

10-STEP GUIDE TO AN



UPGRADED LIFESTYLE

V.M. SIMANDAN

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10-STEP GUIDE TO AN UPGRADED LIFESTYLE

Follow your passion.
Stay healthy.
Make online profit.

V.M. Simandan

2nd Edition

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Introduction

In case this is your first time on my [website](#) or [YouTube Channel](#) and you're not familiar with my work, let me briefly tell you who I am and where I "come from."

I was born in a small city in the west of Romania in a region known (for all the wrong reasons, based on novels and films) as Transylvania. That was 469 years ago. No, I'm kidding. The year was 1978 when I was born and in 2002, at 24, I packed my bags and moved to Asia.

In 2018, after living in Thailand for 16 years (with a brief 10-month stint in the Middle East), I moved to China. I'm now a Beijing-based writer, archer, and traveller who has written and published extensively on lifestyle topics, including sports, health, culture, and travel. I've travelled extensively across Asia and since 2009 I've been running a profitable and sustainable online project.

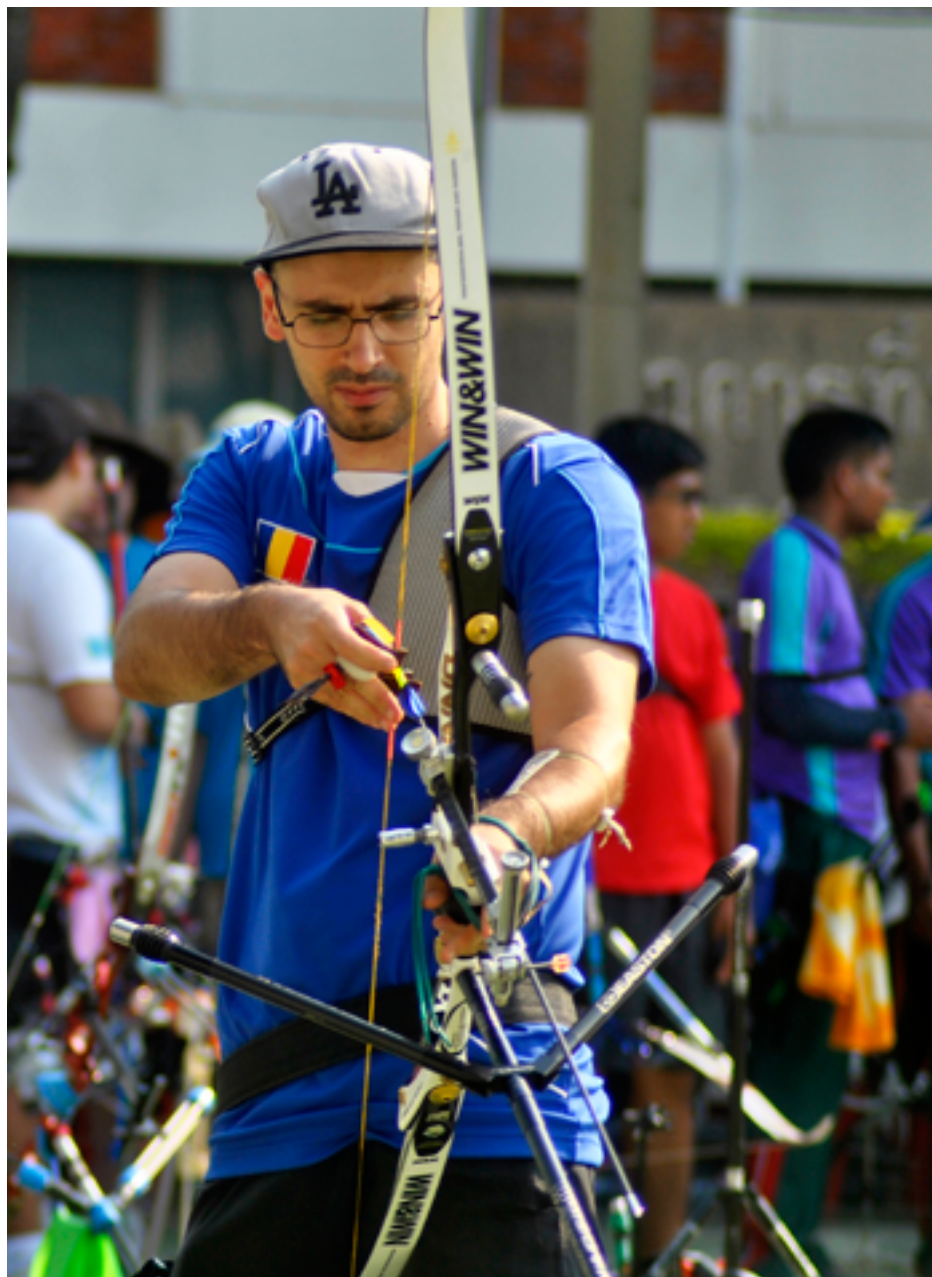
Thank you for stopping by on my website or my YouTube Channel.

After my extensive travels and through sheer grit in the online world, I have succeeded in upgrading my lifestyle to such a degree that now I do what I love and I'm able to create an online profit from my passions and my personal interests.

This ebook can be the start of your own lifestyle upgrade!

However, let me warn you from the start though, this is not a get-rich-quick scheme. I'm not promising you that by the time you've finished reading the book you can quit your day job, start travelling year round, and make a profit online following your own passion.

I'm not saying it's not possible. All I'm saying is that it will take time, dedication,



Being awesome and in full concentration during the 1st Asian Grand Prix 2013 which was held at Hua Mark Archery Field in Bangkok, Thailand. Bringing my national flag to such a big event, so far away from home, was one of my most proudest moments as an archer representing my own country.

and grit. It is best to respect the fact that Patience is a virtue!

I'm putting here in front of you a 10-step guide to upgrading your personal lifestyle with the stated goal of creating an online profit. You won't be able to make thousands of dollars in your first month, but you'll be able to start and grow an online project that could be the answer to creating a passive income or a recurring sustainable online profit.

Would you like that?

If yes, then you're in the right place and you've made the right decision to start reading my "10-Step Guide to an Upgraded Lifestyle."

I wrote this guidance in full honesty and full transparency.

Welcome to a journey that I know will set you on course for an upgraded lifestyle!

Dive in with confidence and total determination.

How to use this guide

This ebook is divided into 10 chapters, each dealing with a key area in your development towards an upgraded lifestyle.

I advise you to read each chapter carefully, but not as if you were reading the entertainment section of your local newspaper.

If you take yourself seriously, you will succeed. I can, at the very least, promise that.

The chapters are written in an easy, non-pretentious style, and all the concepts presented are supported with real examples from my own experience. Nothing you read here is made up or sugarcoated with outrageous examples (such as, “you’ll make a thousand dollars by the end of the first week”), nor any fancy words (many similar forms of guidance seem to quote Bruce Lee), and there will also be no empty promises.

