

Personal Mission Statement

By Chris Palmer

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I want to be remembered by my family, friends and colleagues as a person grounded in decency, simple goodness, infectious vitality and inspiring enthusiasm. Someone with a lasting and wonderful marriage, a great sense of humor and a strong work ethic. A man who made his role and responsibilities as a father one of his highest priorities. A person who committed himself to learning and education and who pursued his accomplishments with passion which left the world a better place.

I will live a principle-centered life, committed to personal improvement and devoted to my family and to my role as a husband and father. I will be a wise, dynamic and inspirational leader whether as a father, professor, filmmaker, environmentalist, author, speaker, humorist or board member.

I will not let circumstances, feelings, old habits or past conditioning determine my response to challenges. Rather, I will live according to the commitments and values I have articulated in this Personal Mission Statement, including continuous, constant and never-ending improvement in all the domains of my life, both personal and professional.

I will set and achieve ambitious goals. I will raise my productivity to extraordinarily high levels. I will find serenity while accomplishing great results.

I will continue learning that all true and lasting change occurs from the “inside out.” Instead of trying to change a situation or person, I will look to myself first for change. I will become the change I want to see in the world and improve myself before I try to improve others.

A separate document called *Goals for Chris Palmer* describes in detail my goals for implementing this Personal Mission Statement.

I have organized my Personal Mission Statement into seven roles (or responsibilities) described below. In my weekly planning, I will fill the upcoming week with activities and meetings which are derived directly and explicitly from these seven roles and from my *Goals for Chris Palmer* document.

First, my role as a person who recognizes the importance of renewal and self-development:

The first and most important role in my life is renewal and self-development, the vital process of enhancing my capacity to make me a more effective and fulfilled person. I have to take care of myself before I can take care of anybody or anything else. This role encompasses four dimensions: physical, social/emotional, mental and spiritual.

Physical: I will exemplify peak vitality and outstanding health. My 60-minute-plus daily exercise regimen (see *Dad's Exercise Book* for details) focuses on strength, endurance,

flexibility, balance and posture. I will feel vibrant and have the energy to take care of my family, friends and colleagues.

Social/Emotional: In both my work and personal life, I cannot do anything without other people. Relationships are not just vital, they are everything. I want to feel deeply connected to my family and friends, to make real and authentic contact with people, and to seek first to understand, then to be understood. I will be a source of laughter, fun, learning and inspiration to people, and I will be loyal to those absent.

I will build my relationships with other people, especially the people I am closest to, by being trustworthy and by being sincere. I will do this by small kindnesses and courtesies, keeping promises, making offers, clarifying and honoring expectations, and displaying integrity and loyalty. I will do these things unconditionally and sincerely, expecting nothing in return. I will observe and draw attention to what people are doing right, and I will praise with specificity.

When I have a problem with somebody, I will focus on how I am contributing to that problem, and what I am doing to help create it. Problems are, in fact, opportunities to build relationships with people faster than usual.

When I listen to people, I tend to interpret their words and feelings to fit my own opinions and experiences – as if I know the inner terrain of the person when, in fact, I don't. I will develop the skill and habit of empathy. I will learn to listen to people's unspoken concerns and learn to do this without making judgments or giving advice. I will place myself within the other person's frame of reference in order to experience his or her feelings as that person experiences them. I will deeply understand the other person's point of view. In fact, I will attempt to express the other person's point of view better than he or she can.

Mental: One of the secrets of a successful and fulfilling life is continuous learning. I am committed to continuous learning and improvement, and thus to continually opening up new possibilities for others and for me. I will find mentors and drink deeply from inspiring books. Because the best way to learn is to teach, I will constantly teach others what I am learning.

I will learn the distinction between "opinions" and "grounded assessments." When I offer opinions, I will make it clear they are just opinions and worth little. Grounded assessments, unlike opinions, generate new possibilities for people. They also lead to action (i.e., a request, an offer or a promise), they are confined to a specified domain, they can be supported by factual evidence, and they are based on clear and articulated standards.

Spiritual: I will find joy in designing the purpose of my life, including having close and loving relationships full of grace, unselfishness and forgiveness. I will create extraordinary results and fulfillment. I will learn, listen, love, laugh and leave a legacy. My life must be fulfilling and meaningful in order to make sense. I will align my daily activities with my most important goals and thereby honor all the people who have loved and helped me.

I will live by the timeless principles of human conduct that are fundamental to living a satisfying and joyful life, including fairness, integrity, honesty, service, courage, patience, self-discipline,

compassion, responsibility, generosity, hard work, creativity and tenacity. In this way, I will create a life of purpose, passion, joy, adventure and love.

Second, my role as a husband: Being a husband is one of the most important roles I have in my life. It is the foundation of our family's happiness. I will do everything I can to help Gail lead the fulfilling and vibrant life that she dreams for herself. I will be loving, affectionate, considerate, gentle, conscientious, devoted, reliable, supportive and fun. I will cherish the daily routines of the wonderful life we have together, and I will coddle and pamper her. I will be an extraordinary husband, best friend, and partner to Gail and a source of love, joy, fun, compassion and wisdom.

