

THERE'S NO PLAN B FOR YOUR A-GAME



Be the Best in the
World at What You Do



BO EASON

CHAPTER 1 –

The first time I ever played tackle football, the very first day of practice, they weighed and measured us for the game program. I was a freshman in high school, five feet tall, one hundred pounds, and by the look on the coach's face, it was clear I was not football material.

My dad picked me up after practice and I told him, "Dad, they weighed and measured us and the coach thinks I'm too small to play."

Without skipping a beat, he said, "Did they measure your heart, goddammit?"

I told him, "My school doesn't even have one of those heart-measuring things."

Then my dad told me a story about a little puppy. He was a ranch-hand on his uncle's cattle ranch, and they used a dog to help them herd the cattle. This dog was amazing. It could do the work of ten men and it was always one step ahead of the herd. The ranch literally could not survive without this dog. "When the ranch dog gets too old and loses a step, they breed it with another rancher's dog," my dad said. "And then when the puppies are born, the rancher takes the smallest puppy, the runt of the litter, and ties a little piece of yarn around its neck. Then he watches that puppy very carefully. After about twelve weeks the rancher takes all the puppies except for the runt, goes to town and sells them or even gives them away. The runt of the litter is the new working dog on the ranch.

"Bo, the runt always has to work harder to survive against its bigger brothers and sisters. Always. The runt becomes the smartest, the fastest, the most determined. Of all the puppies, the runt's heart is the biggest. The rancher stakes his whole livelihood on that fact.

"Bet on the runt every time, goddammit."

I knew what my dad was telling me. I'm the youngest of six kids, so I knew my place. I was the runt. I had to work harder than anyone else. And that's exactly what I did. I made that dog's story my story. And I've been telling myself that story ever since. It helped me develop the stamina to keep going after what I wanted most in life, and it led to every success I've ever had.

Story. Stamina. Success. It's that simple.

That doesn't mean it's easy. It can be hard as hell to keep repeating your story and to follow through with the actions that will make the story come true. But I know you can do it. Because if I did it, anyone can do it.

Now, I don't pretend I know your story. But I do know this:

You will succeed or fail based on the stories you tell yourself and others.

My dad was a cowboy—a real-life, working cowboy. You've probably got a picture already of what sort of person that would be: gruff, no-nonsense, practical. Finished every sentence with a cuss word as if it were punctuation.

Yet every morning my dad woke my brother Tony and me saying, "Keep moving, partner. You're the best in there, goddammit. You're the best."

You're the best. He massaged that message into our brains everywhere we went, from the little league baseball field, to getting on the school bus, to the time we went on a double date with the Tomasini sisters in high school. Every morning, every evening, for twenty years he continued. He saw greatness in us that we just couldn't see for ourselves. My brother and I were embarrassed that he would say it right in front of our friends and teammates and dates. And then one day, years later, we thought, "Well, maybe he's right. Maybe we are the best." My brother and I surrendered to what he saw in us and we lived into our own greatness. He spoke us into

existence.

Ever since my childhood, I've been obsessed with what makes people great, what makes them the best. And because of that obsession, I inherited my dad's best quality: the ability to see greatness in people and speak it into existence. I can show anyone who has the guts to commit—anyone who will choose the pain of discipline over the pain of regret—how to become a top performer. It takes commitment, and it takes focus, and it takes the willingness to drop anything that does not serve your mission.

If you fully commit yourself, you can be the best in the world at what you do. Don't believe me? Well, think about this: You were born the best. Do you remember the day of your conception? If you don't, let me remind you of what happened on that day. On the day you were conceived, 300 million sperm were released. The one that would create you was one of those sperm. Three hundred million sperm backed by millions of years of evolution, designed to accomplish one thing—penetrate an egg. All 300 million have one job. And one of those sperm got the job done.

So, you tell me, who won the first race you ever entered? YOU. You, I—we won that race with 300 million to 1 odds against us. We come into this world with greatness already sewn into the fabric of our DNA. We just need to acknowledge our potential and remember and surrender to who we already are.

I'm proof that this attitude can succeed.