Some chapters will end with a specific task (such as, write down your goals) and an encouragement to interact with our community on Facebook and YouTube.

It is highly advisable that you take action immediately!

I recommend that you should read one chapter at the beginning of the week and then try to implement it throughout the week. By following this system, in 10 weeks’ time you will have a clear picture of where you’re going and you will be able to start working on the details of upgrading your lifestyle. (I know this

might sound a bit too abstract, but as you reach and read through each chapter, you will see that the life applications are fairly easy.)

I will try to help you stay on track as much as I can.

Follow my YouTube Channel to get the inspiration you might need.

Subscribe to my [UpLife YouTube Channel](#)!

So, let me make this clear: You are not alone! There's a whole community of selfless people who have been where you are now but, through their utter determination, have succeeded, and would like to see you succeed too.

Some chapters provide links to further reading materials. If you're interested in the topics highlighted, click on the link ([in blue](#)) and read the articles at your own pace. The reason why I haven't included these extra articles in the ebook is because I wanted to keep it simple and of a manageable size. I do whole-



On the balcony of EmQuartier, a luxury shopping mall downtown Bangkok, where I was invited to do a restaurant review in 2016. One of the perks of being a travel writer is that businesses reach out to you and ask you to experience and review their services. In this case, I had a great lunch with my fiancée and a pleasant afternoon roaming the newly opened shopping mall.

heartedly recommend you to take the time to read these extra resources, but your success will not necessarily depend on doing so.

The most important thing is for you to:

* take action based on each chapter *

Now, let the upgrading of your lifestyle begin!

CHAPTER 1

Set Clear Goals

I've always known what I had wanted to be from a very young age. By the time I finished my high school studies in Arad, a small city in the west of Romania, I had a clear goal in mind: that of becoming a ninja. No, don't laugh, I'm not trying to be funny here.

I was literally obsessed with all things Japanese - especially martial arts – and I knew from the bottom of my heart that I wanted to be a ninja. For that reason, at the age of 17, I sat down at my desk and wrote down on a small piece of paper all my goals for the next five-to-six years.

I basically identified the three stages that I would need to pass in order to become a ninja and these became my short-term, medium-term, and long-term goals. To me, as a young adult, everything seemed possible.

All I had to do was just follow my plan.

If you think I'm pulling your leg right now, or that I'm trying to start this book on upgrading your lifestyle by making up some outrageous background story, then be warned: this is a true story!

So, my personal goals of becoming a ninja, as written down on that small piece of paper more than 20 years ago, were these:

Short-term goal: Find a master to train me.

Remember, this was in 1997, within a world where people communicated by

writing letters, sending messages by fax, and contacting each other on a fixed telephone landline. After some digging and with plenty of use and inspiration from a few martial arts magazines that were available at that time in Romania, I found a master in the capital city of Bucharest who was training martial arts students for semi-pro fights. I pledged myself to him in a letter, gave him my contact details, and waited for an answer.

Medium-term goal: To study the art of espionage.

Before I had even graduated from high school, I showed some great interest in joining the Romanian Secret Service Academy. Officers started recruiting prospective students early in Grade 12 and I was spotted as someone with high interest. Needless to say, I applied, I passed the initial tests, and was all set up to sit the entrance exam as soon as I graduated from high school.

Long-term goal: Go to Japan and become a ninja.

The ultimate goal of my training as a martial artist and a spy was to go to Japan and become a ninja. I always knew that I would not stay in my home country after graduating from university and the dream to go to Japan remained as strong as ever during my years as an undergraduate student. To me, in five or six years, I could be physically, mentally, and financially prepared to pack my things and move to Japan.

Of course, things didn't go as planned. After all, I realized that I had actually upheld an impossibly ridiculous goal and I didn't even have a driver's license



Selfie time with a ninja mannequin at the Ninja Reference Library (2013) within the Azuchi Momoyama Bunkamura, a theme park also known as Edo Wonderland in Ise. Ise is located in Japan's Mie Prefecture, a place that once included the historical region of Iga Province, where the ancient ninja were active between the 15th and 17th centuries.

when I had initially sat down at my desk and wrote down my goals. (If you want to find out exactly how things developed, watch my video of how I became a teacher.)

However, what really mattered to me was that I had a clear goal in my mind. If you ask me now whether I had succeeded in achieving that end goal (of becoming a ninja), then my answer would be simple: Not yet.

What does that mean?

It means that I still love Japan (and have travelled extensively in Japan!). I still want to be a ninja, but not the same kind of ninja I first imagined. (FYI, I now aim to become a “[language ninja](#)”!)

Bottom line: in order for you to achieve what you want, you'll have to take the time and write down your goals. Regardless of how unachievable they might seem at first, you have to write them down.

Visualizing, remembering, and working towards your goals on a daily basis will bring you closer and closer to your end goal.

Will it be difficult? Yes, of course. Nothing is easy! But this is where you create the path that you truly and deeply want to follow.

This is where you start upgrading your lifestyle.

Once you've written down your short-term, medium-term and long-term goals, share them with a trusted friend, with your family, with a community of like-minded people who, just like you, are on their own [journey to upgrade their lifestyle](#).

Let me start by sharing with you my current life goals:

- **Short-term goal:** To create a system where I can better share with the world

around me my expertise as a writer, archer, and traveller.

- **Medium-term goal:** To create an online language learning platform where language learners can have access to instructional videos, lessons, exercises, tests, and certification; and to create an online literacy program around the idea of reading books for children aloud in such a way that the characters in the book will literally come alive on the screen.

- **Long-term goal:** To win a medal in the archery event at the Kansai World Masters Games 2021 - Japan.

Now it's your turn!

Write down your own personal goals!

Do it NOW!

CHAPTER 2

Health Fitness Sports

There have been hundreds of books explaining the science behind the importance of health in having a strong body and an active mind. If you have time to read all the literature out there, you'll probably no doubt accept what has been acknowledged as 'the truth': You must take care of your health. But this is so basic and primarily instinctive that you don't need academic articles in scientific journals to be convinced. You just know it intuitively.

Whenever I talk and write about an upgraded lifestyle, regardless of whether it's mine or yours, one thing is very clear in my mind: You can never upgrade your lifestyle if you don't take care of your body. It's as simple as that. A weak body is more prone to illnesses and diseases which negatively impact your lifestyle.

In order for anyone to upgrade their life, they must lead a healthy and active lifestyle.

So, on that note, why do so many people still have unhealthy lifestyles when they fully well know the damaging effects of drugs, tobacco, and alcohol to name just a few health-debilitating vices and addictions?

The answer is very simple: Personal choice.

We are all sentient human beings who, for most of our adult lives, make our own decisions and suffer the consequences

in order to reap the perceived benefits.

