

tim a. gardner

the
backpack



how to
understand and manage yourself
while loving others along the way

WILEY

The Backpack is a simple, engaging story on the power of personal choice to improve your life. Tim shares his wisdom and practical steps on what it takes to fully succeed in life.

—**Jon Gordon, best-selling author of *The Carpenter***

Tim Gardner tells this memorable and clever story with humor, genuineness, and plenty of well-earned wisdom. Rare is the author who can challenge the best of leaders to be better and Tim cuts to the core of what leaders need to hear. Read it. And in the process, you'll learn more about *The Backpack* you carry. You will be better for it.

—**Flip Flippen, founder and chairman of the Flippen Group, best-selling author of *The Flip Side: Break Free of the Behaviors that Hold You Back.***

As the founder of a company whose only legacy is to develop leaders, I've learned that self-awareness is one of the ... if not the ... most important leadership skills. *The Backpack* tells a powerful and practical story on how you can grow in this critical yet often missing trait; one that is required to be a successful leader.

—**David P. Lindsey, founder and chairman of DEFENDERS, Inc., founder of the Super Service Challenge and trueU.**

The *Backpack* is an inspiring book that comes out of the mind and heart of a remarkable individual as well as a great storyteller. It is an engaging, challenging book that addresses the need for us to understand, own, and tweak our behaviors to be better, to love better, and to positively impact others. It is a call to "conversion!" As you read the stories you will say, "That's me." You will become more self-aware and challenged to be your best you ... guaranteed!

—**LTG (Ret) R.L. VanAntwerp, 39 Year Army Veteran and Leadership Coach, former Commanding General of the US Army Corp of Engineers**

The Backpack is one of those precious literary gems that all of us can relate to. It represents a loving and gentle reminder to slow down, pay attention, and take responsibility. Since reading it, I find myself sharing the engaging messages and metaphors with others in general conversation and each time we laugh and reflect on all of the people we've whacked with our backpacks. I finished the book with tears in my eyes, a full heart, and empowered to pay greater attention to how well I am loving others.

—**Andrea Butcher, president of HRD Advisory Group**

Dr. Tim Gardner remarkably frames personal improvement through self-awareness in *The Backpack*. Simple, high-impact, and timeless tools to help people grow personally and professionally are explained in actionable nuggets through his storytelling. I've had the privilege to personally be coached by Tim as well watch him head leadership development in multiple organizations with thousands of team members. I've consistently seen relationships healed, talent unleashed, and confidence grown.

—**Marcia Barnes, founder and CEO of Valve and Meter**

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*To my parents:
Mom, who inspired my love of books and education.
Dad, who imparted a strong work ethic and
a commitment to do what's right.
Thank you for everything!*

Notes

Chapter 2

1. Markman, Howard J., Scott M. Stanley, and Susan L. Blumberg. *Fighting for Your Marriage* (Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, 2010).
2. Thanks to Dave Lindsey, Founder and Chairman of DEFENDERS, Inc., for sharing his packing SOP.

Chapter 18

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1. Eurich, Tasha. “What Self-Awareness Really Is,” *Harvard Business Review*, January 4, 2018.

Chapter 20

1. Lencioni, Patrick. “Make Your Values Mean Something,” *Harvard Business Review*, July 2002.

Chapter 31

1. Wooden, John, and Steve Jamison. *Coach Wooden’s Leadership Game Plan for Success* (McGraw-Hill Education: New York, 2009), 107.
2. Ibid., 36.

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People say that writing a good book is a community effort. That's true. More importantly, living a good life is a community effort. I'm grateful I have a great community for both.

First and forever, I am grateful for Amy, my bride of over 30 years—you are my cheerleader, coach, critic, and best friend. You make my life and my writing far better than they would ever be without you. May there be many more opportunities to write on the beach—while toasting sunset!

I am forever grateful for our children, Caleb, Grace, and Austin. As you each make your own phenomenal path in life, may you always remember that the porch light is on, you're on the favorites list so you can call anytime of the day or night, and that you are each responsible for your own backpacks. Never forget that you are loved deeply by us and by God. And never forget that you were made to love others and make this world a better place.

I am grateful for Kurt & Vickie, Glenn & Nancy, Craig & Julie B., Steve & Bobbi, and Tom & Julie P., our faithful community group. Thank you for the love, prayers, and support, and for going through the ups and downs of life together. May ocean-life be frequent.

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I am grateful for every person who has allowed me to be part of their journey. This includes former patients, clients, business leaders, co-workers, audience members, readers, letter writers, professors, and church friends. To each of you, I say, "Thank you." You have made me better. You have taught me about my backpack.

And, finally and foremost, I am grateful to God. Thank you for your blessings which are beyond measure. Thank you for the never-ending opportunities to serve others. Thank you for your son, Jesus, who has shown us what leadership and love of others truly looks like. May we all follow his example.

And one more: I am grateful for you, the reader. Thank you for taking the time to read *The Backpack*. My hope, however, is that it is more than a read. My hope is that this is part of your life's journey and that you grow, both in self-awareness and in your love for others.