One of the legacies Gail and I will leave is a strong family whose members love and care for each other, respect each other, laugh together, have fun together, grow together, enjoy meaningful relationships with each other and who have a deep sense of shared vision around our family's essential meaning and purpose.

Third, my role as a father: I will be the best father possible to Kim, Tina and Jen, giving them constant love, encouragement and support, always being there for them, affirming them, catching them doing "something right." Nothing else I will ever do will have the impact on me that my children do. Kim, Tina and Jen have remade me, and I will always be profoundly grateful for that. I can thank them by being the best possible father to them.

I will be an inspiring example for them in everything that I do. I will help Kim, Tina and Jenny to become ever more responsible, optimistic, loving, resilient, capable, strong, successful and fulfilled.

I will continue keeping a daily journal to celebrate our family life and keep a record of what we are doing. I will also continue to write the girls nightly letters when I travel. I will do fun and joyful things with the girls, both at the micro level (i.e., moments) and at the macro level (e.g., trips, adventures and projects). I will continue to give the girls great memories that they will treasure long after I am gone.

As a family, we will continue to have virtual family meetings (less formal now than when all the girls lived at home) – usually in the form of relaxed conversations on the phone or by e-mail. I will nurture family rituals that bring us closer together, and I will encourage the girls to continue to take self-defense courses. I will also continue to encourage them to read great books, especially biographies, and encourage them to write.

I will be light, playful, accepting, trusting, attentive, respectful and considerate. I will especially listen actively to their real concerns and help them attain what they need. I will encourage them to solve their own problems and accomplish their goals. I will help them to achieve great things and to lead loving and ennobling lives.

And I will continue to welcome Sujay, an extraordinarily decent and wonderful person, into our family as warmly as I would my own son.

Fourth, my role as a son, brother and friend: I will honor the memory of my parents. I will stay in close touch with my brothers Tim and Jon. I will also stay in close touch with my relatives, neighbors and colleagues, and nurture my large network of friends and colleagues.

Fifth, my role as a professor, film producer, director of the Center for Environmental Filmmaking, President of the MacGillivray Freeman Films Educational Foundation, CEO of VideoTakes, author, speaker, board member, and other professional responsibilities: A major part of my life is my work as a professor and filmmaker at American University. My goal is to be a wonderfully inspirational professor, always available to my students, and constantly encouraging, supporting and challenging them. I intend to provide my students with a life-changing experience. I want to be renowned for my exceptional teaching skills and for getting my students actively engaged in their own learning.

By working closely with my colleagues, I will help make the Center for Environmental Filmmaking into a powerhouse of national and international influence on films relating to conservation. I will continue to establish trusting relationships with all my colleagues and help them achieve their goals. I will find ways to express my appreciation and gratitude to them.

I will accomplish my goals at the Center by running a “virtual corporation” with a minimum of bureaucracy and red tape, by making judicious use of the expertise of faculty and staff at SOC, and by operating in a mood of entrepreneurial hustle, passionate enthusiasm and high productivity.

I will also serve to the best of my ability as President of the MacGillivray Freeman Films Educational Foundation, CEO of VideoTakes, Inc., author of a book on wildlife filmmaking, presenter and keynote speaker, and board member of many nonprofits. See the separate document *Goals for Chris Palmer* for more details.

Sixth, my role as a person who values the miracle of humor: I will honor and embrace humor as a major part of my life. It has a power and exhilaration which can accomplish extraordinary things, including bringing people closer together, teaching me to laugh at myself, activating the immune system, healing the mind and the body, putting breakdowns and challenges into perspective, and deflating tense situations. Laughter is an amazing and wonderful phenomenon. I will deepen my understanding of the value of humor and, more generally, the value of perspective. I will become a more competent observer of the humor in the mundane and routine, and I will use more humor in my journal and in my letters.

Seventh, my role as a “role model” for dealing competently, gracefully and patiently with old age and death: I will become immersed in reinterpreting what it means for someone to “retire” so it becomes an incredibly active and productive part of my later life. I want to live my life in crescendo and make meaningful, vigorous contributions to society in my old age. I will grow older with grace, dignity and joy, and I will plan for my death so it is a fulfilling and positive experience.

I will lead a balanced, exuberant and honorable life so that when I die, I will enjoy the profound satisfaction of having no regrets of any kind. I will leave a legacy that will benefit my daughters and their children and grandchildren, as well as many others.

I look forward to getting older as an incredibly challenging phase of my life. I will be a role model for others and have an amazingly productive and fun old age. My aim is to die with my dreams fulfilled, leaving behind an identity and reputation I am proud of, and knowing that I didn't, through timidity, apathy, complacency or lack of imagination, let an opportunity to excel and contribute pass me by.

I will study death and dying and deepen my understanding of it. I realize that death is my constant companion — as it is for us all. I will let this awareness guide me to make the best use of my time and live life to the fullest every moment.