Bottom line: If you want to be healthy, then choose to live a healthy lifestyle.

I've heard it from so many people that it's expensive to eat a healthy diet; that it's expensive to buy only organic food; that it's expensive to buy quality foodstuff. While all this is true and eating a healthy diet can be more expensive, the issue does not relate to money alone.

No-one is saying you should buy the choicest cuts but you can counter the negative influences in your health by not buying the more expensive and better food, but by getting rid of all the junk that you put in your body.

Let me give you just a few examples: Say "no" to soda and drink plain water instead. If you want a refreshing drink, squeeze your own lemon or orange in a glass, add two cubes of ice, and pour some fresh water over it. By doing this you will have just reduced from your system several bad sugars and have replaced them with a tasty and vitamin-full refreshing drink.

The examples can go on and on, but I think you've got the picture. You must choose to eat in a healthy way. Do that every day, in every possible manner and you're one step closer to an upgraded lifestyle. If you have problems coming up with a meal plan, [contact me](#) and I'll gladly extend my expert advice.

The path to a healthy upgraded lifestyle branches out in three areas which, although different in scope, they all unite as one during your journey of obtaining and maintaining a successful and healthy lifestyle.

The three paths that I follow on a daily and weekly basis are:

- 1) Eating healthy**
- 2) Toning up**
- 3) Staying active**

I've already touched on the first point. Remember: Choose to eat in a healthy

way.

If you want to both feel good about yourself and reduce the risk of some life-threatening diseases such as obesity and diabetes, then you must exercise at least one or two times a week.

You don't have to spend hours in a gym nor lift the heaviest weights on the dumbbell rack in order to tone up. What you have to do is put aside just 30 minutes of your time and exercise vigorously. It can be anywhere: at the gym, in the park, at your home, in your neighborhood, but you've got to move and be active on a regular, daily basis.

If you don't like lifting weights, then use your own body weight. You can do push-ups, pull-ups, sit-ups, triceps dips, plus a whole plethora of exercises which don't require you to have access to any weight machines at a gym. You can do these exercises on your own in your own front-room or on your bedroom floor.



With a group of like-minded people at my local gym in Bangkok in 2009. At that time I was frequenting a Bodypump class, which is a group barbell workout that follows the rhythms of high energy music for its toning up routine. I loved doing the squats with the weights of the weight lifting bar in the colours of the Romanian flag!

Go for sprints in the park, alternate push-ups with jumping jacks, do as many pull-ups as you can, followed by squats and sit-ups. The combinations are infinite.

If you haven't exercised in a long time, it won't be easy at first. But, in a few months' time, all the sweat and time dedicated to toning up will be worth it in the healthy body end result.

By eating healthy food and doing regular exercises to tone up your muscles, you will boost both your confidence and your health.

Why not dedicate at least one afternoon or evening a week to practicing a sport? You don't have to turn into a professional athlete, but the structure and routine of playing a sport will further more increase your dopamine levels and take you further up on the ladder of an upgraded lifestyle.

Joining a team or a club will also give you the chance to meet new people, to network, and to become part of a community of sport lovers.

So, who knows, you might even find a mentor who can help you with your struggles?!

If you live in Bangkok, then consult my (upcoming) book [Thailand Sports from A to Z](#) to find out where you can practice some of the least-known sports in Thailand, such as lacrosse, baseball, and sumo.

Choose to eat healthy food and schedule your week as such so that you spend time toning up and playing sports.

CHAPTER 3

Create an Online Profit

Part of the reason why you downloaded this ebook and probably why you found my blog in the first place, was because you're interested in creating an online profit. But, from the start, I have to make it very clear that I'm not promising any miracles here. I'm not promising that if you follow my "system" you'll get rich in no time; nor will you be able to quit your day job and live forever travelling the world as the much coveted life of a digital nomad.

On the contrary, I'm sorry to disappoint you here...

Creating a sustainable profit online and learning the tricks of the trade will obviously take some time, patience, and dedication.

What I can promise you is this: If you start a blog now, I can guide you through all the steps you need to undertake in order to successfully create a profit from your online presence.

Let me explain how.

With the advent of social media which cut down on long-form content creation (in return for shorter Facebook posts and tweets), with the proliferation of site aggregators (which take their information from multiple online sources to create "original" syndicated content), and with the many scams and get-rich-schemes out there that fool people into believing that making money online

has never ever been easier, then the need for real websites with valuable original content has never been greater these days.

The fact that people no longer start a blog but rather a Facebook page on which they recycle news and photos from elsewhere, should give you a boost of confidence that you'll be able to succeed. Fewer and fewer people are willing to spend the time to build a solid website (from all points of view, from layout, to content, to usability) and, as a direct result, more and more online and offline businesses are looking for valuable blogs where they can present their products to new audiences.

Let me give you an example from my own experience.

I started a travel lifestyle blog in 2009 with the intention of sharing my travels with the world. I had no clue that one day, 7 years later, this same website would become the source of passive income for me. However, what I can tell you is that I didn't give up when the traffic went down; when everyone else was ditching their website for other online fads; when the hours I put into writing articles and maintaining the blog did not equate at all into any financial profit.

Actually, for almost two years, my website cost me money, not to mention that the time spent working on it could have easily been translated into profit by tutoring an extra class in the evening or at weekends, in return for real, tangible cash.

But, I have to emphasize the point that I didn't give up – and as you can see from [my hero's journey](#), I started making enough money on my website to cover the operational costs by 2011 and I've been turning a consistent profit every year since.

What was my secret?

No secret at all!

I did not give up when everyone else did and I continued to write on topics that I loved and thus, could sustain my personal interest in pursuing it.

Today, the travel industry is a worldwide multi-billion dollar business and the competition out there is getting tougher. To up their game, travel companies have long realized that they need a good presence online, but a fancy company website won't do everything that the company needs to achieve anymore.

Any business needs real people with real blogs (like me!) to write about their services, to promote them, to link back to them, and to review their sites.

And guess what?

They're willing to pay fairly well for this service!

I can already hear you: How much? Will it be worth it?

The answer is simple. If you open a blog about something you are really passionate about, then all the profits that will come your way will be a bonus. You'll get paid for doing what you like. Simple as that.

So, to now answer your question: You can get anywhere between \$5US to \$250US for promoting a business or a service in your area of interest. To some people this can be viewed as being extremely little and others see it as amazingly profitable, but once the ball starts rolling, it never stops. It's a snowball effect that will bring more and more customers to your door while you still do what you enjoy best: write about topics you love *and* make a side profit from doing it.

I can already see the wheels spinning in your head and the next thing you're wondering is this: "But how do I find these customers who so willingly pay?"

This is actually quite easy: once your blog starts to become an authority in your chosen niche, be it travel, dog food, or handmade dolls, then the businesses themselves will contact you!