Thank you for joining me in this community of fellow-travelers learning to live and love well with our *Backpacks*.

Tim Gardner
December 2018

About the Author

Dr. Tim Gardner is passionate about people. As a fellow-struggler on life's journey, his mission is to help others live their best life in every area of their life. As an innovator and leader in the field of human relationships and leadership development for over 30 years, Tim founded and directed the Cabin Counseling Center, Life Skills Counseling Center, and Relational Intelligence, LLC. He currently works as a Senior Performance Consultant for the Flippen Group, consulting with some of the largest organizations in the world.

A native Texan known for his quick wit and down-home wisdom, Tim is a gifted and popular speaker and writer. His workshops about healthy workplace relationships have been featured in *The Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, and the *Indianapolis Star*. He is the author of four books, two curricula, and over 20 magazine and journal articles.

To learn more about Tim or to book him for a speaking engagement, please visit his website, www.TimAGardner.com, and or you can contact him at Tim@TimAGardner.com. Follow him on Twitter @DocGardner.

Chapter 1

Jon was late.
Again.

And he was ticked off at everything and everyone.

Again.

He had already decided that this was *not* going to be a good day.

His flight was scheduled to leave at 8:05 a.m., which meant he wanted to be completely ready, backpack in hand, and walking out the door at 6:05. This was the plan he had laid out in his head the previous night. It would give him plenty of time to get to the airport, check in at valet parking, breeze through the TSA Precheck lane, grab a second cup of coffee from his favorite airport hotspot, and be at the gate in time for another look at his newly finished presentation and early boarding with his Frequent Flyer status.

As Jon had slipped into bed the night before, he had smiled. It was good to have a plan.

It was better to have status.

It was now 5:41. He was sitting on a stool in his closet, not smiling, and rubbing his aching foot. He was thinking about how he had not yet accomplished anything. This was not the plan at all. “How did this day get so screwed up already?”

As is often the case, it began with the alarm.

Jon's perfect plans had included a 5:15 wake-up, a quick change into his workout clothes for 25 minutes on the elliptical, and 15 minutes to shower, shave, and dress. This should have left him a short buffer to pour a cup of coffee to go; snatch a banana from the basket that his wife, Grace, always kept stocked with fresh fruit; and grab his carry-on and backpack as he headed out the door. He had even laid out his clothes, packed his bag and hauled it downstairs the night before so he wouldn't wake up Grace digging through the dresser early in the morning—as had happened many times before. He was proud of himself for being so thoughtful. All was set in order to get to the airport right on time.

The perfect plan.

He had heard his smartphone alarm at 5:39. That wasn't a phone glitch; his last thought before trying to close his eyes was, "Hey! I've packed my bags ahead of time. That gives me an extra 15 minutes to sleep!" Impulsively, Jon had changed the wake-up time. He had justified that this extra sleep would make up for the time he had spent returning emails in bed—a task he had not accounted for in his planning. Now, even in his slow retreat from slumber as his feet hit the floor, he wondered where the other nine minutes went.

What didn't come slowly was his irritation over the fact that his plans were quickly going south.

"Okay, 10 minutes of a workout is still better than none. And I can shorten my shower," he reasoned, as he unplugged his phone from the charger and headed for the bathroom.

"Ouch!" He tried to muffle his shriek as his bare foot stepped directly on top of the hard rubber bone that Dumbledore, their dog, had dropped by the bed immediately before joining Grace and Jon, panting and wagging his entire body as he nestled in for the night. (Where the 65-pound fuzz-ball slept when their 10-year-old daughter, Annalise, was gone to a sleepover was still a bone of contention.)

This bone happened to be the one of those dental toys with spikes! Jon glanced quickly at Grace's side of the bed, still not wanting to wake her, though that was becoming less of a concern as he thought, "Why does she have to let that idiot dog sleep with us, anyway? She knows I need to get in six hours of sleep and Dumbledore could make that difficult if not impossible!"

"From now on that dog is going in the crate whenever Annalise is gone," he half-mumbled. "And what the heck were they thinking when they bought that assault-weapon dog toy? Obviously not about me!"

Jon limped into the bathroom and not-so-quietly closed the door.

As usual, his morning had started in a state of hurry. "Do it now" and "do it next" lists dominated his thoughts. Tension and stress already filled his body. The list of people and things he blamed for his quickly deteriorating morning was growing rapidly. The emotions he was carrying both in his brain and in his body were so fired up that he was rushing through his morning, completely unaware of anything around him.

So now Jon sat in his closet—with his aching foot and angry face—tense, frustrated, and more than 20 minutes behind what had been the perfect schedule.

No sense of wonder.

No sense of joy.

No sense of peace.

Not a grateful thought in his head.

His only sense was of pain. And his only thought was, "Why do all of these things always happen to me?"

As Jon rubbed his foot, he stared in confusion at the second thing he had stumbled over that young morning. In the middle of his limping-hurry to the bathroom, he had tripped over another object that, for some reason, was sitting in the middle of the closet doorway.

"How in the world did I get taken out by my own backpack?"

