

The Dash  
Making Sure Your Obituary  
Won't Suck

Tom Morrison



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## FOREWARD

I know what you're thinking. Who the heck is Eric Szymanski, and why did I turn to this page instead of going straight to the first chapter of Tom's book? I'll do my best to make this worth your time.

As I write this, I'm so "Naked and Afraid". I helped Tom write the title of this book, and now he wants me to write the Foreword. What the heck is a Foreword, anyway? This is "*SO, Tom Morrison!*" He is getting me to do something I've never done before in front of an intimate audience. He loves to get people out of their comfort zone. But who am I kidding? I am not a writer...I work in Sales. Where is the last time I heard that? Oh yeah, I remember...

The last time I heard the words, "You just don't understand, you work in Sales" was when I was surrounded by four (yes, four) large bouncers while hosting Tom and his wife, DeAnna, at a two day VIP Client Showcase at a world-famous tourist destination. The bouncers were there to escort me (*ME, not Tom*), out of the establishment. Mind you, I was *the Host* – and the bar was at MY Resort. I'm getting bounced out of a club, at a bar that I represent, in front of a client. What the hell? I even have the word *Senior* in my job title. I'm having an out of body experience, I'm wondering why I'm explaining myself to the "brute squad" and hoping I don't get fired. Meanwhile, Tom has worked his way inside, enjoying his drink and conversation. This is just like Tom. How in the world could this be happening? I'll try to explain...

It's 1:27 am and we just finished cocktails and dancing at a night club after party...aka "Networking" in Tom's language. We're in a boardwalk setting and we're walking to the valet area to procure a ride back to our resort. The night is over...or so I thought. As we were walking, Tom hears more music coming from another bar. He wants to go in for a second afterglow. A second afterglow?! Did I mention it's 1:27 am? Who does that? Oh yeah...Tom does. Why? Because Tom wants to make sure his obituary won't suck. His favorite hashtag is #LiveInTheMoment. It's all about memorable experiences for Tom, while dragging his friends along for the ride. So Tom turns to me and says, "I forgot

my lanyard (i.e. event name badge) in the previous club.” I felt it was my responsibility to ensure that Tom had his name badge at our event the next day. With both clubs closing in less than 3 minutes, I had to act fast. I tell Tom to go inside bar #2 and order a round of drinks. I will go back to the club #1 to retrieve his lanyard. Time is of the essence. With me wearing professional attire, but no name tag or company credentials, I quickly state to the bouncer in bar #2 that I’m a leader at the company. I’m hosting clients for a 2-day VIP tour, and I’m heading over to retrieve something from club #1 (which is next door) and will be right back. Tom had told me exactly where it was. The plan is set. Tom and DeAnna walk in to bar #2 while I walk back to the club #1 to retrieve Tom’s lanyard. I make record time. Tom’s lanyard is exactly where he said it would be. I’ll bet I was gone maybe 60 seconds from the door of bar #2. When I return to join Tom, the door is closed. I check my watch, it’s 1:29am. I pull the door handle and *it’s locked*. Are you kidding me, there is still one minute left!

My clients are inside. I’m standing outside the locked door, holding Tom’s lanyard like a game show contestant with a parting gift. What am I going to do? I told my client to go inside and everything would be ok. What if it’s not? It’s my responsibility to ensure they are safe. Just breathe... Take a moment and think. The bouncer’s watch must have been a little fast. He must have closed and locked the door so other guests could not go inside. I’m sure he wouldn’t mind if I walked to the back door and went inside, right? After all, I explained the situation. We both work there, it will all be ok, right? I was so wrong. I walk past several employees as I stroll through the back door. I wave, smile, and make eye contact. I have nothing to hide, I’m a “Senior Manager.” I enter the establishment. Tom and DeAnna have already ordered another round of drinks. I walk over, hand Tom his lanyard, and exhale as I believe the crisis has been averted. Little did I know, that while solving Tom’s lanyard crisis, I had created my own personal invitation to “Bouncer Wonderland”.

I’m sitting down with Tom and DeAnna, when four large men walk over to me and ask me to leave...immediately. They can’t be serious. I try to explain the situation. I’m hosting clients. I’m a

leader at the company. I spoke with the bouncer at the door. It's right at that moment I realize that one of the four bouncers *was* the bouncer from the front door. They are not backing down. My words are going unheard. They do not want to talk this over. What am I going to do? There is no reference to this in the employee handbook. I had a choice – escalate or diffuse the situation. I chose to try to diffuse the situation. I tell Tom and DeAnna, "Please stay here and finish your drink. I'll walk to the back office and talk to the bouncers and the bar manager. We'll work this out. It's a simple misunderstanding."