At the age of nine, I declared I wanted to play pro football. I took a crayon and a piece of school paper and I drew up a twenty-year plan. And this plan wasn't just about getting into the NFL. This plan was going to make me into the best safety in the world.

That plan ruled my life. For the next nine years, I woke up every morning at 5:00 to run drills (which in this case meant running backward, because safeties do a lot of that). *Everything* I did was with that NFL dream in mind. If an activity or an event didn't move me along my path to being the best safety in the world, I didn't do it. Prom? Nope. Goofing around? Nope. I was focused and I was dead serious. This was my life dream, after all—crayon and everything.

So by the end of my senior year in high school, you'd think at least one college would recruit me, one school would offer me a football scholarship, right?

Wrong.

Not a single college in the entire country was interested. 350 colleges and universities in this nation play football and not one of them wanted me.

So I invited myself to a small college near my hometown. I had my plan, right? And after nine years of running backwards as fast as I could, I wasn't going to suddenly stop because no one wanted me.

I enrolled at the University of California, Davis, which gave zero scholarships and played Division II football. I just showed up at their training camp a month before classes started. I talked my way into a uniform, a meal ticket, and dorm keys from the equipment managers. Kept my dream alive, right? It was all going according to my plan.

Maybe not. I was sent home after the first day of practice. They took back my uniform, my meal ticket, and my dorm keys. I spent the night in my truck, eating peanut butter-hot dog bun sandwiches.

The next day, I showed up in the locker room as if nothing had happened and begged the equipment managers to give me another uniform—just give me a chance to prove myself—and

for whatever reason, they agreed. They gave me an ancient hunk of cloth that might have been a uniform at one time. They handed over the biggest helmet I'd ever seen. Every step I took, it bounced down over my eyes. I put on that non-matching uniform and that helmet, and I showed up for practice every day, twice a day. And then I slept in my truck and ate peanut butter-hot dog bun sandwiches.

I did that for a solid month and eventually I played my way onto that team because I refused to quit. I refused to believe that nine years of getting up at 5:00 every morning and running backwards as fast as I could hadn't been worth it. I had faith in myself and my plan, even when no-one else did.

Four years later, the Houston Oilers drafted me as a top safety taken during the 1984 NFL draft. After four years with Houston, I was traded to the San Francisco 49ers. Then a career-ending knee injury knocked me out of football—and onto the operating table for the seventh time—and out of the only life I'd ever known or planned for.

I knew instantly that I was in deep trouble. I had no Plan B. I'd never planned for anything other than playing pro football, and I had no option other than playing pro football. What was I? I was the best in the world at running my head into other people at twenty-five miles an hour. That ability does not translate to civilian life.

So there I was. My knee and my career were smashed beyond repair. I knew I'd be wheeled off the field and into surgery. And I realized, lying there in that pileup on an NFL field, that all the energy and drive I'd channeled into football needed to be redirected, or I'd end up in prison. I needed a new twenty-year plan, one that used my body's energy, my innate command to *move* and make impact.

And right there, as I was being wheeled off the field, I decided I'd go to New York City and work with acting and speaking coaches who could teach me how to use my body to communicate from a stage. I have no idea where this idea came from, but I went with it. I decided to learn how to speak to people, to express myself both physically and with words.

I figured it would help me avoid prison.

So I moved to New York and found the best acting and movement coaches available. I took every class I could find. And I decided I needed a new life plan (one not written with crayon this time). And that plan was to be the best stage performer of our time.

So I asked all the people in classes with me, "Who's the greatest stage performer of all time?" and they all said, "Al Pacino." Obviously I needed to meet Al Pacino. I just needed to figure out how to make that happen.

A couple of days later, I was having dinner with a friend. Anna Strasberg, Lee Strasberg's widow, was in the restaurant. My friend knew Anna and introduced me to her. So I did what I do, which is ask questions. Here's the widow of the best acting coach in the world—of course I was going to learn whatever I could. How could I be the best? What should I do? What would Lee have told me to do?