Actually, I am asked this question quite a lot, even from the genuine experts

covering online e-commerce who want to know how I go about approaching possible advertisers on my blog. I don't. They approach me.

OK. It's certainly true that I provide them with all the tools needed to assess if my blog is what they're looking for, from honest blog traffic analytics, to advertising and collaboration options, to the most simple and basic [contact details](#).



With my wife, Upashna, on our honeymoon in Greece in 2016. While we were on the ferry traveling to Aegina, an amazing island in the Saronic Gulf, an online marketing agency paid me \$250US (my highest commission so far) to advertise their travelling services. Bring it on!

However, since I've got nothing else to lose then, on the contrary I get free quality content for my website, I'm open to negotiations and usually I manage to strike a deal according to the client's budget.

Let me spell this out very clearly, once again:

I write my travel lifestyle blog because I'm passionate about travelling, healthy living and sports and, at the same time, people contact me and give me money to promote their businesses. Coupled with a few various other [methods of](#)

making money online – nothing secret, nothing complicated
– I have a recurring, almost passive, income every month.

My online “enterprise” brings in about \$700US a month.

This comes from just a few hours of work a week (don't forget I still have an 8-to-4 job each day). Not bad right? That's \$8,400US a year, which is more than (or almost equal to) the **minimum wages of many countries** around the world, including all countries in Southeast Asia (except Singapore and Brunei). As a matter of fact, what I now make on the sideline from my online projects matches exactly what my first salary as being a teacher in Thailand was, in 2002!

So what can you do to achieve this extra income yourself?

First of all, stop wasting time, write down your goals (see Chapter I in case you have made the huge mistake of skipping it!) and get down to work.

Here's a rough outline of your future profit-making online project:

- 1) Choose a niche (a topic) you're passionate about**
- 2) Start a blog**
- 3) Update your blog regularly with original, well-written and informative articles**
- 4) Build a strong social media presence**
- 5) Branch out **platform-wise****

Also, never forget this!

There's a whole community of passionate people who are already out there in the process of constantly upgrading their own lifestyles. Reach out to them for help, inspiration, and ideas.

CHAPTER 4

Invest in Yourself

The biggest mistake one can make as an athlete, businessperson, writer, etc. is to become complacent with his or her situation in life and believe that if things are going well now, they'll always be like this.

The truth of the matter is that life is like a rollercoaster and, at times, we find ourselves riding at high speed on the uphill only to find ourselves with heads upside-down diving hard and then reach a total stall and remain settled.

There's no doubt that our success in life will go up and down and we will both face challenges and encounter successes.

One thing is for sure: You can't stop growing. You have to continue investing in your online business, in your passion, in your ideas.

But there's nothing more valuable than investing in yourself!

Therefore, by “investing in yourself” I don't mean reading more self-help books and theorizing on what it means to become ‘better.’ No, I literally mean spending money out of your own pocket to learn a new skill, to brush up on a fading skill, to take yourself to the next level and become from an excellent amateur to a full-on prepared professional.

Once again, this all goes back to Chapter I and the short, medium, and long-term goals you will have already identified for yourself.

Think of it like this: Every time you're about to reach one of your goals, you should consider investing some money in training yourself for the success of your next goal.

For example, as I write this ebook for the re-launch of my website, I am about to reach my short-term goal: that of creating a system where I can better share my expertise as a writer, archer, and traveller. In the weeks before I achieved this goal ([the system is now up and running](#)), I underwent a huge learning curve in project management, web design, user experience, and video editing.

To do that, I looked for the best people in the industry who could help me and I learned from them. Lucky me, [Web Courses Bangkok](#) were able to provide some excellent training, which, I'll be honest, wasn't cheap, but it was definitely well worth every penny. Why? Because the skills I learned from the experts in that field will keep me going throughout my medium-term goal.



With Carl Heaton at Web Courses Bangkok headquarters on a late Friday evening in 2016. It was our first one-on-one session in which we solidified the strategy I was to follow for the re-launch of my website. Before we both went home, dead tired after a week of hard work (both of us in the teaching industry!), I took a Polaroid selfie and put it up on their world map, next to the headshots of other students who had trained at Carl's web design school.

It so happens that the web and graphic design school where I took one-on-one classes also has an agency which does all the things that I wanted done for my project. And if you do the maths, then calculating the time you spent and the money you invested, you might be better off to just outsource everything...

But then, believe me when I tell you this: At the first glitch in your next level of development, you'll be stuck with a problem you cannot solve yourself and from there to not quitting altogether, there will only be a few more hiccups.

So, invest in yourself wholeheartedly. Don't be stingy. After all, it's your future you're investing in.

Other examples of ways you can invest in yourself, other than taking classes, would be buying healthier food, upgrading your computer, getting new lenses for your camera, installing an air-conditioner unit in your workroom, upgrading your website to a better server, etc.

As you can see from these examples, by investing in yourself, you would literally upgrade your lifestyle which is the whole point of you reading this ebook.

You might ask this: "But where can I find the money to do this personal investment?"

How about establishing and following this rule: *The money that I make online, I will use to re-invest in myself.* This has been my Golden Rule ever since I'd made my first dollar online and I have never strayed away since then.

Remember: This is not one of those silly get-rich-quick schemes that will promise the impossible. No. As I mentioned before, let me underline this fact again: It will take some time to build a successful online business, and to upgrade your lifestyle. You won't be quitting your job today and become a successful entrepreneur tomorrow.

On the contrary.

You will keep your day job. You will make time to work on all

the areas you want to work on and, if you follow the advice I provide you in this 10-step guide to an upgraded lifestyle, you will have all the chances of becoming very successful.

But it will be a journey of one or two years before you can truly say you've achieved an upgraded lifestyle.

To go back to the importance of investing in yourself, let me share with you a personal spending habit of mine.

In the first year I made profit online, I used the money to pay for the operational costs of the website and I also upgraded my Wordpress theme (from a free one to a premium one). In the following years I invested in a better laptop, original software, and video equipment. Then I used better health programs, nutritional supplements, and better foods while all along I used my passion for archery and travels to fuel my blog with exciting content articles.

Look at your goals and identify the skills you'll need to achieve them. Then invest in these skills!

CHAPTER 5

Travel More

When people hear how much I travel, they almost immediately say: “Oh! You obviously have a well-paid job with lots of holidays.” Which is true. The job I have in Beijing pays fairly well in comparison to the standard of living in most parts of Asia and, yes, schools do have long summer holidays.

But this has got nothing to do with traveling more and more!

No-one said you should travel more aboard to a faraway country which requires a big financial sacrifice and more time off from work. No, the reality is far from that.

My experience as a world traveller is that you don't need an exotic location to experience the joys and benefits of travelling.

If you don't have the money to buy a round-trip ticket to Japan, then how about travelling locally in your own country of residence?

