

THE ACCOUNTABILITY EFFECT

THE BOOK YOUR EXCUSES DON'T WANT YOU TO READ

BASSAM TARAZI

Foreword



“Who do you want to be when you grow up?” That was never the question. Instead, it was, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” Did we have it wrong all along?

I thought of this question as I stood a mere 800 feet below Everest Base Camp, huffing, puffing, freezing, and wondering what on Earth I was doing there. I knew why I was in Nepal, of course. I was there for the challenge. I was there for the experience of trudging through something until I reached the finish line. I was there to bond with a group of strangers who shared a common goal. I was there to see what my body could do, and to be able to say that I had done it. In that moment before we conquered our ultimate goal, I was pretty sure who I was on the inside. I was accountable for the choices I was making and the life I was living. It was that fact that brought an unmatched smile to my face.

We have enough stimulation and distractions around us to keep us busy until the next Ice Age. If it's not the television, it's the Internet. If it's not the Internet, it's our phones. If it's not our phones, it's our jobs. It is very easy to watch our lives zip by without ever stopping to ponder who it is that we want to be before it's too late.

This book is for your heart of hearts, for the voice inside your head, for the person you want to be, and for the person you are scared to become. It is a battle cry to regain your center, to never give up on your dreams, and to surround yourself with those who refill your cups of life, love and gratitude.

This book is for the tinkerers, the ones who dare to be better, and want to find out how to do so. It is for those who can handle a little tough love, who want to seize the moment, who are not afraid of hard work, and who refuse to rely on a bed of excuses. It is for anyone looking to get back behind the wheel of the car that is careening far too quickly down the road of life.

I have traveled to 43 countries. I have worked on the reactors of nuclear submarines. I have co-founded the [Nomading Film Festival](#). I have been tens of thousands of dollars in debt. I have learned by getting my feet wet and my hands dirty. It hasn't always been easy, and at times I found myself out on a ledge while everyone else thought I was crazy. What follows on these pages is direct, honest, and unapologetic, because to figure out who we are, we have to scrub off the excess layers of expectations, pop culture, peer pressure, and accepted norms that our society has laid upon us.

Accountability is intimidating, I know. It means that someone is keeping score. At the same time,

accountability will lead to happiness. Accountability starts with “who” because, if you do not know who you are, you will not be ready to make a choice you have to own. Come join me on a journey as we dissect the word “who” and explore why that word is the key to living a fulfilled life.

This book is broken up in two parts. Part 1 is “you” and Part 2 is “us”. You are about to embark on Part 1. Part 2 will be available in the summer of 2012.

I thank you for taking the time to read this. If you find it inspirational, reflective and informative, surely share it with others! I would also love to hear your feedback, regardless of its nature.

Humbly,



Bassam Tarazi

bassam@colipera.com

[@bassamtarazi](https://twitter.com/bassamtarazi)



Part 1: Who? You.

CONTENTS

WHO HAS IT BETTER?

- THE MODERN TIMES

WHO CARES?

- IF YOU DON'T CARE, NO ONE WILL
- ONE LIFE
- TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

WHO ARE YOU?

- IDENTITY
- JOB
- HOBBIES
- THE CULTURE YOU GREW UP IN
- YOUR SOCIAL SELF

WHO DO YOU WANT TO BE?

- YOUR LIFE'S VISION
- THE STUFF YOU COMPLAIN ABOUT

WHO'S IN CHARGE?

- THE MARIONETTE
- YOUR PARENT'S CHILD

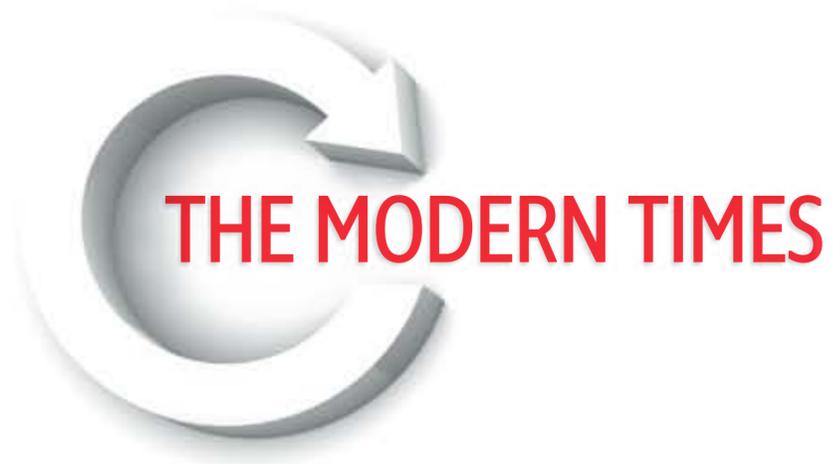
WHO ARE YOU WAITING FOR?

