

Servant Leadership

An Interview with Tony Robbins

EDITORS' NOTE Tony Robbins is an entrepreneur, #1 New York Times best-selling author, philanthropist, and the nation's #1 life and business strategist. He has empowered more than 50 million people from 100 countries around the world through his audio programs, educational videos, and live seminars. For more than four and a half decades, millions of people have enjoyed the warmth, humor, and transformational power of his business



Tony Robbins

and personal development events. Robbins is the author of six international bestsellers, including the 2014 New York Times #1 financial bestseller, MONEY: Master the Game, and UNSHAKEABLE: Your Financial Freedom Playbook (2017). His most recent book, LIFE FORCE: How New Breakthroughs in Precision Medicine Can Transform the Quality of Your Life and Those You Love, was released in February 2022. Robbins is involved in more than 100 privately held businesses with combined sales exceeding \$7 billion a year. He has been honored by Accenture as one of the "Top 50 Business Intellectuals in the World," by Harvard Business Press as one of the "Top 200 Business Gurus," and by American Express as one of the "Top Six Business Leaders in the World." Fortune magazine's cover article named him the "CEO Whisperer," and he has been named in the Top 50 of Worth Magazine's 100 most powerful people in global finance for three consecutive years. He has worked with four U.S. presidents, top entertainers – from Aerosmith to Green Day, Usher and Pitbull, and athletes and sports teams including tennis great Serena Williams, UFC champion Conor McGregor, and the NBA's Golden State Warriors. Robbins is a leading philanthropist and through his 1 Billion Meals Challenge in partnership with Feeding America, he has provided over 850 million meals in the last 7 years and he is ahead of schedule to provide 1 billion meals by 2025. Through the Tony Robbins Foundation, he has awarded over 2,000 grants and other resources to health and human services organizations, implemented a life-changing curriculum in 1,700+ correctional facilities, and gathered thousands of young leaders from around the world with its youth programs.

Will you discuss your personal journey and how it impacted your career and path in life?

I grew up in a tough environment. I grew up poor in southern California, sometimes without enough food to eat. Many times, we were too broke to buy food or clothes. There was lots of love in my family, and my mom was wonderful in so many ways, but she struggled with addictions to alcohol and prescription drugs. I also had a series of four fathers growing up.

A turning point in my life that helped shape me to this day happened on Thanksgiving when I was 11. A neighbor who knew we were struggling knocked at the front door holding bags filled with food for a big Thanksgiving dinner. My father at the time was embarrassed to get the help our family needed at this moment. I was happy just to have food. I resolved right then and there to become successful enough so that I could help others the way that my neighbor helped me and my family.

Another pivotal point in my journey happened when I was 17. After leaving home, I started working as a part-time janitor earning a mere \$40 a week. I used most of what I made in a week to make the best investment in myself that I have ever made. For \$35, I attended a three-hour seminar by Jim Rohn, a personal development coach who soon became my mentor. I landed a job with Jim which provided me with a foundation that led me to my professional calling and what helps shape who I am to this day.

Jim got me to start focusing on the few who *do* in life, not just the many who *talk*. I began to appreciate the value of role models, those special people who can help you identify a proven approach instead of expending all your energy in trial and error. What Jim taught me was this: for things to get better, you need to get better. For things to change, you have to change. And if you want to succeed at anything – whether it's building a hugely profitable business, constructing a stormproof investment portfolio, or creating a healthy lifestyle that fills you with boundless energy – you need to study people who have already achieved the result you're after. In other words, success



Tony Robbins leads numerous events each year

leaves clues. If a person has sustained success in any long-term ambition – whether it was losing weight, growing a business, sustaining an extraordinary relationship – then luck has nothing to do with it. They're doing something different than you are. So you need to understand exactly what they're doing differently, and precisely how they've mastered the skills you'll need to replicate their success.