I was always amazed at how much more I used to travel in Thailand in comparison to most of the Thai people. I visited roughly 70% of all the provinces in Thailand and with very few exceptions, I did it on a very tight budget.

This is mainly because of my understanding of what “travel” really means. If you think travelling means booking three nights in a resort, eating your three meals at their restaurant, and roaming aimlessly around the walled-in compound of

the resort all day long, then we're not on the same page. I wouldn't do this even on a "family" trip. Actually, especially not on a family trip!

This is not travelling. This is consumerist tourism.

Traveling to me goes beyond money and comfort.

Travelling is an experience into life itself.

There are really very few things I can say to convince you of this without sounding too philosophical so, I'll just give you three very different examples. I am sure you'll be able to relate to at least one of them.

When I first moved to Bangkok during my second year in Thailand I was working in a Thai school and earning what was, and still is, the minimum wages for a foreign teacher. (The salary numbers added to roughly a bit more than my monthly online income today.)

At the same time, I was investing all my money in a Master's degree program in order to consolidate my career as a teacher. My career goals were very clear: to get the education and experience needed to move to a bilingual school and then move on to an international school (where the salaries increased exponentially).

So, as you can imagine, I was doing eight hours at work, three nights a week at the university, and half a day of tutoring on Saturdays just to meet the university fees. What free time I had was spent studying. My life was tough...

Wait. NO! My life wasn't tough at all. It was literally beautiful. I was doing a job that to me was very easy, I was studying in a field I had great interest in, I chose to make some extra money with tutoring and... found enough time to continue my aikido practice and also found time to travel.

(If you re-read carefully the three paragraphs above, you will clearly identify the first four steps in this guide to an upgraded lifestyle. I was doing this already in 2003 without really being conscious of it, but if you ever want to know "where's the proof" to all these steps, well, the proof is in these examples that I am now providing!)

Being interested in history and fascinated with Thailand's ancient ruins (two areas I'm still fond of even today, many, many years later), I decided to go on a overnight [trip to Ayutthaya](#), the ancient capital of Siam, now a modern city located 85 km north of Bangkok.

The cheapest way for me to get there was by public bus. This was a small, non-air conditioned inter-provincial bus that stopped at every station. Not the fastest way to reach my destination, but for a young man of 25 who was absorbing everything around him, the bus made perfect sense to me.

Well, we hadn't even got out of Bangkok city when the bus broke down in the middle of the road and the bus company had to send another one to replace it. Eventually, I reached Ayutthaya, found a small hostel, rented a bicycle and explored like a little kid the hundreds of ruins that are still standing in the old capital. At night I was invited to a "party" which took place in the middle of a rice field, with buffalos roaming around, and food cooked over an open fire.

I still remember the 30-minute ride to the "party" in the back of a pick-up truck huddled together with the other partygoers, mostly local rice farmers. The sight of the clear starry night sky, the sounds of the bugs, and the smell of burning wood was one of the most memorable experiences I had during my first years in Thailand.

That is travelling at it's best, in my opinion. Experiencing authentic culture, interacting with the locals, and exploring very freely a new place is what travelling really means to me.

I can already hear some of you finding excuses and pointing to the fact that I was already in an exotic location that offered cheap travelling opportunities, but read my next example of a totally different kind of travel anyone can experience, regardless of their location or financial situation.

After more than a decade in Thailand, I returned to my home country of Romania with my wife and was ashamed to admit that I had been so obsessed with Asia, that I had never taken the time and interest to even travel in my own native

country when I had lived there.

So, the two of us, both basically strangers in what was a familiar land for me, visited the nearby countryside. Again, we had one of the most memorable one-night trips to places within a 4-hour ride from my own home in Arad, a small city in the western part of Romania. We loved it so much that we were actually planning to bring friends from Thailand and have them experience an authentic Romanian countryside experience too.

How about finding pleasure in riding in a cart pulled by horses, roaming the streets of a village that almost lost its entire youth population (to migration to big cities or abroad), to skipping pebbles in a lake, exploring uninhabited cottages, being invited into villagers' homes and treated with fruit, watching an old grandma milk a cow, and visiting monasteries and castles that looked like sets from movies like *The Game of Thrones* or *Lord of the Rings*?

All of this had always been right there, in front of me, in my 24 years of living in Romania. Why did I ignore it for so long? Why didn't I just open my eyes and see that there's a world out there, in my immediate environment, which was well worth exploring?

I wish I had become the experienced world traveller I am today by starting small in my own community and then moving on to farther destinations. It seems to be that I had done just the exact opposite.

You don't have to wait until you have all the money necessary to travel abroad. There are so many destinations right there where you live. They are very much worth exploring.

Travel more. Start today!

As the years pass by, you're well underway to achieve your long-term career goal, you've even started your own passive income online business and now have the time and money to take those long trips you had always wanted to take...

So many things have changed, you're now more mature, you now see the world

through the eyes of a person who's had tough decisions to make in their life and now knows far better (or so you think.)

Stop right there! Money isn't and will never be the reason why you travel. If you travel just because you have the money, you'll just be another tourist snapping photos and ticking boxes: "Yeah, I've seen that, been there too; OK, let's go back to the hotel now." Please don't make that mistake.

Be a traveller and remain a traveller, regardless of your financial means!

After visiting Romania, I took my wife on a honeymoon in Europe and travelled through seven countries and I can't remember how many more cities. It was, again, the trip of a lifetime and especially my wife's dream. But also for me, who have always had my eyes on Asia, I missed all the wonderful things I could have visited, which are located only a few hours away from my childhood home.



Enjoying a sunny day in Monaco in 2016, on the footsteps of James Bond's adventures. The Monaco Cruise Port (or Port Hercules) was the first sight we visited. Checking out the multi-million dollar superyachts and the harbour where the Monaco Yacht Show takes place every year was a really cool experience.

We chose to travel in style but at grassroots level. We took the EuroRail from country to country, from city to city; we traveled by bus, by metro, and we really walked a lot. We stayed in decent accommodation, but didn't splash out on luxurious hotels.

We chose to spend our money on a historical guided tour of the Colosseum in Rome, on cruises on the River Seine in Paris, on lunch on the terrace of a restaurant with a view of Ancient Corinth in Greece, on a gondola ride in Venice, in Italy, and on a train ticket with an amazing view of the Austrian countryside.

We had the money to spend and we did spend it all, but not on plane tickets and 5-Star hotels.

We chose to spend more on things that created memories, that made us better world citizens, that enriched our experiences and eventually upgraded our lifestyles.

(And yes, we did see the famous da Vinci's Mona Lisa in Paris, but then we took five more hours to explore the *entire* Louvre Museum and walked out, both completely amazed at how small and insignificant our legacy will be if we don't aim to achieve something greater than life.)

These three travel stories are meant to show you how you can upgrade your lifestyle by being a lifelong traveller and how you don't need to let your financial situation stop you from seeing the world around you.