Turned out Anna liked me because I asked all these questions about how to improve my acting. It also turned out that Al Pacino is the godfather for her two sons. When I heard that, I immediately asked for an introduction to him. I told Anna that I wanted what Al Pacino had. I wanted to be the best stage actor, so I needed to find out what he did.

Anna agreed to introduce us, which is how I ended up playing touch football in the snow with her two sons and Al Pacino, and then went to his house where he spent three hours breaking

down the next fifteen years for me.

I told Al, “All the kids in my acting classes tell me you’re the best stage actor of our time. I want that. Can you tell me how to do that?”

And he said, “Yeah, I can tell you. But you might not like the answer, because it’s going to take you fifteen years.”

I said, “Cool. I work really well with that sort of timeline.” Obviously Al didn’t know about my crayon-and-paper twenty year plan. Fifteen years would be a snap.

Al Pacino told me I had to get on stage—any stage, anywhere, as often as I could. We spent three hours playing pool and laying out a roadmap for my success. And at the end, I thanked him, and I said, “You must get this sort of question all the time from actors.”

“No, you’re the first,” he said. “I have actors ask me how to get famous, or can I get them a part, or can I introduce them to my agent. You’re the only one who’s ever asked how to be the best.”

The fifteen year plan Al dictated to me was pretty simple. Basically, I had to spend more time on a stage than anyone else in the world. So I did. I spent the next fifteen years acting anywhere I could get a role, starting with a children’s play in Sacramento, California.

That’s right. From competing against and playing with the top athletes in the world, I went to acting in a kids’ play, “The Shoemaker and the Elves.” I was the mayor of the town, and I wore this big silly hat, and I was acting with a bunch of kids. I’d gone from signing autographs in NFL stadiums to standing in front of a hundred noisy kids who were not even looking at me. They were too busy shoving each other and eating popcorn.

At one point during the play, I looked out into the audience and saw my brother Tony and

my best friend Kenny O'Brien sitting there. They showed up to support me, which was great. So you have to picture this: These guys are both NFL quarterbacks. Tony had just taken the New England Patriots to the Super Bowl and Kenny was the starting quarterback of the New York Jets. They're huge guys sitting in these kid-sized seats, and they're looking at me like they're just totally in shock. Like they were thinking, "Good job with the mayor's hat, Bo, but what the hell are you doing and why?"

But I knew what I was doing. I had my fifteen year plan. This kids' play was just part of the process.

I knew that my mastery as an NFL safety didn't mean I could walk into any acting job anywhere and be great. My football skills did not transfer to acting. But my ability to focus, practice, rehearse, and keep my plan in mind at all times *did* transfer. I just needed another long-term plan with a different goal, one that focused on acting, movement, and writing plays.

So I did what Al Pacino told me to do. I got on every stage I could. I rehearsed constantly. Everything I did related to my new long-term plan. Eventually, I wrote and staged a one-person semi-autobiographical play called *Runt of the Litter* (it's now being adapted as a major motion picture). In 2004, *The New York Times* referred to it as "one of the most powerful plays in the last decade." But you know the best review I ever received? One night, about ten or fifteen minutes into the play, I made eye contact with a man sitting on the aisle, about five rows back. He crossed his arms over his chest and gave me an approving head nod.

That guy was Al Pacino.

I performed *Runt* for fifteen years, one-thousand-three hundred performances. By this time, I was married, and my wife Dawn and I took the show on a fifty city tour across the

country. And after a while, something odd started to happen. Business people started knocking on my stage door. They always asked the same thing: “Can you bring this to my company? I want my employees to see your play.”

I always had the same answer: “What the hell? No. This is a theater piece.”

They kept asking and I kept saying no. Finally, one executive offered to fly me, Dawn, and the kids (we had two at this point) to Hawaii if I would perform *Runt* at his company’s 100-year anniversary celebration. He named an enormous speaker fee. After I picked my jaw up off the floor, I finally understood what was going on. These business executives didn’t want their employees to have a theater experience; *they wanted their employees to adopt my mindset.*

That’s when a huge light went on for me. I saw that I could reach thousands more people—*tens of thousands* more people—as a speaker and trainer than as an actor. I could have impact on a scale I’d never dreamed of. I could help people actually change their lives if I shifted my goal from acting to outreach.