Chapter 2

Sofia had been “short called” two hours ago. She didn’t mind. It was a clear expectation of the job—one that she planned for. In her job as a flight attendant, so many unplanned things occurred on a daily basis that she was used to being prepared for the unexpected. Some of her fellow flight crew members viewed their reserve-line schedule as days off with a possibility of being interrupted by work; Sofia viewed them as work days with a possibility of being interrupted by a day off.

Over the years she had learned that realistic expectations were the key to avoiding disappointment, be it at work or home. She knew that if she packed a reserve day with activities that she or her family were looking forward to, only to have it all blown up because she was called to work, then they would all be let down at best. However, if she expected to work on a reserve day and chose to spend her pre-work time getting a few things done or taking one of her grown children to lunch, then didn’t get called in? Well, that was a bonus!

Sofia even had to admit that sometimes *not* getting called into work could be a disappointment. Her two kids were grown and out of the house and her husband, Scott, worked a normal schedule. This made her job all the more appealing. She was sure to meet interesting people, serve them, and keep them safe. It was a joy to her. She even viewed the occasional

upset passenger or the people who treated her like a glorified waitress as welcome challenges.

“There’s always a reason why people act like they do,” she knew. “Even when they themselves don’t know the reason.”

On some short calls, Sofia had to pop out of bed and be at the airport on an hour’s notice. On this fine morning, she had two hours’ notice. “Another bonus,” Sofia thought gratefully. This allowed her to not have to short-circuit her morning routine. She never skipped it; she simply had a modified version when the predictably unpredictable occurred. On occasion, Sofia entertained the thought of getting up at 3:00 a.m. on days she was on the early reserve line. That would mean she had time to get in her full “day prep,” as she called it, just in case the call came.

It didn’t take much effort for Scott to persuade her to change her mind, especially since a 3:00 a.m. wake-up time meant going to bed at 8:00 p.m. the night before. They both knew their unhurried morning routines were important because that time set the tone for the entire day. However, when discussing radical changes like this, Scott would say something like, “Let’s not go all climb-Kilimanjaro crazy,” or make some other goofy retort.

Scott was a dyed-in-the-wool believer in discipline and commitment, but “lighten up, have fun, and don’t take yourself too seriously” were among his core values. Scott and Sofia both knew that a clear awareness of your personal core values was critical for a purposeful, meaningful life. They helped you govern your thoughts and choices throughout any given day.

Why would they be important for companies and organizations and not individuals and families?

Sofia smiled as she thought of Scott. He was another thing to be grateful for. Daily.

She was also grateful for all she had learned over the years and, more importantly, applied to her life. For example, Sofia knew that it didn’t matter if the short call came with one

or two hours notice, waking her from a dead sleep or interrupting lunch with a friend, her expectations were always aligned with reality, so her reality would not become disappointment. She had learned a formula in a relationship book and it had always stuck with her: If $E > R$, then $R = D$.¹

If your expectations (E) are greater than your reality (R), then your reality (R) will equal disappointment (D).

Now, with her Rollaboard and backpack in tow, Sofia made her way toward the security line, knowing she had plenty of time to stop at the crew lounge before she needed to be at her gate. She enjoyed not rushing. Even more, she enjoyed the freedom of not worrying whether or not she packed everything she needed. Maybe one day she would get to thank the passenger² who shared his packing method with her on a leg from NYC to Indianapolis. She had adopted it as her packing SOP, standard operating procedure. In this case, it was simply a checklist of what she needed to pack. She had an SOP for a one-day trip, two-day trip, three-day trip—whatever size trip. She always used it and therefore rarely forgot to pack anything.

Sofia smiled as she looked around at all of the faces loading luggage onto the X-ray belt. She could tell that some were worried, some relaxed, some stressed, some joyful, some impatient, some moving slowly, and some moving fast. She noticed all of the different backpacks in various states of wear and tear, all carrying many different things.

With over 20 years in the travel industry, Sofia knew that there would be some folks who thought they had things in their backpack that were not there, and there would be other people who had items in their backpacks of which they were completely unaware. She remembered one passenger who had pulled a self-help book out of his backpack. He had never seen the book before and, boy, was he ticked off! Someone had apparently snuck the book into his backpack,

insinuating it was something he needed to read. The irony, which helped Sofia remember the event, was the title of the book: *Self-Awareness: The Key to Anger Management*.

As she moved through the security line, Sofia watched the passengers. What adventures were they headed for? Had they packed everything they needed? Would what they were carrying in their backpacks create joy—or cause problems?

She smiled again. There was a quiet confidence that came from being aware of your baggage. That thought made her smile even more. Everybody had baggage; life had taught her that some people were aware of it and others were not.

Sofia enjoyed the personal peace that was rooted in the conscious awareness of exactly where every item in her backpack was located. This is also why she preferred a backpack over the tote used by most of her colleagues; all of the extra compartments helped her stay aware of where everything she needed was located—for the most part, anyway. There was always room for growth.

On every trip, Sofia consciously worked to improve her overall awareness of her backpack.

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