- COMFORT KILLS
- THE STATUS QUO
- YOUR GENIUS

WHO ELSE?

WHO HAS IT BETTER?





Running water. Food on shelves. Career changes. Partying. Cell phones. Cars. Planes. Recreational travel. Civility. Paved roads. Freedom of speech. Freedom of religion. Freedom to live. Fantasy football. Online shopping. On-demand everything. Wine & cheese parties. Side businesses. Hobbies. We in the West live at an unprecedented time in human history.

Our world is filled with mass consumption and physical comforts that would make someone from a previous century fall over with disbelief. Most of us do not hunt our food, make our own clothing or build much of anything; yet we have access to gluten free bread, eco-friendly clothing, kale, Hot Wheels, LED lights, shelving units, cow's milk, sheep's wool and goat cheese.

We have the tools to change our surroundings and indulge our interests at our disposal, 24/7. We can take classes on any subject at any time (see, e.g., [TED Talks](#), [MIT Global Learning](#), [Skillshare](#), [The Khan Academy](#)). Never before have there been more resources and opportunities for us learn, grow, and create. We can start a business in a matter of days. We can speak to anyone on the planet, at any time of day, as long as we both have “a signal”. Want to change your major? Go ahead, even make your own. Want to change where you live? Knock yourself out. Want to change your career? Have at it. Want to learn about French Impressionist painters? Ok, go [here](#). Want to learn about quarks? Go [here](#). Want to learn anything at all? Go [here](#). The word “can’t” does not have the same clout it once did. You “can’t” or you “won’t”? There is a big difference. For the first time in history, all of the information you need to take action across nearly any area of interest is literally at your typing fingertips. It only takes a few clicks to open your world up to something fascinating.

History will not feel sorry for the unprecedented opportunities we have.

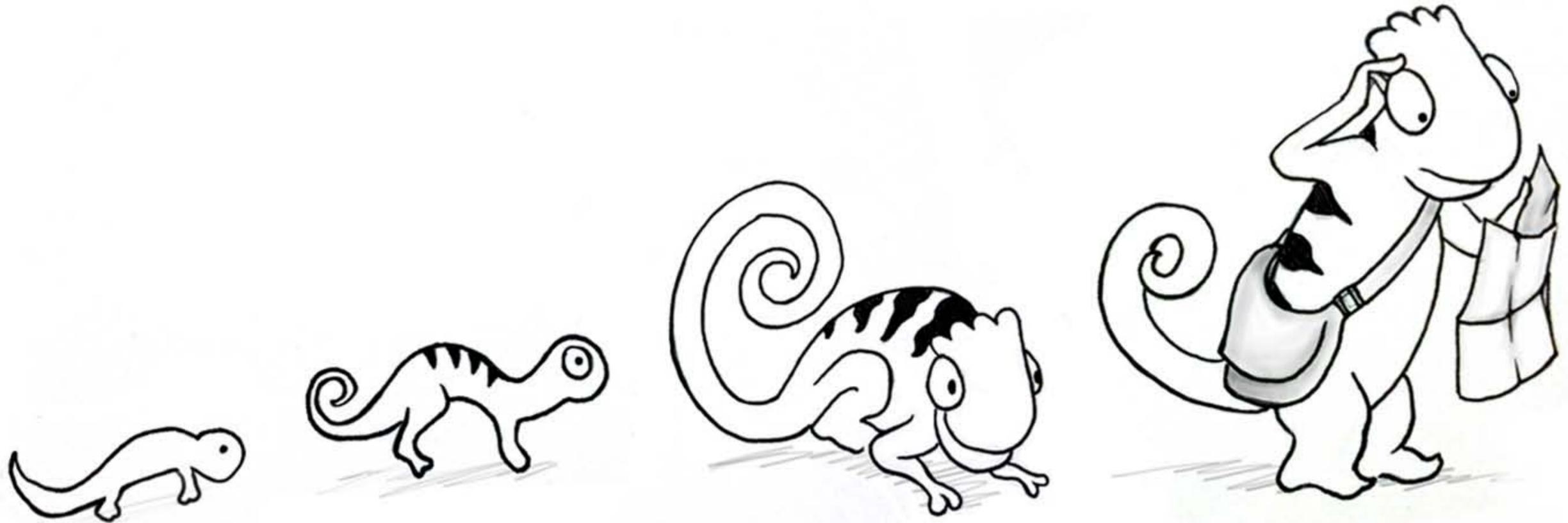
I met a man in Haiti who said:

