

Control the Controllables

An Interview with Greg Harden

EDITORS' NOTE *Greg Harden is a life coach, motivational speaker and executive consultant who is best known for his work with seven-time Super Bowl champion quarterback Tom Brady, Heisman Trophy winner and Super Bowl MVP Desmond Howard, and 23-time Olympic gold medalist Michael Phelps. Harden began work as a student-athlete counselor in 1986 when Michigan legendary football coach, Bo Schembechler, brought him in after hearing of the work Harden was doing in the local community helping people deal with the challenges of everyday life and work as a clinical therapist. He meets with hundreds of athletes every year including some of the greatest athletes and coaches of all time in their respective sports, like Jalen Rose, Olympians Emily Brunemann, and Jeff Porter, to name a few. Besides sports, Harden has provided performance coaching to corporate executives and community leaders. He has trained hundreds of managers and administrators on managing troubled employees. Harden is the author of Stay Sane in an Insane World which was an instant New York Times Bestseller.*



Greg Harden

I ended up helping some high-performance individuals reach their full potential. Then Athletics called me. I had already pushed people to do self-evaluation and self-assessment and increase their self-awareness. I was training people to be self-motivated, to pursue self-mastery. So, it segued nicely into people asking if I worked with individuals and with companies. The passion kept growing and growing and I would help people have so many great success stories not only within athletics, but outside as well.

What interested you in writing your new book, *Stay Sane in an Insane World*, and what are the key messages you wanted to convey in the book?

Many people had been challenging me for years to write a book. When our community was assaulted by a pandemic and people were struggling to find out what kind of community we were going to have, I felt that was the perfect time to sit and fight through the challenges of writing over and over and over again, and getting the stories I thought were pivotal to push people to self-discovery and self-actualization.

What do you feel are the keys to a person living their best life?

It is important for people to understand one of the most effective ways to become the best version of you is to deliberately and intentionally become the world's greatest expert on one subject: yourself. A key piece to that puzzle is to train people to stop being afraid of being afraid, and also to get people in the habit of practicing, training, and rehearsing giving 100 percent 100 percent of the time at everything they do.

You have a framed phrase on your desk that says, "Control the controllables." What does this phrase mean to you?

It means it's really important people capture – with clarity – that no one has control over your mind but you, and we cannot allow others to determine how we feel about who we are and who we are going to become. It also means to stop trying to control other people and other aspects of work and family, and focus like a laser beam on identifying and committing to changing only the things you can, and not being confused into trying to change the things you can't.

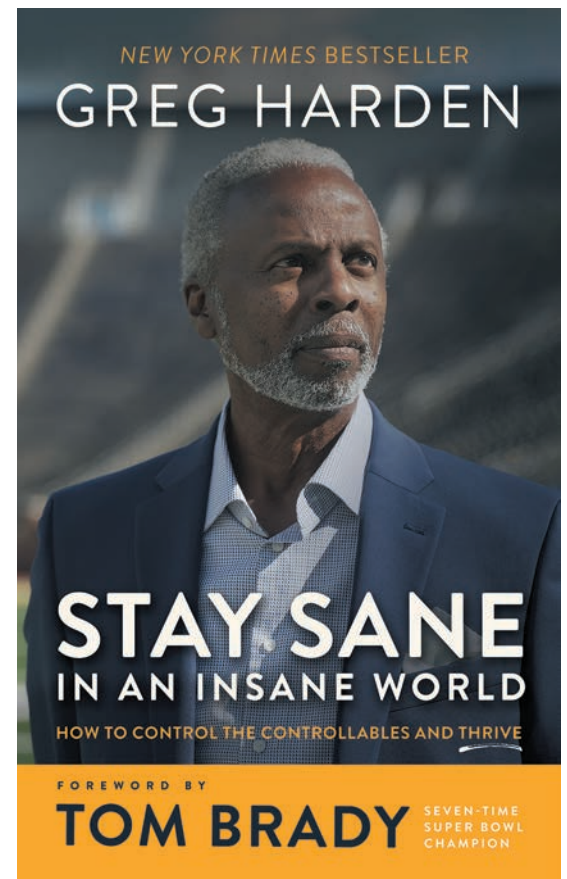
Will you discuss your career journey?

It has been an exciting journey. I thought I would be in radio-television-film and ended up having a mentor who convinced me that helping people and healing people was a far greater quest. So, he challenged me to go beyond just the idea of being a pseudo-psychologist in social work, and to create game-changing programs to help people develop themselves and survive any circumstances they may face.

I had a full-time job as a clinical therapist at a hospital and from there segued into independent contracting and doing personal development training. One of my clients was the University of Michigan football program, which transitioned into a full-time assignment over a couple of decades. But I never stopped running my own full-time business as well.

Where did your passion for being a life coach and executive consultant develop?

Contrary to popular belief, I was doing personal development training for the College of Engineering and the Medical School. That led to training managers to be better coaches, and coaches to be better managers. Ultimately,



Did you always know that you had an entrepreneurial spirit and desire to build your own business?

Absolutely, positively, categorically and beyond a shadow of a doubt. The only thing I believed about job-security was I'd only be safe if I was the one writing the check. I may not be able to pay me, but I'll never let me go.

What does success mean to you?

Success is being able to achieve personal goals, and that goes beyond making money or being famous or being influential. It means being satisfied about how my life is going. Having a sense of purpose and people around you who love you and trust you. Success is feeling that you can help shape the lives of not only the people you care about, but anyone who comes into your path.

What do you feel are the keys to effective leadership?

Being able to lead with hands in your pocket. Being able to empower people to do their jobs and trusting them to do their jobs. If you don't trust them to execute, why did you hire them? You must trust them, train them, and liberate them to solve problems. Being solution-focused is the name of the game.

What advice do you offer to young people beginning their careers?

I want young people to understand that if I'm interviewing you, I'm trying to see if you're a good fit for the organization. At the same time, when you're applying for a job, you have to have the same mentality as the people hiring you – you need to understand if it's a good fit for you, too. You need to ask questions and have done your homework so the job and role in the company benefits everyone, not just one side or the other. ●