



SWAGGER

**UNLEASH EVERYTHING
YOU ARE AND BECOME
EVERYTHING YOU WANT**

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PAGE TWO
BOOKS



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PART ONE

WHY SWAGGER MATTERS

WHAT IS SWAGGER?

IT'S NINE O'CLOCK on a Tuesday morning and I'm standing in a nondescript training room. A group of ten men mill around, darting slightly nervous looks at each other and smiling tentatively at me. A few wander over to introduce themselves, and it's firm handshakes all around.

We're about to start one of my presentation skills workshops. But these suited financial services execs have no idea that shit's about to get real up in here.

To kick things off, I list my credentials and experience. Former singer, TV host, advertising creative director, now entrepreneur, training professional, and coach. "I'm the Chief Fire Starter at Combustion," I explain. "It's my job to blow shit up." I tell them that this workshop is not just about becoming a better presenter; it's about learning to be comfortable with discomfort, finding their authentic voice, and keeping it real.

I ask, "Who wants to go first?" and imagine testicles shriveling. I smile warmly—the "mother" part of the "tough mother love" I'm

known for. I wait. I've seen this scenario countless times: a group of senior executives taken out of their natural beige corporate habitat and thrust into the dreaded "skills building" scenario. By definition and design, this scenario is guaranteed to evoke a fair bit of insecurity. Add to that a small feisty woman who doesn't seem to fit the mold of trainer they're used to. Little do they know this will be unlike any training experience they've ever had.

I keep waiting.

Finally, one guy's hand goes up. Burly build, salt-and-pepper hair, open suit jacket. "I'll go," he offers. His smile does not disguise his reluctance. Straightening his jacket, he heads up front.

"Hi, I'm Tony."

"OK, Tony. Just pull a little paper strip from that cup and use what's on it to start telling us a story while I make some notes on how you're coming across," I instruct.

And he's off to the races.

I don't listen to a word. Instead, I focus on everything he's working incredibly hard not to show me. I watch how his energy and bluster amp up. He clenches his fists and juts one finger out on each hand, pistol style, as he jovially rapid-fires his way through his presentation. The fear around his eyes is in direct contradiction to his wide grin. He struts back and forth as he tells his story, a "good-time Charlie" all the way, voice booming, wearing his arrogance like a shield. And he doesn't fool me for a second.

Mid-sentence, I put my hand up to cut him off. He smiles expectantly.

"What the *hell* was that?" I say.

The smile falters a little.

"What was all of *this* bullshit?" I ask, mimicking the finger-pointy gun thing.

The smile droops. The room gets very, very quiet.

"Tony," I say, "despite you trying to distract from just about everything interesting and human about you, here's what I saw." His breathing hitches and becomes heavy. "You're the kind of guy who might have the cottage next to me up at the lake," I say. "One

morning at five, I get up to go fishing, only my boat won't start. So, I go next door and wake you up. Are you pissed? Hell, no. You come out in your T-shirt and boxers and get my boat started. You might even come fishing. Am I right?"

Bewilderment overtakes Tony's reddening face. "How do you know that?" he asks. "Just from what I did?"

"Because I *see* you," I say. "Now cut the shit. I want you to talk about something you care about. Look me in the face and tell me the truth. Are you ready?" Tony nods. I count him down, 3... 2... 1. He opens his mouth like a fish a few times and inhales deeply. Finally, he starts talking, his eyes firmly on me.

"My mother... my mother..." he says. Then, the most guttural sob imaginable bursts out of him. He clamps his hand over his mouth, looking horrified.

"Keep going," I encourage.

"My mother was born in Italy and came here before she had me," he continues. His eyes start to fill with tears and, sobbing again, he turns his back.

"Tony... keep going," I say quietly.

He does. Tony tells us the story of his incredible mother, a tiny Italian immigrant who raised him with ferocity and love and was key in forming him as a man. As his story unfolds, tears stream down his face. One of the other guys gets up and hugs him mid-sentence. Tony goes on to reveal that his mother recently passed away, and now he feels a piece of himself is missing.

When he's done, the room of bankers gives him a standing ovation. Tony looks shocked. I go over and throw my arms around him. He hugs me back and whispers over and over, "I don't know what happened, I don't know what happened."

"I do," I say. "You just found your swagger."

Well, after that display, Tony was never again looked at the same by his colleagues. He was mocked, ignored, and undermined, and his leadership prospects went down the crapper, and—

Seriously? Did you really think that could happen just from being both brave and vulnerable at work?