Tom, DeAnna, and the "four horsemen" all agree to this plan. Excellent! I'm escorted to the back office. Three brutes stay with me, while one goes to find the manager. Long story short, they don't care who I am, or what I'm doing here. By the way, the first words out of my mouth is that Tom is the CEO of an organization who can fill the bar with patrons. This is very embarrassing for them (not me). I'm here to demonstrate the good time you could have at the bar, so Tom will return with hundreds of his members. They are ruining it. The manager comes over. I repeat my story and ask if he wants to call my boss at 1:40 am to confirm who I am, not knowing if they would answer the call.

My story was met with a unified response – "you must leave now." That's when it came out of the original bouncer... "*You just don't understand, you work in Sales! You think you can do whatever you want.*" It was at that moment that I realized we were at a stalemate. ...but I knew something they didn't know... While we were in the back office, I was giving Tom and DeAnna time to finish their drinks. I was stalling the manager and the bouncers to give my clients the time they needed. I apologized to the "walking muscle trees" and offered to leave with my clients immediately. They said that's all they wanted in the first place. Mission accomplished! I walked back into the bar and Tom asked if everything was ok. I observed their glasses were nearly empty and asked if they were ready to leave. Thankfully, Tom said, "yes," and we were out of there like a bat out of hell.

The next morning, I arrived at our event. The first thing I said to the nearest senior leader is, "I think I may be fired today." I explained what happened, and she said everything would be ok. It

turns out that our company did *not* manage that particular bar, so *technically* I was trespassing. Oh, Snap! Rest assured! I lived to sell another day!

Let me remind you that the only reason I almost lost my job due to trespassing was because Tom wanted to go to a “second afterglow” at 1:27 am to create another awesome life memory...without his freaking name badge. Soon afterwards, Tom signed a contract with my company to host his conference at our establishment. He never confirmed this, but I’m pretty sure one of the main reasons Tom chose our company was because I demonstrated my willingness to lose my job to make sure he could have a good time with his wife...while I almost got beat up by four very large men.

Many would have called it a night at 1:27 am that night...not Tom. He has a passion for life, and a “live in the moment” attitude to create a balance and quality of life that people admire and desire. He wants the same for you.

My question is, “Are you living the quality of life you really, really want? ...or do you feel like you are just going through the motions in life?” If you disappeared, would anyone care? Do you ever feel the mountain is too steep to climb, or you don’t have enough time to get it all done? Maybe you have some success, but you don’t know how to get to the next level.

If you already have the perfect life, this book may not be for you. Put the book down, and step away from the table. Take a moment or two and congratulate yourself on your awesomeness. You have arrived!

If your life isn’t perfect and you’re still reading this, congratulations. Try not to feel bad about your less than perfect situation. I’m right there with you. You are not alone. We’ve all been there, and this too shall pass.

You may be wondering, “how do I get from where I am now to where I want to be?” There must be something I can do. There is...

The knowledge you will gain from reading Tom’s book is the path for discovering your desires, chasing your dreams, and living a life so your obituary doesn’t suck. Don’t stop here. Turn the page

to chapter one, keep reading, and start creating the life you want today!

Eric Szymanski

No-Nonsense Hospitality Professional

Association Industry Professional

Member of Tom's Wolfpack

Survivor of Tom's Bachelor Party

Attendee and M.C. of Tom & DeAnna's Wedding

Barbershop Quartet Singer

Husband & Father

Eric's Dash-

Eric was born and raised in the suburbs of Detroit, Michigan, where he was a member of the East Middle School 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Football Team. Eric played Offense and Defense on this team, which was undefeated and unscored upon. His mother did not let him continue his dream to play high school football though...he played in the freaking Marching Band, and watched his teammates win the State Football Championship...

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## CHAPTER 1

### BETWEEN THE NUMBERS

*As you stare at the dash of someone's life, you stare into their joy, success, hurt, and pain.*

*What will your dash represent?*

If you were to count the world's population, there would be over 7,500,000,000 people on earth. That's right. A lot of zeros, which means a bunch of people. Now if you were to try and find one commonality among 100% of the world's population, it would be virtually impossible. Everyone has some individual trait that separates the population into smaller groups such as nationality, gender, age, ethnicity, or occupation to name a few. It really is impossible to find one element that is a common link to every human being...except for one...the Dash.

