

## CHAPTER 1

# Is Playing It Safe Holding You Back?

**T**he sound of a text message jolted me awake. It was 7:45 A.M.—far too early for any text message, in my opinion. As I rolled over and stared at the screen, I stopped. I rubbed my eyes and read the words on the screen one more time. I realized something was wrong.

I was spending a few days in San Francisco with a friend. We had just gotten back from a fantastic trip to Cuba. I had just co-founded ADDO, a leadership consulting company, with my best friend Kevin Scott, and we had a promising new client. If we could land a couple of other big consulting jobs, we just might make this thing work! My friend in San Francisco was a Harvard Law grad and an executive at Twitter. This guy could open doors Kevin and I had only dreamed about. Life was “moving up and to the right” in a big way, and I was excited about the future.

My Dad knew that I hated getting up early, but it was his message that glared at me from the phone. It was almost 11:00 a.m. in Atlanta where he lived. The short message was something I’d never read before or since: “We need to talk. Call me.”

Instantly, I knew there were only two options: Either someone was in big trouble (a car crash, unplanned pregnancy, or death came to mind) or my father had found out something I’d done, and I was in big trouble! Instantly, my memory scanned the

past couple of years to see if Dad could have discovered any of the crazy things I'd done. There were too many to count.

Within seconds, my mind went into overdrive, and adrenaline flooded every cell. I called him immediately, but my Aunt Sharon answered. That wasn't a good sign. She lived in Florida, why was she in Atlanta answering Dad's phone? I was now sure the worst had happened. Every second seemed like an eternity before she explained what was going on.

Her first words were, "Give me a couple of seconds to step out into the hall."

Oh great. Was she stepping out of intensive care where my Dad lay near death? Was she already at the funeral home?

She finally began, "We just met with the doctor the second time to get the results of the tests. We just found out your Dad has Stage 4 cancer."

She then went silent. I guess she was letting me process her words, but I wasn't sure what to make of them. I didn't know anything about cancer, so I wasn't sure if there were four or a hundred stages. The context clues told me that Stage 4 wasn't good at all.

Finally, she spoke again: "I know you want to talk to your Dad. We're both pretty upset."

Before she could give the phone to Dad, I asked the one question that immediately came to mind: "How long does he have to live?"

Aunt Sharon paused for a second and then said, almost in a whisper, "They're giving him about a year."

She handed the phone to Dad, and he began, "Garrett, I don't want you to worry. You have a lot of important things going on, and you're all the way across the country. I want you to have a good time with your friends in San Francisco. When you finish your trip, you can come home and we'll talk about all this. We'll figure out what all of this means."

That's my Dad. He just got a death sentence, but he was more concerned about me having a good time and making connections

with cool tech companies on the West Coast. I'm not sure I even let him finish his sentence. I simply responded, "Dad, I'll be on the first flight back." We both cried. I told him I loved him, and I scrambled to find the first flight back to Atlanta.

This phone call either created or awakened a world of fears in me. Maybe they had all been there before but I'd shoved them down below the surface. I don't know where they'd been, but suddenly, they were lions roaring in my face.

My Dad was going to die within a year. All my life I had been able to talk my way into opportunities and out of trouble, but no amount of persuasive words could change this stark fact. I've always been sure I could meet any challenge and inspire people along the way, but this was different. I've always had a knack for finding option C when options A and B don't work. I knew the formula for success: You create something, market it, sell it, and scale it. I'd created non-profits and for-profits. I'd consulted with major companies, and we were on the verge of a major breakthrough in our growth. I'd made a living by creatively solving problems, but none of my talents, wit, or experience could alter the painful truth of this moment. The person who believed in me more than anyone on the planet was going to die, and there wasn't a thing I could do about it. This time, my role wasn't to solve the problem. My only part was to be present and support a dying man I dearly loved.

A hundred times on the flight back, I asked myself, *What in the world am I going to do? I don't know anything about cancer.* My confidence was shattered. I wondered how I could be strong for my father, I doubted my ability to cope with his failing health, I couldn't imagine how I could fulfill all the commitments I'd just made in our new company, I wondered if what I had been pursuing was meaningful at all, and I was terrified by all the things that were out of my control (which suddenly went from a few things to everything). On the long flight back, everything in my life was

up for grabs. All of the new and exciting opportunities seemed suddenly and ultimately empty . . . or at least confusing. I faced the cold, hard reality that I was walking into a situation for which I was completely unprepared and incompetent. The future that had seemed so bright now looked like dense fog at night. The entire plane flight was a nightmare of doubt and fear.

People had always seen me as bold, creative, and confident (and I made sure I projected that image everywhere I went), but suddenly I felt overwhelmed, paralyzed, and helpless. My confidence was now only a memory. I was unsure and insecure.

When I walked in the door at my Dad's condo, we hugged each other and wept for a long time. Both of us knew that nothing would ever be the same. Fear became my constant companion.

The fears described in this book are my fears, the ones I've become painfully aware of since that awful day I got the text from my Dad. Maybe you can relate to some of them.

## THE CONCEPT OF "10 SECONDS OF INSANE COURAGE"

I had dinner with my friend Lisa Wilson and a few others at a restaurant in Atlanta. As young singles often do, we talked about the importance and the complexity of relationships. At one point, Lisa told us, "Getting into a relationship or getting out of one takes the same thing: it takes 10 seconds of insane courage to say 'yes' or to say 'no more.'" She was getting out of a relationship, and she explained that she really liked the guy, but it just wasn't right. She explained, "I needed 10 seconds of insane courage to tell him it's over. In a moment . . . it was only 10 seconds . . . I knew I just had to speak up and say the first words. If I could find the courage to say the first few words, the rest would follow. And that's exactly what happened."

Instantly, I realized the principle applies to every aspect of life, not just dating. I told her, "That's one of the most profound things I've ever heard in my life."

Lisa laughed, “Great! Take it. It’s all yours.”<sup>1</sup>

People need 10 seconds of insane courage to make all kinds of decisions in dating, marriage, raising kids, their career, hobbies, travel, and every conceivable adventure. Here are a few:

- asking for a raise
- asking someone on a date
- pitching a new product
- raising your hand and speaking up in a meeting
- taking the job and moving away
- asking that person to marry you
- saying “yes” or saying “no, it’s not right”
- speaking up to the boss when you have something important to say
- being vulnerable with your spouse about something you did
- leaving work to spend time with your kids
- listening to hard truth
- jumping out of a plane to skydive
- applying for a new job
- giving a speech
- buying the plane ticket to go where you’ve never been before
- saying goodbye
- introducing yourself to someone “out of your league”
- offering your time when someone is lost and needs help
- and countless more