I bet that while reading Tony’s story, some of you were dying inside, thinking that if it had been you, you would never have shown your face at work again. But I also bet you were moved by his authenticity. Yes, Tony’s work life changed that day, but not for the reasons you imagine. In one small but significant moment, Tony lost his fear and was able to be his real self. He was finally seen for the complete, complex, and messy human that he is—and *nothing bad happened*.



**Swagger is not about perfection.
It’s about being a flawed badass.**

There it is. The fundamental dichotomy of the number we do on ourselves in the business world. We want to have what we think traditional swagger is—an air of powerful, cocksure confidence, no matter the situation. We want to be heard, respected, recognized, and rewarded for being our true selves at work, but we’re too shit-scared of the possible repercussions. So, we squash our realness down, telling ourselves that we’ll get what we want in the end if we’re hardworking drones who don’t stand out too much. After all, no one likes a “loudmouth,” a “show-off,” a “shit-disturber,” an “upstart,” or a “rule breaker.”

Except that’s bullshit. Because being real does not, by definition, make you an asshole. But it can make you a game changer.

I see this paradigm at play day after day in the “corporate jungle.” And it doesn’t matter how “cool” the company is. I’ve worked with them all: Google, TD Bank, IKEA, Uber, PepsiCo, Disney, Leo Burnett, and countless other corporate giants. They all have their culture of hierarchy, the rules of engagement, the game that must be played. There’s always a uniform. It doesn’t matter whether it’s a business suit or jeans and a T-shirt: there’s a way we’re expected to show up, and we do. Why? Because we’re afraid of what might happen if we don’t.

And this doesn't change if you're an entrepreneur, part of a start-up, independent, or an aspiring *anything*. We *all* have an ideal stuck in our heads, and we spend our days thinking that we suck if we can't live up to it. "If only I could . . . then I would . . ."

SWAGGER REDEFINED

This is where I come in. I don't believe there's a prescribed way to behave at work if you want to succeed. Sure, there are social mores and HR-endorsed behaviors, but that's not what we're talking about here. I've spent the past decade getting paid to help people elevate their game, and there's one universal truth that surfaces time after time: the more you are able to be yourself in your work, the more successful you will be at work. That's what swagger really is. It's not about fronting or faking; it's the courage to do the complete opposite in the face of scrutiny or judgment.

Real swagger, new swagger, true swagger is *this*:

Swagger is the ability to manifest the real you and hold on to it in the face of all the psychological crap that's going to come for it—regardless of the situation or environment.

Finding and liberating your swagger is a process that requires facing down demons, recording over old tapes, challenging your own preconception of what you "should" or "shouldn't" do, say, and be. It's about taking new risks and seeing yourself differently, especially in a professional capacity. It's like living in an epic movie of your own making, with your own unique language, and never allowing other people to write crappy subtitles for you.

Swagger is not about perfection. It's about being a flawed badass. It's self-acceptance, not self-assuredness.

And once you find your swagger, you'll never, ever want to go back to who you were, because having swagger is the secret to that game-changing, next-level success.

In this book, I'm going to share stories of the countless people I've worked with and help you recognize the barriers to swagger.

Then I'm going to show you how to work through those barriers one by one. In my work, I've tried a million different approaches and techniques, had hundreds of one-on-one and group conversations, created exercises to produce kick-ass results, and kicked a lot of asses to get those results. I'm going to share my best approaches, techniques, and exercises with you so you can custom-kick your own backside and step into your swagger.

In lieu of you standing in front of me as we do this work, I have to imagine you are an amalgam of every gorgeously flawed, potential-filled, and powerful person I've ever encountered. Only you will know what resonates. But in the words of Oprah, *what I know for sure* is that something *will* resonate with you. Your job is to hear it and tell the truth to yourself. That's the first step in unleashing your swagger: No bullshit allowed.

Here's the thing: if you stop talking crap to yourself, you'll be less likely to talk it to anyone else. That includes negative or self-aggrandizing talk. You are not a loser; nor are you the king or queen of the freakin' universe. You are somewhere in between. And that's a beautiful and beautifully human thing. Depending on the day, you'll swing more to one end than the other and then back again. But what matters is your ability to accept where you feel you are, have a frank talk with yourself about why you're feeling what you're feeling, and then get your head right for the moment.

Getting to swagger isn't a switch you flip. It's a journey.

You've got this. And I've got you.