals. It's only natural to want to be liked and fit in. Besides, being complimented and comparing favorably to others can do wonders for our confidence and self-esteem. The problem occurs when people become obsessed with being liked; then perception overshadows reality.

In this scenario, appearance is more celebrated than substance, shortcuts are more commonplace than hard work, and doing what's right gives way to doing what's easy. In essence, smoke and mirrors outweigh authenticity. Furthermore, when the need for acceptance reigns supreme, you're giving others control over your life. While you can shape your character, you have limited control over their perception of you. So, stay true to yourself.

*Your character is in your hands.  
Your reputation is in the hands of others.*

## How Strong Are Your Moral Values?

Our moral values serve as guiding forces, shaping our decisions and actions, and ultimately defining the essence of our character. Here are 15 ways to determine the depth of your moral convictions:

Do you...

- **Invest in your future** or refuse to make sacrifices?
- **Confront your fears** or surrender to them?
- **Keep your promises** or break your commitments?
- **Think about others' needs** or make everything all about you?
- **Accept accountability** or sidestep responsibility?

- **Remain true to your values** or bend to peer pressure?
- **Do what's right** or make exceptions when it's convenient?
- **Set high expectations** or settle for good?
- **Accept adversity like a champ** or feel sorry for yourself?
- **Earn your rewards** or feel entitled to them?
- **Work to make things better** or grumble about how things are?
- **Appreciate what you have** or continually hunger for more?
- **Surround yourself with exceptional role models** or hang out with negative influencers?
- **Define acceptable standards of behavior for yourself** or allow others to set them for you?
- **Listen to your conscience** or fall victim to temptation?

## **You Are the Author of Your Life Story**

Live a life that makes you proud; one in which you begin each day's journey with a 10-minute walk within your soul. It's a life in which you hope for the best, try your best, and bring out the best in others. It's a life in which you reach for the stars and extend your hand to help others in need. It's a life in which you live with honor and integrity, give more than you take, and care not only about where life is taking you, but about how you're getting there as well. But most of all, it's a life in which you earn the trust, respect, and admiration of people, not because you try hard to please them, but because of who you are. :)

# IT CAN BE LONELY TO STAND UP FOR WHAT'S RIGHT

It's hard to remain true to your values when you're pressured to abandon them, call out bad behavior when everyone looks the other way, and tell the truth when you'll become the object of scorn. You may get bullied, ridiculed, cancelled, and even punished for doing the honorable thing. But you know in your heart that you're doing what's right, and no one — and I mean no one — can take that away from you.

Do you speak your mind or tell people what they want to hear, expose the truth even if it might upset the applecart, and stand up for what's right regardless of what it may cost you?

*It's better to stand alone, with honor,  
than compromise your values to fit in.*

## 10 Ways to Stand Up for What's Right

**Tell it like it is rather than what folks want to hear.** Credible people are open, honest, and forthright. They don't beat around the bush, spin the truth, or exaggerate claims to make something sound better.

**Disclose wrongdoings rather than overlook impropriety.** Every time you excuse immorality or fail to speak up about corruption, you're complicit in dragging society down. As Plato said, "Your silence gives consent."

**Remain true to your values when others lower their standards.** People can't make you do things without your permission. Never lower your personal standards. Never!

**Keep hope alive when others lose faith.** Stand up to naysayers. Think of all the things that were once considered impossible that are commonplace today.

**Do what's right, regardless of the repercussions.** It may be easier to look the other way than reprimand a star performer for unethical behavior. But what message does that send to others? Compromising your principles, even one time, can be a terrible mistake.

**Speak up for injustice when others are silent.** Before you judge any situation, take the shoe-on-the-other-foot test. Ask yourself whether things are fair and how you'd feel if the situation were reversed.

**Discipline bad behavior rather than looking the other way.** Some folks turn their backs, fail to speak out, or cover up for unethical behavior because it's convenient. When bad behavior isn't challenged, it becomes acceptable to act in an unacceptable way.

**Push for change when others are set in their ways.** Be a force for change. Don't get complacent by succumbing to a "we've always done it this way" mentality.

**Seek the truth rather than follow the crowd.** Think for yourself. One or many believers don't determine the truth or untruth.

**Be the bearer of bad news even when your message may be poorly received.** Don't sugarcoat bad news. Tell it like it is, even if it hurts.

## What's Right Is Right

It's easy to compromise your values, lower your standards, and look the other way, but the penalty of doing so is enormous. As Martin Luther King, Jr., said, "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter." Do you live with honor and integrity, or do you compromise your principles to attain wealth, power, and status? While that may *not* matter to you, it should!

*If you can't hear your conscience, turn up the volume.*

I'm sure you're thinking that standing up for what's right is uncomfortable. In fact, you're afraid of the repercussions of acting that way. I get it. But what are the consequences of being silent? Actions have consequences. Inaction does, too.