“My passport says I’m Haitian. I can’t leave. Yours says, American. You can leave. Do me a favor, have fun in your life, make people laugh, make people smile, love people and do something you enjoy. Don’t feel sorry for me but just remember the opportunities you have and make the most of them.”

I imagine that if you went to live with an obscure tribe or village in any Third World country solely because you felt guilty for the things you had, they would look at you quizzically and poetically ask, “What the hell are you doing here?”

We did not ask for this life of abundance, but we have it. The gift was handed to us soaked in the sweat of generations who fought, clawed, sacrificed and loved before us. Is that our fault? No. But it is our fault if we throw the gift away. It is our duty to take that gift and live lives that are befitting of it. We owe it to those who were born into a life less fortunate through no choice of their own.

WHO CARES?





YOU DO. IF YOU DON'T, NO ONE WILL.

If there is any meaning to life while we are here, it is to have a purpose: your kids, your job, your hobby, a team, a book, a political platform, a cause, a movement, a game, a restaurant, a country, a smile, a pet. Purpose will be your navigator during those times in life when the fog seems to outweigh the clarity. No one is ever going to care about your life and the way you choose to live it more than you will. That is a beautiful thing – never forget how beautiful.

So when you say “I don’t care,” I don’t believe you. You do care. Evolution and the luck of life sneaked its way through death, diseases and accidents to forge an unmistakable, unbreakable line of reproduction long enough to get to you. If that burden is too heavy, tough luck. Care.

Couldn't care more. It's your duty.



This is your one go at life. Eventually you will be dead, and none of this will matter anymore. Let that fact invigorate you. Let the fact that you are alive now and have the ability to matter to your friends, family and fellow man inspire you. Undoubtedly, you will have to be patient along the way, and the timing will never be perfect to do the things that you have talked about doing. But, if you wait long enough, you will die. And then surely you will have waited too long.

But I don't know what I want to do with my life!

Just because you haven't figured out your purpose in life doesn't mean that you can't be developing your skills, repertoire and knowledge toward something that you find interesting today. What tomorrow brings could take life away from you so, by God, live *today*. Does that mean you are to burn your possessions and open your own business in Belize tomorrow? Maybe, maybe not.

Living today simply means being present and taking accountability for your actions, or lack thereof. Many times, people take the "you have one life, don't have any regrets" approach to mean that they have to make a drastic change in their lives this very second, or the world will end. Not true. Ask yourself this: If I wait, how will my life be different in three months? Six months? One Year? Etc. What will you be doing in that time to put

yourself in a better position to learn and grow? Maybe you have loans that you have to pay off. Maybe you want to finish a project with your current employer. Maybe you want in-state residence for grad school. Maybe you want to improve your Spanish before you move to Madrid. If you are going to postpone a big decision in your life, be sure it is for a reason that you control and not because you are waiting for a sign from the heavens that may never come.

Have your go at life, but understand that things take time to percolate, marinate and curate. The reason we all loved the regimen of college so much was because it a) allowed us to learn and question things and b) kept us in line. There were semesters, term papers and exams. You had your immediate future mapped out for you.

When you get to the real world, all of that disappears, and what was once the winding, exciting, and defined road of a Formula 1 race suddenly turns into the Bolivian salt flats of your career - miles and miles of a vast expanse in all directions without anyone telling you where to go or when to turn.