During the past four and a half decades of working with people from all walks of life and cultures around the world, I have repeatedly observed a single core trait that the most successful achievers share – whether they are successful in business or politics or finance or sports – a hunger that usually comes from pain they have experienced in their life fueling a passion that reaches beyond themselves.

When did you know that coaching others was your passion and what has made the work so special for you?

When I got started, the whole notion of “life coaching” did not exist. For as long as I can remember, I hated to see others suffer. That's why I've spent more than four and a half decades of my life working to help millions of people to uncover the most effective strategies to get from where they are to where they truly want to be. I'm obsessed with helping people lift themselves up from pain to power.

What was the spark that lit your entrepreneurial spirit and desire to build businesses?

I actually didn't start out looking to be in business. My goal has always been impact, but at a certain point I realized that my words would die on my lips if I didn't create a system to scale. I had to build the muscle of entrepreneurship, and it was built also by modeling some of the people I'm privileged to call friends – Marc Benioff, Peter Guber and Richard Branson.



Over time, I also got involved in other areas of business, and now am involved in more than 100 privately held businesses with combined sales exceeding \$7 billion a year. They range from hospitality to healthcare, pro sports to eSports, private equity to wealth management, asteroid mining to creating 3D printed prosthetics and improving the safety and sustainability of our food supply.

As my business and personal networks have grown over the past four and a half decades, I have continually gained access to new ideas, opportunities, and relationships which leads me to new entrepreneurial opportunities. I am always asking, “How can I help?” When you do that continually, it builds a relationship because you're not asking

for things, you're giving. It also exposes you to new ideas and opportunities.

Do you feel that entrepreneurship can be taught or is it an ability and skill that a person is born with?

Entrepreneurs aren't always born that way. Some develop an entrepreneurial mind after experiencing setbacks or committing to learning about themselves and the changes they need to make to unlock extraordinary lives. The key characteristic of any entrepreneur is the ability to handle risk. The best entrepreneurs on the planet tap into asymmetric risk-reward – meaning they look to limit the downside and maximize the upside.

Take Richard Branson, for example. When he was first starting out, launching his airline company, Virgin Atlantic, in 1984, there was a huge amount of risk to get started. Trying to take on an established company like British Airways was no small endeavor. Purchasing a fleet of Boeing jets, which are unbelievably expensive, there's huge risk in that business. Everybody knows that Richard risks his life going in balloons, going in boats – but when it comes to business, his whole thing is, “Where is the downside? How are we protecting against the downside?”

Richard negotiated a deal with Boeing to make sure that he could send the planes back and wouldn't be liable if Virgin went under. This mindset is how people become billionaires. They don't fall into the trap of taking giant risks and hoping they are going to win. They find where there is the least amount of risk with the most upside – and do that again and again.

You are known as a leading entrepreneur, life and business strategist, best-selling author, and philanthropist. How do all these areas interconnect for you and how do you successfully balance them all at such a high level on a global scale?

It all starts with my decisions on what to focus on and what I am going to do about it.

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Those decisions are always rooted in my core belief system: “How can I best serve people and the moment.”

At the moment, one focus for me is improving healthcare, and more specifically, transforming our current system of post-illness sick care into pre-illness, preventative longevity care utilizing the amazing advancements happening in precision and regenerative medicine. This is a very good example of how focus leads to balanced interconnectivity across multiple areas like personal, business and philanthropic.

A few years back and over my lifetime, I went on my own personal health journey after being confronted with a number of health-related challenges, including a serious snowboarding accident where a doctor told me that “Life as you know it is over.” I thought otherwise and sought out the best second opinions I could find. Today, at 62, I am stronger than before I got injured through the power of precision and regenerative medicine and maintaining the right mindset. My own experience taught me that health truly is wealth. There is an old saying, “A person who has health has a million dreams, a person without it has one.”

Through my own journey, and my access to some of the best doctors and researchers in the world making advancements in precision and regenerative medicine, I became passionate about sharing what I had learned with others and finding ways to give more people access to the life-changing diagnostics, medical insights and treatments someone like me can access.