You may be asking, "Tom, what do you mean, the Dash?" Without question, 100% of all people in the world have a Dash. You can't get rid of it. You can't hide from it. You can't ignore it. You can't run from it. You can't throw it away. When each person is born, they are born with a Dash. Your Dash is the small hyphen that separates two numbers over your lifetime. The number to the left of your Dash is the start of your life. The number on the right of your Dash is the end of your life. The Dash in the middle is your life.

It seems like only a simple line that separates two numbers, but in reality, it represents EVERYTHING about you. How you lived your life, what people think about you, what you stood for, and the legacy you will be remembered for. All of the happiness, joy, success, failure, victory, and pain are wrapped up inside of your Dash. It's obvious if you are reading this book, you don't have a number on the right, so read on and take close notes. Your life is about to change.

The question for you is how is your dash playing out? Are you experiencing the quality of life you dreamed of as a young person? Are you checking off your bucket list now, or are you waiting until

retirement? Are you building memories with those you love most? Are you saying what you would like to say to someone now instead of waiting until it's too late? Are you building the memories doing what you REALLY want to do in life? The biggest question of all is, "As you think about how your Dash is playing out, will your obituary suck?"

At the end of everyone's life, their Dash is translated in their obituary. The world will get to read how you lived your life, what you stood for, and what your legacy is about, in your obituary. For me, in that moment of people reading what makes up my Dash, I don't want my obituary to suck. I want people to see that I lived my dreams, chased incredible experiences I loved, and cared for those closest to me. Most people want these same three elements of chasing their dreams, creating great memories, and to be loved in their life. Most people, however, don't. I could fill this book with an entire set of excuses as to why they don't pursue the best life possible, but I'm not about excuses. I'm about you, your hope, your dreams, and you living the best life possible. I want that for you.

Do you want more from your life? Do you have dreams you would like to chase? Do you have people you would like to have a better relationship with? Do you have life goals that you would love to achieve? Do you have adventures you would like to take? If you desire to live the best life possible and live a quality of life that is fulfilling to your soul each day, you are in the right place.

As I speak around the country on generational differences, many Baby Boomers feel that the younger generation wants to play too much instead of work. I feel that many in the Baby Boomer generation fault the Millennials for their desire to have a nice work/life balance at such a young age. Baby Boomers were taught to work, work, work, from youth to retirement, and then you retire and enjoy life. The problem is that most Boomers woke up in their early 50s, wondering where the time went, looking for meaning in their life, and wondering why they were waiting on retirement to begin enjoying life. Many called it the "mid-life crisis." I think boomers just rediscovered their life at 50 and now want to start living it again.

Many in the younger generation got to watch that work, work,

work quality of life play out in their parents' lives, and what did many see in their parents? Debt, divorce, stress, and unfilled dreams over a lifetime. Young people watched their parents live lives that lead to wondering in their 50s, where did all the time go? Why didn't I live life more? Society should not fault the younger generation for their refreshing philosophy of work/life balance. We should embrace it.

A long life is no guarantee. We should all be living life every day, in a way that brings us joy, smiles, happiness, and fulfillment. That doesn't mean that every day will be perfect, but in those imperfect days, you will at least be living a quality of life that you want. No matter what age you are, I want you to chase your dreams, experience your bucket list, and live life in a way that every day makes you smile and say, "MY LIFE ROCKS!"

To help give you some focus and motivation to chase the experiences and quality of life that you really desire, let's do a little life assessment. The following is a picture with 78 squares in it. These squares represent the average life span of a person living in the United States. I want you to take a pencil or pen, and color in the number of squares that represent your age. For example, if you are 56, color in 56 squares.

### Life Block Exercise

*Color in the number of squares of your age  
Those not colored is what you have left to live*


Once you have colored in the squares, I want you to stare at that picture and realize that the colored portion is what you have lived in life. The white squares are what you have left to live. This is a general visual of the time-line of your Dash.