This usually paralyzes us because we figure that, if we are going in any direction, it must be the right direction. We quite often value consistency over thought, even if staying consistent is a road to nowhere. To combat this, we have to create our own exits, rest stops and checkpoints. Facilitate and manage your own map. If you are lucky enough to die of old age, don't be the guy on his deathbed saying, "I wish I did X, Y and Z." If that is the case, then you mismanaged your journey somewhere along the way.

Your goals need to be a lot like your life. No one should believe in them more than you. If you are doing something half-assed or superficially, be prepared to get run over by nine people who are doing it because they love it. You have to be the commander of your ship and put in countless unceremonious hours. Don't expect anyone else to take the helm. Hopefully, if you work hard enough, there will be a day when people will want to ride in your boat and support your vision's destination. But you are always the captain of your ship.

Of course, while you *do* only have one life, that does not mean that you should make every selfish decision in the book, simply because you wanted to “live life to the fullest.” Yes, it is your life, but so much of your life depends on the lives of the other people living around you (we’ll get to that in detail in Part 2). The truth is, you don’t live your life in isolation from others. You need people – physically, emotionally, professionally, platonically, financially – be they parents, friends, lovers, teachers, employers, coworkers, loan officers, investors, contractors or customers. We are society. You and your life are a part of that society. So do what you love, but understand that you will undoubtedly need to coexist and work with others in order to be truly fulfilled.

***An existence that isn’t a shared existence
is no existence at all.***



TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

Eat your veggies, exercise, stretch, sleep. Be in command of your body. Be proud of your body. It has hosted every thought, feeling and exertion that you have ever had. It is your vessel, and it will do everything necessary to keep you going. Respect it. Know it. Love it. It likes living, and is pretty damn good at it. Don't play Russian Roulette with your body and mistreat it, assuming it will always bounce right back. One day it won't, and unfortunately we have no reset buttons in place. You must be true to yourself and know that caring for yourself is the first step. You cannot blame anyone else for your falling short of this responsibility. Ever.

WHO ARE YOU?





When you describe yourself to someone, how do you typically begin? What makes you different? How do you think other people speak of you when you leave the room? What is your identity as an individual? If you were to die tomorrow, what would your gravestone say?

Here lies _____. (S)He was a person who _____.

Think about it. Keep thinking about it. If you could write your own obituary, what would it say? What legacy would you leave behind? Though our bodies don't live on, our teachings, influence and legacies can. So are you going to paddle your way along the river of life, or are you going to be the leaf that merely floats along for a while and then dissolves into the tides of time? It is your choice and yours alone. You cannot blame the rapids, the rocks, the twists or the turns.

***You cannot control those forces
around you, but you can control
how you respond to the forces.***



Does your job define you? Do you enjoy what you? Do the good days outweigh the bad? Are you lying to yourself? Are you learning every day? Do you find yourself rationalizing why you can't leave? Careers start, change, adapt, subtract, start again and flip upside down all the time. If you are like most people, you spend the majority of your life at a place, doing something that earns you a living. It is important that you enjoy it somewhat. Your significant other and what you do for income are the two things that have the biggest impact on your life, so do yourself a favor and try to enjoy them a little bit, if not a whole lot. As my friends at [Holstee](#) say, "If you don't like your job, quit".

If you are unable to quit because you have a stack of unopened bills, school debt and/or

mortgage payment breathing down your neck, are you doing something to change your circumstances in the meantime? Are you learning something new on the side? Are you even trying? Those “I can’t-s” and “you don’t understand-s” that you want to utter? Save them. The only question that matters is: Can you live with the decisions you are making (not the face you put on) as you live out your life? Your heart of hearts does not forget, and it always knows the truth, so if you tried but really couldn’t, your conscience will be at peace knowing that you did everything in your power. But if you could, but just didn’t, you will always kick yourself for not trying.



What do you do when you are not earning a living? The free time you are lucky to have should be filled with things you are interested in. The opposite of happiness is boredom. Find something that you like to tinker with, and tinker away! If you are totally lost for a hobby, volunteer. It will invigorate you. Our hobbies and interests are where we can expand ourselves as human beings. We can create connections outside of the work place and grant ourselves access to an environment where we can flourish, build confidence and perhaps, give added meaning to our lives and the lives of those around us.