From this, I interviewed 150 of the leading scientific, medical and wellness experts and began writing *Life Force*, which became a #1 *New York Times* bestseller the week it launched.

From the *Life Force* work, I became exposed and involved with a number of cutting-edge healthcare businesses, including Fountain

Life, and important research projects in areas such as cancer, heart disease, and Alzheimer’s.

I then supported the initial goal of improving people’s lives and transforming existing healthcare by dedicating 100 percent of profits from *Life Force* to charity. Book sales will provide Feeding America, the largest food bank network in the United States, the ability to provide 20 million meals to those who are food insecure and may lack a healthy diet. The rest of the book’s profits are going to support scientific research combating cancer, heart disease, Alzheimer’s, and aging.

What are the primary keys to effective leadership?

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It’s important to note that anyone can be a leader; some people may be born with it, but it’s really a muscle that you build over and over by overcoming adversity and solving problems.

What is leadership? What makes a great leader? Often the “leaders” we see on TV or in the media today are figureheads that do what’s popular, but not what’s right.

Leadership is the ability to create immediate impact and compel lasting, positive change in others. It’s understanding what motivates people and how to harness the power of influence in yourself and others to achieve a greater vision for mankind at every level.

Ultimately, a leader is a master of their own psychology, because the first person you need to influence is you. Leaders master the art of influence within themselves and with others so that they can act as a force for good and serve something that’s larger than themselves – creating permanent and lasting change around them.

Whether it’s someone who’s committed themselves at work, in their family, or in their community — I admire anyone who brings out the greatness that lies within each human being and enables individuals to put that greatness into practice consistently. Leaders inspire themselves and others to do, be, give and become more than they ever thought possible.

Anyone who faces challenges and not only overcomes them, but sets a new standard and steps up to create the future they envisioned – this is someone I am inspired by.

How would you describe your personal management style?

First, I think it’s important to distinguish between a manager and a leader. Managers manage outcomes; leaders drive change and transformation. They keep their eye on the outcome and adapt their style to what best serves the purpose.

Whether I'm working with someone one-on-one, or with an organization, my goal is always to serve. I am a servant leader who also situationally adapts my leadership style based on the moment and what best serves a given situation. You may have a dominant leadership style, but the best leaders I have found tap into other styles when it better fits a situation.

You talk about doing well and also doing good. How do true leaders balance achieving financial results and a strong bottom line while also making a difference and serving as a force for good in society?

Everyone can do well and also do good, and I don't think those two sentiments should be separated. I've always believed that you don't get beyond scarcity; you start there. If you won't give a dime out of a dollar, you certainly aren't going to give \$100,000 out of \$1 million.

In the case of both leaders and businesses, they are charged with leading, and the only way to become wealthy, and stay wealthy, is to find a way to do more for others than anyone else is in an area that people really value. Bottom line: leaders and businesses will prosper if they become more valuable. Do more. Give more. Be more. Serve communities more.

Simply, transactionally pulling riches and what you want from those you engage personally and for business purposes will yield far less benefit longer-term.

By listening, serving, and giving to the needs and priorities of the communities you engage, the communities more often than not will engage alongside you and multiply your efforts to do things like helping feed the hungry, educating the young and improving the health of our planet. Those communities will also remain loyal to you for doing the right thing for the community. You did good and the community has a vested interest in helping you make sure that you and your business do well.

You have written more than a half-dozen best-selling books over your career. What interests you most about book writing and will you describe how you approach developing and writing a best-selling book?