I needed a new plan.

This third time around, I knew exactly how to become the best speaker and trainer in the world: I needed to tell myself a different story.

That was the moment when I realized everything I’d accomplished was because of the stories I was telling myself. I just had to follow the same process I’d used in my NFL career and my theater career. This wasn’t about natural talent, it was about eliminating everything that didn’t support my new story and focusing every day on making that new story happen.

If I didn’t realize it before, I got it now. It doesn’t matter what you want to do. Let me repeat that. *It doesn’t matter what you want to do.* It only matters what story you tell yourself and

then how you live out that story, every single day, until you gain mastery. And every day after that, as well.

Sound intimidating? Well, I'm not going to sugar-coat the truth. And if you've read this far, you know I'm not offering you a quick fix, thirty day miracle life turnaround.

It's not easy. It's not always fun. It might involve peanut butter-hot dog bun sandwiches; it definitely will involve focus and effort and stamina. And it can be scary as hell—trusting your gut, refusing to stay with the pack. But the results I've seen, and the results my clients have seen, prove that it's worthwhile.

Before I outline, step by step, how you're going to change your life. Let's go back to the very beginning for this one.

In the year I graduated from high school, there were 1,200,000 high school football players in the US. What percentage of those 1.2 million players, do you suppose went on to play in the NFL? Answer: 0.03%

My tiny high school had twenty-seven boys, farm boys on the football team. There had never been a pro athlete from that high school before I got there, and never one since I left. Not one. Based on the statistics I just showed you of high school players turning pro, how many of those twenty-seven farm boys on my team do you suppose went on to play in the NFL?

Answer: Four. Four of us played in the NFL for a total of twenty five years, with two Super Bowl appearances. That's a statistical impossibility. That can't happen. Especially given that there's never been a history at the school for pro athletes of any kind. So how do you explain it? Coincidence? Something in the water? Sheer dumb luck?

I'm convinced it's none of those things. It's the power of having someone around who was so focused on his dream and his plan that he dragged other boys along with him.

A while back, I was at a class reunion, and I asked a couple of the other guys why they thought we all went on to play in the pros. And they told me, "Hey, you were running around with your twenty-year plan, and we figured if that little shit Bo was gonna play in the NFL, we could, too."

After that class reunion, I was thinking about the roommates I've had and how I might have influenced them without knowing it. My first ever roommate, my brother Tony, was a first round quarterback pick in the NFL draft. He led the New England Patriots to their first Super Bowl. My first college roommate, Kenny O'Brien, was also a first round quarterback pick. Two roommates, two first round draft picks as quarterbacks. Don't you know everyone was lining up to be my roommate now! My second college roommate was a sixth round quarterback pick. I'm three for three with roommates becoming NFL quarterbacks! And Dawn, my fourth and final roommate, became a Hollywood and Broadway producer. I'm not saying I caused their success. They were the ones who put in the work. They were the ones who focused and ran the miles. But, you've got to admit there are some very strange coincidences going on here that defy all statistical possibilities. I know that I must have had influence on them. I know that my own focus and commitment helped sharpen theirs.

Just think of the impact you can have on the important people in your life.

I'm only going to make you one promise: If you do what I say, or more importantly, do what I do, people will not have the ability to look away from you. You will lead in ways you never expected. And it will transform you. It will transform your entire life and all of your

relationships. You will have such deep impact on the people closest to you that they'll tell their own stories and find their way to the top right along with you.

But it will only happen if you commit to giving everything you've got for as long as it takes to work through this book. I'm going to help you find your story, build the stamina it takes to live it, and guide you to success. Just like my dad started every day for me by telling me I was the best, I'm here to tell you you're the best. I'm telling you it's time for you to tell a new story about yourself.

Let's get started.

ACTION STEP

Write who you are and where you see your life heading. Keep this short—no more than about a page. This book is about transforming yourself, so you need to know where you're starting. By the way, that piece of paper with my twenty year plan written in crayon? I still have it, and you will want to keep yours.