From hobbies comes the forward nudge of progress.

If everyone simply went to work and did nothing else, then precious little would be created in backyards, garages, or on kitchen tables. Write down three things you have a genuine interest in. Pick one and do something with it, *anything*. I don't care if you wrote down: "Picking my nose". Who knows, maybe you end up writing the bestseller, "How To Pick Your Nose Like An Adult - But Feel Like A Child" after your *nose-diggin'* blog goes viral. Hobbies shape us and give us context. *Who's Rachel again?* "Oh, she's the one that lives next to Tracy. She's the fun girl that makes that cool jewelry." *Oh right, Rachel! She's cool. I like her.*



The people around you – your friends, family, teachers, coworkers, travel buddies – helped shape who you are today and who you will be tomorrow. There is no “you” separate from “them”. Rejoice in the good qualities of those relationships. At the same time, embrace and learn from the bad qualities. If you have a great memory or a great foundation, build on it. If your childhood was not the most enviable of situations, that is obviously unfortunate – but there are lessons to be derived from your experience. Good, bad, or ugly, “nurture” shaped us just as much as “nature”, and it’s always healthy to be open and honest of this fact.



Facebook, Twitter, personal blogs. This modern world allows us an online identity that is separate and distinct from our actual lives, and we must be weary of confusing our social self with our genuine self. We typically portray ourselves online as the person we hope to be, or the person we want other people to think we are. At the same time, the Internet allows us to experiment with different voices and different interests, and to be anonymous about them if we so choose. We can join conversations, “like” a photo, and follow and comment on the activities of others in a reality separate from the tangible world. Being cognizant of that existence is important, because it is not *exactly* “us”.

WHO DO YOU WANT TO BE?





Do you want kids? Do you want to be married? Do you want to stay at a job and retire comfortably off a pension? Do you want to jump around and experience the unknown? Perhaps a mixture? There is no right or wrong, but it is important to imagine the kind of life that you want. If you don't, you can't really complain when things don't pan out.

How about a bucket list? Are there things you must get done in life? If you don't know what your hopes and dreams are, how do you know what direction to go in? Our moments left in time are from this moment forth. There is no going back. It is important to know who you want to become, so you don't end up in the middle of nowhere with a few less years to live. Time is murderous.