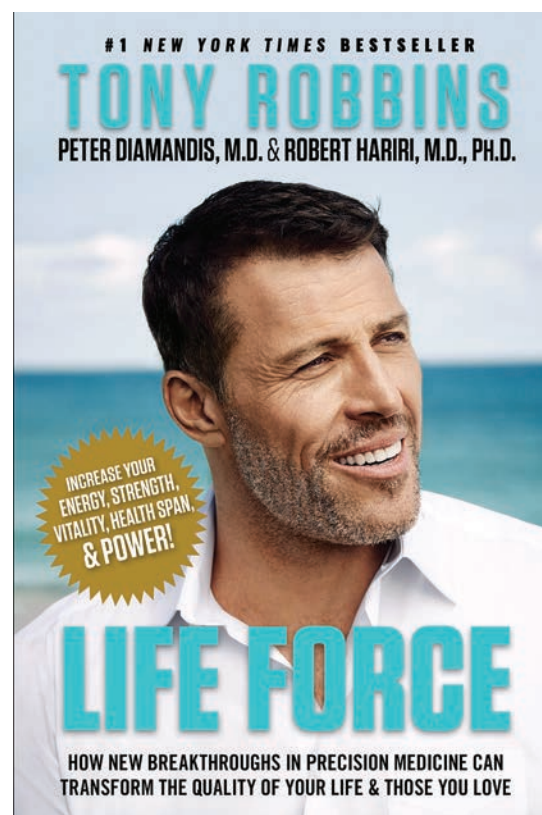
Well I'll tell you, the process of writing is not something I enjoy. It is a lot of work and many long hours, often late into the night and sometimes into the early morning hours. Ironically, I was often working on the sleep chapter in my latest book, *Life Force*, at three in the morning. That said, I chose to write books time and time again because of my passion to share important knowledge that I believe everyone should have access to so they can live the lives they want. I use books because it allows me to communicate complex topics in a proven and universally used way to gather large amounts of new knowledge no matter where in the world a person may live.

I'm a spoken communicator by nature, but I've always loved books. I didn't have any role models growing up, so I would escape into books. I would read biographies, or books about overcoming extreme adversity like Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning*.

Eventually, I took a speed-reading course and set myself a goal of reading one book a day and while I did not reach that lofty target, it did inspire me to read more than 700 books in seven years.

My whole life I have been obsessed with looking at how can you help people improve their lives. I have always focused on things that really matter to people like their body, emotions, relationships, finances, career, and the spiritual side of life.

I wrote my first book, *Unlimited Power: The New Science of Personal Achievement*, in 1986, more than 35 years ago. However, one constant is always present. I always seek out the brightest minds in an area I am writing about during the research process. For the #1 *New York Times* bestseller, *Money: Master of the Game*, I wrote after the 2008 financial crisis that devastated



Tony Robbins' latest book cover

so many people's lives, I talked with 50 of the smartest minds in investing, including Warren Buffett, Ray Dalio, and Paul Tudor Jones. I took in what they graciously shared and worked to make it simple and actionable for everyday people so they could take more control of their finances, and as a result their lives. For my latest #1 *New York Times* bestseller, *Life Force: How New Breakthroughs in Precision Medicine Can Transform the Quality of Your Life & Those You Love*, with co-authors Drs. Peter Diamandis and Robert Hariri, I spoke with and relied on the expertise of 150 of the world's leading scientific, medical and wellness experts. My new book taps into those minds to share how people can become the CEO of their own health and to remind them that the goal is not to be the richest person in the graveyard. Too often people forget that their health is their true wealth.

What was your personal inspiration for writing, *Life Force*, and what are the primary messages you want readers to get from the book?

I have long been a biohacker and studying and teaching health for decades, but I became increasingly focused on it because I had an injury that should have ended my career. I got injured in the snowboarding accident I touched on earlier. I thought I broke my neck when I woke up, but I had torn my rotator cuff, and on a 0 out of 10 scale, I was in a 9.9 level of pain. Like anyone, I went to my doctors and they said: surgery, surgery, surgery. They said I may have limited mobility of my arm and would be in recovery for four to six months. The last doctor had the grimest news for me: he said life as I knew it was over because I also had extreme spinal stenosis. No more running, no more jumping. I am blessed enough to work with some of the greatest athletes in the world, so I started calling around to the smartest people I know in medical research and asked them about regenerative medicine therapies like placental and umbilical cord derived stem cells as a treatment option used by some elite athletes after injury. Eventually, after doing my research, I went to a recommended location in Panama and underwent three days of non-surgical stem cell treatment. I was tired the first day, a short cytokine response the second day which I expected, and after waking up the third day I had no pain in my shoulder and none in my spine for the first time in 14 years. MRIs confirmed the healing. This precision and regenerative health journey led me to not only my own personal discovery, but an obsession to learn more and share what is happening in precision and regenerative medicine with others. That is how *Life Force* was born.