This all comes down to two words — *acceptance* versus *self-worth*. Some people are more interested in being accepted and winning the approval of others than doing what's right. The downside of acting that way is losing respect for yourself.

It takes someone very special to have the courage, strength, and conviction to do what's right — especially if there are consequences for behaving that way. That's called moral character. Some people talk a good game while others make honor and integrity the bedrock of their life. Although they may face the wrath of others, I applaud them for their honesty, integrity, and strength of moral character. Listen to your conscience. You have to live with yourself for the rest of your life. :)

# THE COST OF DISTRUST

**P**eople like talking about trust. Parents expect it, relationships require it, and leaders demand it. In fact, whenever trust is mentioned, everyone smiles and nods their head. That's because trust is like motherhood and apple pie.

Yet, there seems to be a disconnect between the perceived value of trust and the priority that it receives. Some folks view trust as nothing more than a motivational speech, a clever slogan, or a fancy book collecting dust on a shelf.

Why doesn't trust receive the priority that it rightly deserves? In some cases, people are short-term thinkers. They'll do anything to get what they want and aren't willing to make the long-term commitment. Others conclude that it's hard to measure the impact that our words and actions have on trust — so why pay the price? Let's look at what happens in the absence of trust.

## **Distrust Commands a Heavy Price**

In a world where trust is a valuable currency, distrust commands a very hefty price. A lack of trust:

**Creates a distraction.** Distrust causes people to lose sight of what's important and become sidetracked by trivial matters.



**Damages relationships.** Distrust promotes disharmony and uncertainty. It causes people to scrutinize what others say and second-guess their intent.

**Destroys communication.** Distrust fosters dishonesty and lack of transparency. People spend more effort reading between the lines than listening to what's being said.

**Damages teamwork.** Distrust creates dissension. It pits people against one another. You can expect finger-pointing, the blame game, and witch hunts to thrive where distrust is prevalent.

**Reduces competitiveness.** In business, when there's distrust, people spend more time answering to the "paperwork police" than doing their job. This increases costs, but rarely adds value to the product or the customer experience.

**Encourages game playing.** Distrust encourages people to spend more time trying to beat the system rather than trying to do something meaningful.

**Destroys individual initiative.** Distrust encourages people to look busy rather than to be productive.

**Creates a toxic environment.** Distrust creates an atmosphere that can be cut with a knife. In these environments, people opt for the political solution rather than doing what's right.

**Hurts loyalty and morale.** Distrust is anxiety-provoking and debilitating. Good people would rather leave an organization for greener pastures than spend their days covering their behind.

It's time to put your money where your mouth is.

## The Magic of Trust

What if I told you that distrust could kill our individual aspirations, cripple our personal and business relationships, strip the muscle from our most powerful leaders, and crush the productivity and morale of our best and brightest people? Would I have your attention? Then why don't we give trust the attention it deserves?

You may not think that paying lip service to trust bears a cost, but it commands a very handsome price. If you care about your credibility and reputation, desire the respect of your friends and family, or want to be taken seriously in life...trust matters. Trust is more than a platitude; it defines you as a person.

There is a tendency to believe that if something cannot be seen or heard, it does not exist. It reminds me of the question: If a tree falls in the forest and no one is there to hear it, does it make a sound? Trust, as with other soft issues, is like the tree that falls in a forest. If we don't believe that trust makes an impact, maybe it's time to get our hearing checked. :)

# WHAT CONSTITUTES A MEANINGFUL LIFE?

**M**ost people dream of achieving wealth, power, and fame, and try to balance their professional goals with a rewarding life outside of work. But, if you reached those goals, would that constitute a meaningful life, or would you feel a void?

*Everyone was put on this earth for a reason...what's yours?*

Many people strive to live an opulent life to impress others, but all the riches in the world won't guarantee a happy and fulfilling life. However, a *meaningful purpose* will.

## **10 Ingredients of a Meaningful Life**

We're all busy, busy, busy — racing to the finish line. But if you're running in the wrong direction, speed doesn't matter.

Here are 10 guideposts to help forge a meaningful life:

**Own your life.** You have a choice between owning your life or outsourcing that responsibility to others. In essence, determining your future or blindly accepting what others want for you — and even becoming beholden to them.

**Make yourself proud.** Instead of trying to *look* good, *be* good. When you believe in yourself, you take pride in yourself rather than

seeking approval and validation from others; you think for yourself rather than yielding to peer pressure; and you remain true to your values rather than blowing in the wind.

**Do what's right.** Virtue *isn't* demanding more of others; it's expecting more of yourself. The next time you're faced with a tough decision, do what's right rather than what's convenient. That may require you to speak up when others are silent, question the status quo when things are set in stone, remain steadfast when others cave in, find common ground when others won't compromise, or sacrifice something today so that you can benefit tomorrow.