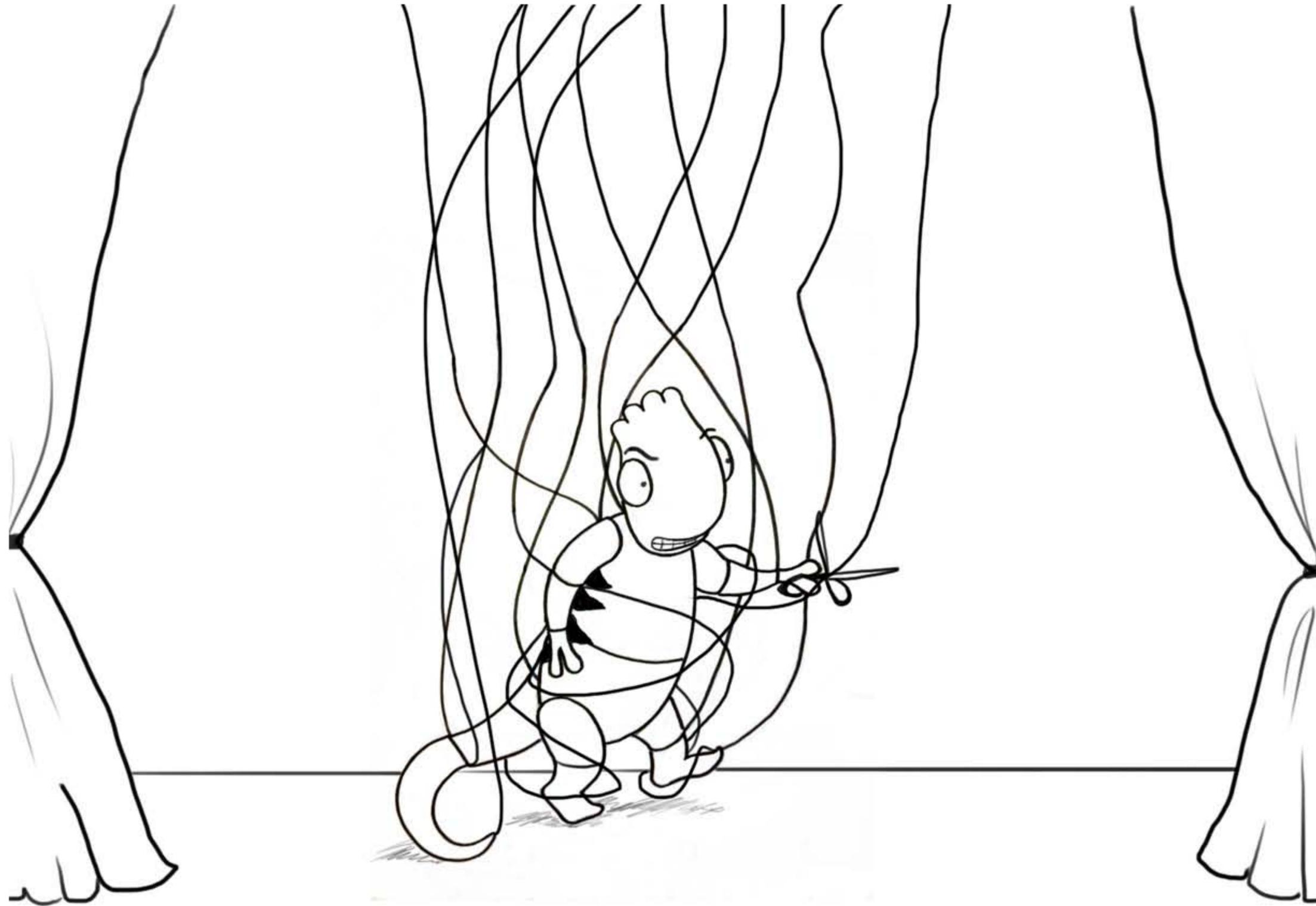
THE STUFF YOU COMPLAIN ABOUT OR WISH YOU HAD

What negative energy do you have in your life? What would you like to be rid of? Sometimes, so much of who we are is the stuff we are not. We end up suffocating ourselves and those around us with talk of the things *not* in our lives, or things we wish we had. This attitude and approach ends up shaping how people perceive us and how we rate the quality of our lives. To put it simply, if you complain less, you will be happier. It's simple math.

Bottom line, people are more drawn to people who talk about what they can do instead of what they can't do.

At times, success can seem as scary as failure. What if, because of the choices you have made, you could feel great every single day? Would you be ready for that? Could you afford to leave your cynicism at the door? Being in a rut is sometimes safe for us because we get support and sympathy from our friends and family. If you didn't have that, and things went your way, how would your days be different? What would be the first flicker indicating that your day was going to be great? How can you turn that flicker into a flame?

WHO'S IN CHARGE?





Are you in control of your life, or are you a marionette in someone else's puppet show? Take a deep breath and a step back, and assess how you make decisions on a daily basis. Give yourself enough time to reflect on the day's matters, because it is so easy to live a reactionary life without ever stopping to analyze the "whys" behind things that are happening around you. If you feel like you don't have much of a say in your life (and you are not a child or in prison), then you need to figure out what those influences are that are holding you back. It is time you take back the reins of your horse.



This is typical for so many of us. If our parents are lawyers, we are often pushed – directly or indirectly – toward a profession in law. We are scared of disappointing them because of the sacrifices they made to send us to law school, when we'd rather work for a non-profit instead. In the end though, it is our life and we need to be accountable for it. Our parents have their own lives to lead, and at some point we have to be able to stand up for ourselves and what we want.

However, the problem is, many of us do not know what we want, so we stay on the path that was paved for us beforehand because the thought of having to find our own way makes us sick to our stomach. By sticking to a route that was chosen for us, we can shed accountability and blame someone else for the trajectory we are on. That is lose-lose for everyone involved.

WHO ARE YOU WAITING FOR?





I know. You are busy. Work. Concerts. Bars. Sports leagues. Gyms. Shopping. Socializing. Baby showers. Weddings. These things take up our time and energy, and you need your weekends to recharge so that you can feel human again.