Over three years, I interacted with some of the world's leading scientific and medical experts who showed me that biotechnology is remaking sick care into a totally new healthcare model: a future-looking, proactive, personalized, precision medicine one.

I began to ask why the rest of the world is not knowledgeable or does not have access to new and amazing breakthroughs in health technology and medicine that can:

- help them heal
- identify disease before it takes root
- maximize their energy and strength to prevent disease
- extend health span and longevity

There is an old saying, 'What you don't know can't hurt you?' Nothing could be further from the truth. When it comes to your health, ignorance isn't bliss – because what you don't know can kill you!

People need to get educated, learn what pre-disease diagnostics and therapies are out there now, and do the work to become the CEO of their own health.

You are deeply engaged in philanthropic work. Will you discuss your passion for philanthropy and how you decide where to focus your efforts?

Giving back is part of my DNA and the way I lead. Of course, my passion for giving back was

initially fueled by my early experiences, including as I have noted the time when a neighbor gave our struggling family food on Thanksgiving. The idea that strangers cared about my family just completely changed me and made me more self-aware, selfless, and dedicated to helping care for others less fortunate.

I started in my teens by asking a local church for the names of two needy families. Just before Thanksgiving, I personally went out and delivered baskets of food to both households, each with a simple note in English and Spanish. I will never forget those words: “This is a gift from a friend. Everybody has tough times so please accept this gift and, if you can, someday do something like this for someone else to pay it forward.”

At one of the houses, a Spanish-speaking woman with four children started to kiss me and I kept saying, “No, no, no, delivery boy!” The truth is that day I was not looking for her acknowledgement of the heartfelt gift. I only wanted to be there in the moment to witness its impact.

As I grew more prosperous, I sought to do and give more. Two baskets became ten, ten baskets became 100, which grew into a larger volunteer Basket Brigade program that eventually morphed into the 100 Million Meals Challenge co-created with Feeding America eight years ago. That campaign grew so successful that its goals are continuing to be surpassed and new ones created. The campaign has now provided support for more than 850 million meals through Feeding America’s U.S. network of 200 food banks. Our goal is to reach a billion meals by 2025 and we are well ahead of schedule. To learn more visit: [https://](https://www.feedingamerica.org/about-us/partners/current-promotions/1-billion-meals)



www.feedingamerica.org/about-us/partners/current-promotions/1-billion-meals.

One of the ways I am amplifying this effort is by donating profits from *Life Force*, as I did with *Money: Master of the Game* and *Unshakable*, to Feeding America. I have also amplified this effort by donating an additional \$10 million during the pandemic because the number of people who became food insecure in that period grew exponentially, outpacing available resources.

My partnership with Feeding America is an example of how I personally, and the Tony Robbins Foundation that bears my name, focus on truly transformative philanthropic efforts at scale. The foundation and I want to empower and support organizations and initiatives that work to make a difference in the quality of life of people often left behind: the homeless, the hungry, the imprisoned population, youth in need, and senior citizens. In the end, my goal and the foundation’s goal is to give value and power back to people facing struggles by creating positive change in their lives and in the communities they call home. Some other efforts we have undertaken include:

- Helping provide funding to plant 71 million trees to improve local habitats and help mitigate climate change that impacts so many aspects of human need
- Providing fresh water to 250,000 people a day in India in order to fight the number one killer of children in that country – waterborne diseases
- Awarding more than 2,000 grants and other resources to health and human services organizations
- Implementing life-changing curriculum in 1,700+ correctional facilities and providing mentorship to thousands of young leaders across the world
- Supporting the nonprofit New Story by helping fund the building of new residential communities in the impoverished areas of Nacajuca, Mexico and El Espino, El Salvador, including the first 3D printed affordable home community in the world.