Some questions I want to ask you at this point as you stare at this image:

- Are you satisfied with what you have done so far?
- Do your decisions align with where you would really like to be in life?
  - Are there people you need to forgive to experience emotional freedom?
  - Are there people you need to ask forgiveness from for your actions?
    - Does your soul feel fulfilled at this very moment?
    - How would the closest people to you describe you to others if you weren't around?
      - Are there things stored up in your heart that you need to say to your parents, children, spouse, or friends?
      - What is on your bucket list?
      - What are you going to do with the time you have left?

As you think of those questions, let me add something to the equation: what happens when tragedy strikes, or you go to the doctor and receive a diagnosis that instantly colors in almost all of your blocks? Don't say it won't happen to you...it happens every single day, to people everywhere, of all ages. Every day people young and old are diagnosed with cancer, have an unexpected heart attack, or are involved in a serious accident. In that moment when anyone finds themselves in the back of an ambulance or in a hospital bed, life becomes real...and so does the number on the right side of your Dash. You wish you had done more. You wish you had forgiven someone. You wish you had said some things to those closest to you. You wish you had taken that trip. You wish you had... The list goes on and on.

With that in mind, I want to encourage you to have a "live-in-the-moment attitude each day." I want you to be open to experiencing life, adventure, and to get outside of your comfort zone, by doing things that you want to do, but are always claiming no time or money to do. There is no time like today to experience life! No longer live with the attitude, "I'll have tomorrow", or "I'll do it next year."

There were two people I knew closely that I want to tell you about that will bring the, “live in the moment” point home. The first person I would like to tell you about is Chelsea. She was the daughter of my cousin. A beautiful, bubbly 19-year-old, who always brought a smile to anyone around her. She had married her sweetheart at 19, and soon after became pregnant with their first child. They lived a great life as a young couple, enjoying a tight bond with their family and friends. She woke up on her 19<sup>th</sup> birthday thinking that day was going to be a glorious day, which it was. She had an amazing husband, was two months away from having her first child, and was going to celebrate her big day with her family.

I can remember the back-to-back Facebook posts like it was yesterday. Chelsea posted right before going to bed on her birthday night how awesome the day was; how amazing her family was. The very next post was her mother’s post the next morning asking for everyone to pray for Chelsea. You see, Chelsea woke up the next morning after her incredible 19<sup>th</sup> birthday, had an aneurism, and fell into a coma. She lasted in that coma in the hospital until her little baby boy was born with no complications. A month later, Chelsea was no longer with us here on earth.

What I would like to share about Chelsea is that in the few months she lived in a coma, she reached more hearts, and changed more lives than most people impact in a lifetime. It was very inspiring to experience seeing people’s lives changing amidst Chelsea’s tragedy.

The second person I want you to take note of is Ray Kroc, the founder of McDonalds. Many people don’t know it, but Ray Kroc discovered McDonalds in his fifties. Yes, in his fifties. Can you believe that? While most people would have given up on their dreams, Ray Kroc discovered that it’s never too late to chase your dreams. Over the years, McDonalds has become a huge success in the fast food industry.

Here is what I want you to take away from these two real-life stories:

- We are not promised tomorrow...don’t live like it.
- It’s never too late to chase your dreams; start today.

My motto in life is, “If I’m asked to go on an adventure, journey, or experience of any kind, and I have the time and money, I say “YES” ...every time.” My favorite saying is, “I’m IN!” The reason why? It’s simple...I don’t want my obituary to suck. I want my obituary to be representative of a person who lived life in a way that fulfilled my dreams, brought daily joy, and ignited passion.

This simple philosophy has helped me, “live in the moment” throughout my entire life and create life memories that cause me to smile and laugh at constantly. It doesn’t matter whether it’s dinner, going to the movie, taking a snow skiing trip, or any other life experience...if I’m invited and I have the time and money, I’M IN!

“Live in the moment” and “I’m IN” are the two phrases that are your commitment to making sure that your obituary doesn’t suck. I want to encourage you to embrace these two phrases as you read this book.

Don’t be someone who “wished they had.” Be an “I did” person. Start today being a person who seizes every day as if you only had one block left to fulfill your dreams in the block exercise. Be the person who writes their bucket list down and pursues it. Be the person who sees people as human beings who need help and be there to help. Be the person who writes their career goals down and accomplishes them. Be the person who decides what you want your legacy to be and makes it happen.

Many reading this book are saying, “Tom, I don’t want my obituary to suck. I want to be an ‘I’m IN’ person. I just don’t know how or where to start.”

My friend, this is your lucky day, because that is what this book is all about!