Share your travel experiences, your adventures – and misadventures! – on your blog!

CHAPTER 6

Learn a Foreign Language

It doesn't really matter how many languages I can speak. I'm not writing this guide to an upgraded lifestyle to brag about my linguistic prowess. The questions that we should all ask ourselves are these: "Why should I learn a foreign language and to what level?" Also: "What's the purpose of me learning a foreign language?"

You might say that just because I'm a teacher and I can speak a few foreign languages, I'm asking you too to learn one more language, if you want to upgrade your lifestyle. Actually, we're going to start this chapter with some definitions and touch a bit on the research that supports my claims.

First of all, the word "upgrade" has a technical connotation and, according to the Cambridge Dictionary, it means, "to improve the quality or usefulness of something [...]." In our case, that something is not a computer, a machine, or some software, but your own lifestyle.

Now, let's touch upon the "usefulness" of you learning a foreign language. Here are seven benefits of learning a foreign language, according to a 2013 article in The Telegraph, an established and respected UK newspaper: "Why Learn a Foreign Language. Benefits of Bilingualism" by Anne Merritt, a Canadian teacher, writer and editor with extensive teaching and travelling experience in Europe and Asia:

I) You become smarter

- 2) You build multitasking skills
- 3) You stave off Alzheimer's and dementia
- 4) Your memory improves
- 5) You become more perceptive
- 6) Your decision-making skills improve
- 7) You improve your English.

These already should be enough reasons to be convinced, but I'd like to add to this list an eighth benefit: The personal joy of being able to communicate with people from a different nationality and culture.

As a certified language and psychology teacher, I couldn't agree more with Anne Merritt's list as I know the research that validates her points. But beyond linguistics and science, the satisfaction that a person can receive from making themselves understood and being able to respond to a comment made by an interlocutor from a different cultural and geographical background than their own, is a truly priceless experience that no scientific paper can bring into the equation.

(Be warned: I'm not contradicting the statements of my previous chapter with regards to the importance to travel locally and not to travel abroad. I bet that if you go to the countryside or another region of your own country, you'll encounter a dialect or certain language peculiarities that you are not familiar with in your own native language. While taking that in, experiencing that in a real-life situation would also make you a language learner!)

One of the professors who had a huge influence on my future as a language learner and teacher was Sever Trifu, a Romanian professor who taught me the philology of the English language during my undergraduate studies in Romania.

According to him, there are three ways one can learn a foreign language: in a bottle, on site, and in bed (he was a cheeky fellow, I know!).

Learning a foreign language 'in a bottle' refers to the traditional classroom setting where the students use the language only during class time and with a limited number of language interactions with other fellow classmates and their teacher. Honestly, that's how I (together with a whole generation of students who grew



While strolling one late afternoon in Patuxai Park in Vientiane, the capital city of Laos, where I was doing a visa run in 2009, I had the chance of practicing my Thai with two Laotian Buddhist monks. Their knowledge of English was extremely limited, so we switched to Thai as the Thai and Lao languages are closely related (one can have a mutually intelligible and basic conversation).

up under and immediately after the Communist regime in Romania) learned English – and it worked.

‘On site’ language learning refers to the student being in the country where that language is spoken (while not necessarily being enrolled in an academic language learning program).

Also, Professor Trifu informed my class of about twenty eager students, in the late 1990s, that one can also learn a foreign language “while in bed.” He looked at us, smiled, let that sink in, and did not elaborate more. He was obviously referring to the situation where one can learn the language from their partner who’s fluent in a different native language.

These anecdotes struck a chord in me and the memory of my late professor will always stay with me. Actually, when I [moved to Thailand in 2002](#), I brought with

me the English-Romanian Dictionary my professor had published and which I had used during my entire undergraduate studies. The 600 Bible-like pages are now yellow with age and the cover is faded, but the lessons learned are still vivid in my mind.

But as time goes by, different ideas evolve and although my professor's three ways of learning a language are still valid, we now have far more possibilities at our disposal and a vast array of methods to pick up a foreign language. We've got distance learning, online lectures, Skype conferences, Google hangouts, instant video messaging, YouTube, and a plethora of app and websites to choose from.

If you really want to learn a foreign language, you literally have hundreds of opportunities and methods to choose from. All you need is the willingness to do so and a desire to move forward on your journey to an upgraded lifestyle.

Join our [Asian Languages and Cultures Society](#) to interact and meet new people. I'm sure you'll find help with the language you're learning, or wish to learn.

CHAPTER 7

Make Time For Yourself and Your Family

This guide to an upgraded lifestyle covers ten areas you should work on but not one area is more important than the other. These 10 steps should be looked upon as an integral part of your lifestyle. Although at first there must be a gradual procession from step 1 to step 10, by absolutely no means am I implying that if one step is achieved it can then be discarded.

No, that's not the case and that's why you can't expect to upgrade your lifestyle from one day to another. As I mentioned before, it will take up to two years to reach the level of lifestyle satisfaction that you're aiming to reach but, even then, the wheels keep on moving.

That's why it's called a "lifestyle" – because it lasts for a lifetime, but you've got to work on it for the rest of your life. (Even financially-stable retired people need to maintain their lifestyle if they want to live healthily and happily.)

Before you move on with your reading, take a moment and think about why do you want to upgrade your lifestyle? With this objective in mind, remember that it's very important not to lose yourself in the process.

Don't forget to make time for yourself and, if there's a

significant other next to you, or if there's a family around you, don't ignore, and don't abandon them.

I know this might be a dumb piece of advice to give, a step that you might want to just skip because you think you're already doing it, but are you really and truly?



2016 Date Night: Having dinner straight from work at a Korean restaurant in downtown Bangkok. Apart from eating great food (and not having to cook at home and then be on duty to wash the dirty dishes), these intentional date nights are a good way to remind ourselves why we chose to live together as husband and wife in the first place.

No-one is perfect, including self-help writers who seem to know everything about fixing everyone else's problems, except their own!

There's nothing to be ashamed of when I'm making this confession, right here on black and white, that this is an area I'm struggling most of all with. Of course I have challenges on a daily basis, trying to fulfill all the tasks that make the machinery of my upgraded lifestyle go smoothly, but it's so easy to forget that there is a tomorrow.

It's so easy to go to bed at night thinking that you could and should have done more during the day; that you shouldn't have allowed that deadline to pass; that.... When this happens to you, then you clearly need to stop and look around.

What do you see?

A room that hasn't been cleaned in two weeks? A spouse who is doing all the house chores all by him/herself? A child you haven't rocked on your knees for who knows how many days? A parent who is still waiting for your call? Other family members who walk on their tiptoes, so that they don't disturb you?

If this is what you see, then take this step seriously: Make time for yourself and your family.

After all, it's your life and you want to live it.