How important have mentors been in your life and who are some of mentors that have most influenced you?

As I mentioned, I didn’t have a lot of role models growing up, so seeking out people who were achieving what I wanted to, studying their formula for success, and modeling it, is what

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propelled me to where I am today. There is no single force more valuable than putting yourself in proximity with people who are playing the game at a higher level than you. Proximity is power. When I was 17 and I met Jim Rohn, a motivational coach, author, and speaker who gave me a job, it changed the course of my entire life.

Until that point, I learned from being a voracious reader. What I learned and continue to teach is that success leaves clues. If a person has sustained success in any long-term ambition, then luck doesn't have anything to do with it.

I am always reading and learning from others. I am truly blessed to have so many brilliant people I learn from in a variety of areas – health, business, finance, leadership, relationships, and emotions. As a result, I continue to learn on a daily basis from amazing leaders and friends like Paul Tudor Jones, a financial mastermind who created the Robin Hood Foundation to elevate people from poverty in New York City; Mark Benioff, the founder of Salesforce; and Peter Guber, chairman and CEO of Mandalay Entertainment and the co-owner of four professional sports teams, including the Golden State Warriors, the Los Angeles Dodgers and Los Angeles Football Club (LAFC) of Major League Soccer.

You have achieved so much and positively impacted so many lives. Are you always looking at what's next or do you take time to reflect and appreciate what you have accomplished?

One lesson that I teach, and that I consider to be of pinnacle importance, is that success without fulfillment is the ultimate failure. Most of us are achievers – we're constantly looking

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for what's next, and we believe that when we reach a certain point, we'll instantly become fulfilled or happy. That's not how life works.

How many readers out there have ever accomplished something – maybe it took you years – and after a day, an hour, or five minutes you thought to yourself, “Is this all there is?” That's because what we get will never make us happy, but who we become in the process, no one can ever take that away. I'm proud of all I've accomplished, and I'm grateful for who I've become, who I've been able to touch, and what I've been able to give.

You are known to be an optimistic person and to see challenges as opportunities. With all the challenges facing the world today, are you still optimistic about the future?

It's no secret that we're living in very challenging times; we're facing massive inflation, war, and we're divided against ourselves. In short, we are in winter. But just like there are seasons in nature, there are seasons in the economy, and in life.

Two books that I highly recommend right now are Ray Dalio's *Changing World Order*, as well as William Strauss' *The 4th Turning*. Both are invaluable in terms of understanding the larger cycles at play.

But I also know this: at our core as human beings, we can handle whatever life brings. We're resourceful and resilient as a species. We can adapt. We're much stronger than we think we are.

Life is both pain and pleasure, both opportunity and challenge, both birth and death. There is a season and a time for everything. It is not for us to decide what the right season of life is or which season of life we should be in. It is our job to embrace the season of life that's been given to us.

Springtime is when it's growth and it's easy and it's fun. In summer, it's hot and sweaty and it is as if you have been working so hard and where's the result. In autumn, we get to reap and it's easy to buy a house or make a big purchase – you have no money and have no income, but you do it. Then there are times like now when it is winter – when it's really dark, when it's really hard, when it seems impossible to make progress and you think you'll never get out of it.

You need to embrace the different seasons of life to prepare so you weather well through the others and blossom when the time comes again.

When things are going great, people think it's going to go great forever. When it's going horrible, people think it's going to be horrible forever. Try to always remember the following when dark clouds move in: Life is not about waiting for the storm to pass, it is about learning how to dance in the rain. ●

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