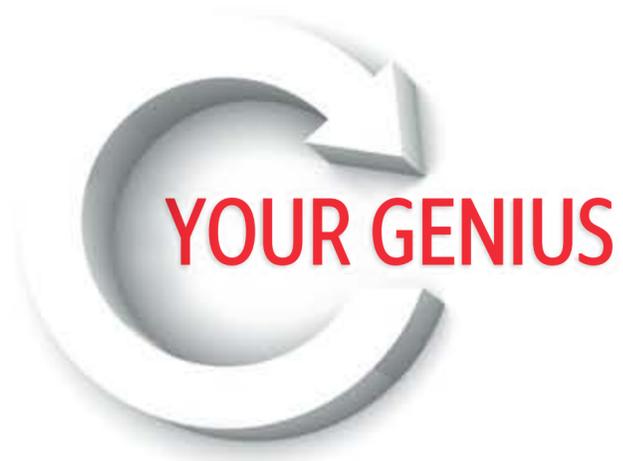
Rest is paramount in life, but laziness lies at the fringes of relaxation. Be careful of ceding ground to the creeping sloth.



It is hard to go against the status quo. I will give you that. It's like trying to change the direction of a floating iceberg. But with enough effort, it can be moved. Think of the people you admire in life. Did any of them do exactly what the status quo said? Chances are, they did not. Chances are, they took risks. Chances are, they *sacrificed*. You have to dare to be great, and you have to sacrifice to follow a dream. Who you want to be is right in front of you. Steve Jobs famously said:

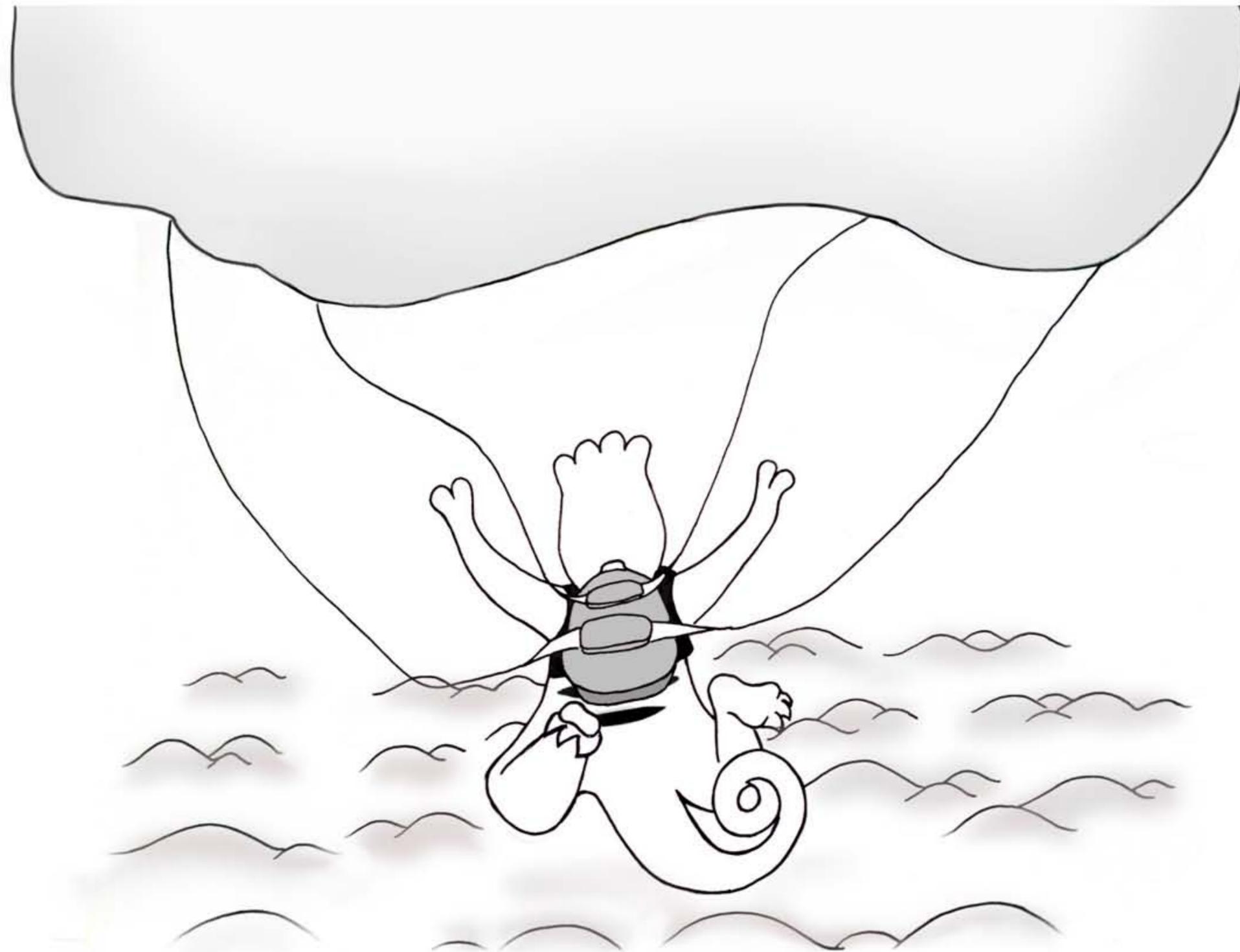
When you grow up, you tend to get told that the world is the way it is, and your life is just to live your life inside the world. Try not to bash into the walls too much. Try to have a nice family life. Have fun, save a little money. That's a very limited life. Life can be much broader,