So, with all the tasks at hand, with all the ideas in your head, with all the projects you've started, where on Earth can you find more time? The thing is this: You really should not think this way!

It's not a matter of finding more time, of squeezing a bit of personal and family time here and there, in between two tasks.

It's all about arriving at a conscious decision to make time.

While I, myself, struggle with this issue almost daily, I am lucky to now have an understanding wife who knows how to pull me back into the "real" world once again. One brilliant way she did this was by starting, together with my sister-in-law, the tradition of "The Simandans Date Night," where at least once a month both me and my brother (or our wives for that matter) have to take their spouses out for a date. It can be anything from having an ice-cream, to watching a movie, or to dining at a fancy restaurant.

We then share a photo on Facebook and tag each other as a reminder to ourselves that this is what matters in life. The person right next to you! The person who will support you in all situations, in sickness and in health, in good days and bad days - they will always be there with loyalty and commitment.

Are you willing to make time for the people who really matter in your life? Will you take up on our challenge?

Post your Date Night photos to your social media and inspire other like-minded people and stay inspired.

Do you have what it takes to do it?

CHAPTER 8

Choose a Hobby

Going hand-in-hand with the concept of making time for yourself, also think of finding a hobby that you will engage in for the sheer pleasure of it. For example, collecting stamps or coins, or bank notes or postcards from different locations you have visited.

It's very important, to almost crucial, not to confuse your passion with your hobby. Your passion will (ideally) be connected to your short, medium, and long-term goals, to your online business, and be directly related to the topic of your blog.

A hobby will be just a leisure activity you engage in to unwind and for the sheer pleasure that it gives to you.

Yes, I know your passion also give you pleasure, but you will never be able to look at this in an off-handedly manner or just for the fun of it. No, you can't afford to do that. It's your future we're talking about!

With that understanding, then how can you achieve a healthy level of mental relaxation during the instances when you make time for yourself?

You could take deep meditation and yoga as a hobby, which are actually great recommendations if you're hard pressed at "finding" a hobby. They both require a mat and... that's it. Maybe a YouTube video to learn some of the basic moves and you're good to go.

Over the years I've had many hobbies (but only a few passions!) and these have

(The origami hobby eventually became a school club for children where I worked and we made 1,000 paper cranes - just like Sadako Sasaki - which we sent to the Peace Park in Hiroshima.)

It's true that all the hobbies that I picked up over the years (and then stopped being interested in, with no harm done!) were somehow related to my life history and interests, but that's only normal. As long as I looked at them as just hobbies, they never interfered with my serious work.

So what's my personal hobby these days?

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100	9.6	10	1.30	500	1	Krasnodar - St. Petersburg	
100	9.6	10	1.30	500	1	St. Petersburg - Moscow	
100	9.6	10	1.30	500	1	Moscow - Krasnodar	
100	9.6	10	1.30	500	1	Krasnodar - St. Petersburg	
100	9.6	10	1.30	500	1	St. Petersburg - Moscow	
100	9.6	10	1.30	500	1	Moscow - Krasnodar	
100	9.6	10	1.30	500	1	Krasnodar - St. Petersburg	
100	9.6	10	1.30	500	1	St. Petersburg - Moscow	
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100	9.6	10	1.30	500	1	Krasnodar - St. Petersburg	
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100	9.6	10	1.30	500	1	Moscow - Krasnodar	
100	9.6	10	1.30	500	1	Krasnodar - St. Petersburg	
100	9.6	10	1.30	500	1	St. Petersburg - Moscow	
100	9.6	10	1.30	500	1	Moscow - Krasnodar	
100	9.6	10	1.30	500	1	Krasnodar - St. Petersburg	
100	9.6	10	1.30	500	1	St. Petersburg - Moscow	
100	9.6	10	1.30	500	1	Moscow - Krasnodar	
100	9.6	10	1.30	500	1	Krasnodar - St. Petersburg	
100	9.6	10	1.30	500	1	St. Petersburg - Moscow	
100	9.6	10	1.30	500	1	Moscow - Krasnodar	
100	9.6	10	1.30	500	1	Krasnodar - St. Petersburg	
100	9.6	10	1.30	500			

Deciphering my grandfather's WWII flight record. On this page, the first flight entered was aboard an IAR 39, a Romanian-built reconnaissance aircraft and light bomber. The date is March 30, 1942. The flight took place at 3,000m altitude and lasted for 2 hours and 15 minutes. With one landing, the mission my grandfather had, was to do a sea reconnaissance flight from Odessa in the Ukraine to Sulina in Romania and back.

When I was in Romania on my last visit back home, I found it extremely relaxing and even exciting to read and follow my grandfather's flight book that he had kept during the Second World War. He flew reconnaissance flights, airmail flights, and personnel transport flights. It was so much fun to read his old-style handwriting and put the pieces of it all together, as if it was a fascinating puzzle I wanted to solve.

These days I'm finding great pleasure in learning how to live like a minimalist.

I have a new feeling that the less material things I gather, the more memories I will make.

Remember this: The sole purpose of your hobby should be only the need to unwind, to relax, to "detox" from the stress of building something for the future. Yes, this might sound antagonistic, but upgrading your lifestyle can become stressful and that is why we must find something to help us cope with this stress.

Spending time with your family and engaging in a hobby for recreation is the perfect answer to the problem.

CHAPTER 9

Read More

Reading has always been a great part of my life and for years and years I had the following reading habit: Whenever I was seated, I opened a book to read. And I mean everywhere: Commuting on the elevated train in Bangkok; during lunchtime; waiting in line to pay my bills; sitting on the toilet; and before going to bed.

Things haven't changed much and I pretty much do read whenever there's time to kill at hand but, these days, I do try to communicate more with the people around me which, obviously comes to the expense of me not having my nose in a book to the same length of time that I so regularly used to.

Reading is such a good habit. It's a statement that you'll probably agree with, without me having to quote this or that study, or to list these many benefits in order to convince you.

But in order to step up the game and upgrade your lifestyle, I'm suggesting the following pattern: Read both fiction and non-fiction; Read both serious books and pulp fiction; Read both short pieces of news and in-depth analysis.

Do this on a weekly basis and focus your reading on the areas you're most interested in!

So many ideas can spring from such a variety of reading sources that when the time comes to choose your next blog post topic, you won't have to think too much. On the contrary, you would have already formed a personal opinion of the subject and, if needed, you would already have established a rough idea of

what your sources will be and where to find them.

But it's very important not to limit yourself to one specific genre.

Expand your horizon and educate yourself.

I don't want to give you a recommend list of books to read because there are hundreds of such lists all over the internet. What I recommend doing is keeping a log of the books you have read, highlight or underline the things that strike you (only write on it if it's your own book of course!), and above all, share your love and habit of reading with the rest of the world.

Lend your books to friends, recommend authors to your family, post photos (and why not selfies?) of you reading, and always ask questions.