**Put others' needs ahead of your own.** In healthy relationships, you place others' interests ahead of your own and they do the same for you — no questions asked. There isn't a formal agreement. The commitment is much stronger. It's called a *relationship* — and it's where you share, grow, and benefit together.

**Do your best.** People place a lot of emphasis on winning. The fact is that you don't have to *be* the best, but you should always *do* your best. Doing your best isn't an activity; it's a mindset.

**Bring out the best in others.** One of the qualities of an exceptional friend or colleague is someone who helps you become the best you can be. They may come across as tough, but they're fair. They may come across as intrusive, but it comes from a place of caring. The truth is that it's easy for someone to set the bar low, turn a blind eye to misconduct, or “yes” you to death. But someone who cares will help you realize your true potential.

**Make a difference.** Why complain about the ills of the world when you could make a world of difference to someone you know? It only takes one person to change a life — and it may as well be you. But you can't make a difference if you don't try.

**Give back.** There are many ways to give. Your gift need not come in a box. Your deed can be as simple as making someone feel

special, reaching out to a lonely person, helping a troubled person find the right path, or comforting a friend. It can take the form of giving someone confidence, spending quality time with someone, or sharing an honest opinion.

**Create a legacy.** As a parent, it's your responsibility to raise kids who have strong moral principles and are productive members of society. That includes giving them your unconditional love, being an active part of their lives, shaping their character, inspiring good habits, promoting the importance of education, encouraging personal responsibility, and most of all, being a good role model.

**Lead by example.** Be the person who others look up to — whose character is beyond reproach. Be the one who inspires others to achieve excellence. And be the one who lives with honor and dignity. The true reward for living a good life isn't the fame and fortune that comes with success, but rather, it's knowing that you earned it the right way. At the end of the day, if you're not proud of who you are and the way you choose to live your life, little else matters.

## Are You Making a Difference?

We're so busy running on a treadmill to nowhere that we lose focus of the things that really matter. Before you know it, the seconds become minutes, the days become weeks, and the months become years.

*Parents give you life. Only you can give it meaning.*

When you look back on your life, will you gauge success by the power that you attained and the wealth that you accumulated? Or will you measure the degree to which your life was rich in character and purpose? Will it matter that you led an honorable existence, made a difference in people's lives, and left the world a better place for your children? The truth is that a meaningful life isn't measured by what you accumulate, but by what you give to others. :)

# ARE YOU LIVING THE LIFE THAT YOU'RE MEANT TO LIVE?

Don't just **look**. **See**.

Don't just **hear**. **Listen**.

Don't just check items off your **to-do list**.  
Make your **priorities** a priority.

Don't just **eat food**. Feed your **mind, body, and soul**.

Don't just be **available**. Be **present**.

Don't just **talk**. **Communicate**.

Don't just **buy**. **Appreciate** what you have.

Don't just **follow the rules**. **Think**.

Don't just **go through the motions**. **Do your best**.

Don't just **have babies**. Be a **parent**.

Don't just **dream**. **Act**.

Don't just invest your **money**. Invest your **time**.

Don't just **get it done**. **Do it right**.

Don't just accumulate **possessions**.  
Collect special **moments**.

Don't just do what's **convenient**. **Do what's right**.

Don't just count the **years**. Savor every **moment**.

Don't just be among the **living**. **Live**. :)

# About the Author

**F**rank Sonnenberg is an award-winning author and a well-known advocate for moral character, personal values, and personal responsibility. He has written 11 books and has been named one of “America’s Top 100 Thought Leaders” and one of “America’s Most Influential Small Business Experts.” Frank has served on several boards and has consulted to some of the largest and most respected companies in the world.

Additionally, his blog — FrankSonnenbergOnline — has attracted millions of readers on the Internet. It was recently named one of the “Best Self-Improvement and Personal Development Blogs” in the world and continues to be listed among the “Best Inspirational Blogs on the Planet.”

# Other Titles from Frank Sonnenberg

## **LEADERSHIP BY EXAMPLE**

*Be a Role Model Who Inspires Greatness in Others*

## **THE PATH TO A MEANINGFUL LIFE**

## **LISTEN TO YOUR CONSCIENCE**

*That's Why You Have One*

## **SOUL FOOD**

*Change Your Thinking, Change Your Life*

## **BOOKSMART**

*Hundreds of Real-World Lessons for Success and Happiness*

## **FOLLOW YOUR CONSCIENCE**

*Make a Difference in Your Life & in the Lives of Others*

## **MANAGING WITH A CONSCIENCE (SECOND EDITION)**

*How to Improve Performance Through Integrity, Trust,  
and Commitment*

## **IT'S THE THOUGHT THAT COUNTS**

*Over 100 Thought-Provoking Lessons to Inspire a Richer Life*

## **MARKETING TO WIN**

*Strategies for Building Competitive Advantage in Service Industries*