once you discover one simple fact, and that is everything around that you call life was made up by people who were no smarter than you. And you can change it. You can influence it. You can build your own things that other people can use. Once you learn that, you'll never be the same again.



You do the world a disservice by not letting your flower bloom. Stop thinking that you are not good enough or that someone else might not like your interests as much as you do. The world needs more people living a life of passion and purpose because living that life inspires others to do the same. Simon Sinek told us, "People don't buy what you do, they buy why you do it." It can be the family you raise, the paintings you create or the time you donate to charity, but let your genius flourish one way or the other. It will change your life and the lives of those around you.

WHO ELSE?



You can read all of the books you want and receive all the guidance the world can give. You can dot your “i’s” and cross your “t’s”. You can save money. You can buy Rosetta Stone, those running shoes or that yarn. But make no mistake about it, you have to be the one who jumps in, who cuts the cord, who opens the book, who takes the first step. You have to use the tools – it is not enough to simply possess them. I assure you that the timing will never be totally right and that the Duke of Doubt will try to hold you back, but it is *you* that has to decide to leap, and no one else.

Because if not you, then who?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bassam's name means: the smiling one. He feels like he couldn't have a better fitting name.

He was always encouraged to live an inquisitive life. He's tried, failed and tried again, but he was always taught to be accountable for the things he did or didn't do. Over his journey, he's visited 43 countries, lived in 8 different cities, worked for 4 companies, started 3 of his own, received 2 degrees, wrote 2 screenplays, and has had 1 hell of a great time doing it. Some of the highlights:

- He created **Colipera** and wrote this entire book during a 4-week session
- He co-founded the **Nomading Film Festival**
- He's worked in the reactors of nuclear submarines at Pearl Harbor, HI
- He's met Fidel Castro
- He's been diving with great whites off the coast of South Africa
- He's climbed to Everest Base Camp, and made a **short film** about it
- He's been the Director of Operations for **Omnibuild**

He grew up in Danbury, CT, got a degree in Mechanical Engineering from RPI, and a green MBA from the San Francisco Institute of Architecture. Bassam believes that the gift of life, the chance to make of one's destiny whatever one chooses, is the greatest gift that could ever be bestowed upon an individual. He wakes up every day feeling like the luckiest guy in the world for having the chances he's had in life and for the support of the friends and family he receives on a daily basis.

Bassam is convinced that happier people are better people and he is going to work tirelessly spreading that notion. He lives by the mantra: Live, love, and never stop learning.

Currently, he lives in Brooklyn, NY working on things at Omnibuild, the film festival, spreading Colipera, teaching goal setting classes and doing one-on-one life coaching.

You can usually find him running the stairs in Fort Greene Park.

Follow Bassam on twitter at: **@bassamtarazi**

Say hi: **bassam@colipera.com**