Create an intellectually active environment around you.

Why would you want to do that?

Well, first of all, I do believe that sharing is caring.

Secondly, on a more selfish note, by showing your interest in books and the topics that make you tick, you will find other like-minded people. You will make new friendships; you'll network with people who have similar interests; and you'll find value in your sharing; and, above all, find a community to belong to as well.

This is exactly the reason why we have a dedicated [YouTube Channel](#). Everyone who is following, did it because they all have a similar goal in life: That of upgrading their lifestyle. And they also believe (or at least acknowledge) in the validity of these 10 steps I propose, that one needs to undertake in order to achieve an upgraded lifestyle.

Sure, it's all debatable and anyone can come up with 10 more different ways to improve your station in life. However, we all know fully well that 99% of the people who sell these blueprints to success are actually piggybacking on a flashy



Enjoying a light read in a coffee shop while waiting for my group to start shooting in the recurve men event at the 1st Asian Archery Grand Prix – Bangkok 2013. It was my third big international event (after the Grand Prix in Bangkok and the World Cup in Shanghai the previous year), so I was obviously excited. But I couldn't just sit idly while waiting to shoot. Stephen King proved to be a good companion!

website and outrageous promises that rarely ever come true to those who follow the so-called guidance.

What I can personally promise you is this: Enter the habit of reading daily, read in your field of interest, share your passion, and sooner or later you will lift yourself up from where you are now in life and become a far better person.

Read more!

This is the only advice (and my only heartfelt request) in this entire book that I don't want to justify with examples and use argumentative writing techniques to convince you of its validity.

You'll have to blindly have faith in me when I tell you this: You will reap handsome benefits from building a culture of reading a broad range of information all around you.

CHAPTER 10

Rest

Your body, mind, and spirit all need a rest.

If you look at the previous chapters once again, you'll see that what I'm trying to do in this guide is to reassure you that, in order to achieve an upgraded lifestyle, you will need to create a balance, a symbiosis between your physical / mental health and your goal-driven projects.

Let's recap the three main categories:

1. Physical health (Chapter 2. Health Fitness Sports)

2. Mental health (Chapter 4. Invest in Yourself; Chapter 6. Learn a Foreign Language; Chapter 7. Make Time For Yourself and Your Family; Chapter 8. Choose a Hobby)

3. Goal-driven projects (Chapter 1. Set Clear Goals; Chapter 3. Create an Online Profit; Chapter 5. Travel More; Chapter 9. Read More)

Of course, depending on your own physical and mental constitution, some chapters might go into different categories while others can easily overlap, but that's normal and not a problem.

The problem here is that there's something very important that is missing.

There's a fourth category, a fourth element, that has to be brought into the picture and complement your physical

health, your mental health, and your day-to-day business routine.

The fourth part of the equation to an upgraded lifestyle is being Spiritual.

$$\begin{array}{c} \text{physical health} + \\ \text{mental health} \\ \text{business routine} \\ \text{spiritual health} \\ \hline \text{upgraded lifestyle} \end{array}$$

Consider these questions:

What is our role on Earth?

Where do we come from?

Where are we going to?

What's the meaning of life?

I know, they're tough questions and I won't even attempt to answer them. What I'm trying to do here by bringing them up is to (re)surface our human being's primordial need for finding some genuine spirituality.

We are all different individual human beings. We come from different countries, different continents, all with different values and beliefs. We have different religious practices which, in most cases, are a reflection of our personal spiritual beliefs.

But how to actually bring this spirituality into our life is rather tricky. Can we put aside a day when we unplug from all worldly things and try to focus our attention on the bigger picture, on the greater destination that we truly aim for?

I propose a day of rest.

This is a new concept for me too, one which I'm trying to implement in my life

and whether I will succeed or fail with implementing it, we'll have to see.

I've entered the [Magic Flight part of my hero's journey](#) and have a long way to go before reaching true self-actualization.

Consider this: Where will my life lead after financial success, after raising my own family, after becoming the best I can be? How will I be remembered when I die? Will I be remembered at all? By whom? Does it matter anyway?

These are tough questions we don't have time to think about in our daily life in the rat race. That is why, once a week, we need to put all aside and look deeply into ourselves and try to find the meaning and the reason for us being alive.

(Anyway, you worked so hard during the week, you do deserve at least one day off to rest!)

Lying on the grass in a park in Bangkok (2015). Doing nothing except enjoying the cleaner air, watching the birds fly over the surface of the lake, walking in the shade, and eating the nachos and salsa we brought from home. A day of rest.



Wrap up

If you've followed the advice I gave you at the beginning of the book, you're now on the tenth week into your journey to an upgraded lifestyle.

I wrote this book with utmost conviction into its ideas and validity of each point that I have presented. I hope you were able to start implementing them into your own life. I hope you've already seen an improvement in your lifestyle and now believe (if you had, indeed, had any previous doubts) that you can upgrade your lifestyle.

I did it. So many other people before you did it (regardless of whether or not they used these 10 steps or not). You did it.

You can still do it.

I know that we haven't met personally, but I hope that, in reading this guidance, you were able to relate to me as the writer and fellow traveller on our own life journeys. The photographs that supported each chapter are "living" proof of my own personal path to success and I'm certain you will find (if you haven't already) your own path too.

Continue working on yourself!



Posing in front of the Oriental Pearl Tower in Shanghai's Pudong district. Although I was in China to represent Romania in the 2012 World Archery Cup, I did have time after my competition to check out this amazingly vibrant megalopolis.

Where to go now?

Upgrading your lifestyle is an ongoing process. It's like [a hero's journey](#). It's cyclical. It starts again and again at higher and higher levels.

Is there an upgrade of your upgrade? I'm sure there is.

All you have to do is find the way to understand it, take action upon it, and reach your full potential. Very few of us will reach the top level on Maslow's hierarchy of needs and self-actualize, but I believe all humans who know themselves can reach a level of self-esteem, self-confidence, independence, and freedom.

You can reach this level too and all you'll have to do is continue upgrading your lifestyle. I myself, as the writer of this guide, am on a personal journey of discovery and continual improvement.

If you need help with your own personal journey, then I have an invitation for you.

If you want to reach your full potential, you are welcome to join our future **Upgrades Lifestyle System (ULS)**, a personalized life coaching, goal oriented, and down-to-earth program that will help you reach the top of Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Keep an eye on my YouTube Channel for the program launch!

Wishing you all the best in your journey of upgrading your own personal lifestyle.



A selfie in front of O-Torii, the “floating” gate to Itsukushima Shinto Shrine, on the island of Miyajima. At high tide, the torii gate is completely surrounded by water and it thus gives the impression that it’s floating. The trip to the island was a great one-day trip from Hiroshima where I visited the Peace Park and Peace Memorial Museum in 2012.

Cheers,

Mihnea

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