

Life-Changing Classics, Volume XIII

THE KEY TO EXCELLENCE



Charlie "Tremendous" Jones

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The Key to Excellence

Published by
Tremendous Life Books
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Mechanicsburg, PA 17055
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www.TremendousLifeBooks.com

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Biography of Charlie “Tremendous” Jones	5
<i>The Key to Excellence</i> by Charlie Jones	9
Reading Contract.....	43

Biography of Charlie “Tremendous” Jones

Charlie “Tremendous” Jones entered the gates of Heaven on October 16, 2008. He made his mark as a best-selling author, publisher, and internationally acclaimed motivational speaker who gained a reputation as an inspirational humorist and book evangelist.

Charles E. Jones was born in Alabama and grew up in Pennsylvania. His beloved wife Gloria resides in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania. Their marriage produced six children and seven grandchildren.

Before achieving tremendous success as a motivational speaker, Charlie Jones started off as an insurance salesman. In 1950—just one year after entering the insurance business with one of America’s top-ten companies—he was awarded his agency’s Most

Biography of Charlie “Tremendous” Jones

Valuable Associate award at the age of 23. Ten years later Mr. Jones received his company’s highest management award for recruiting, manpower and development, and business management.

At age 37 his organization exceeded \$100 million in force, at which time he founded Life Management Services to share his experiences through seminars and consulting.

For more than a quarter of a century, thousands of audiences in America, Canada, Mexico, Australia, New Zealand, Europe, and Asia experienced nonstop laughter as Mr. Tremendous shared his ideas about life’s most challenging situations in business and at home.

He is the author of *Life Is Tremendous*, a bestselling book about his 7 Laws of Leadership, with more than 3 million copies in print. Two of his speeches, “The Price of Leadership” and “Where Does Leadership Begin?” have been enjoyed by millions on audio recordings and at conventions.

He was featured on a variety of radio programs, television networks, and films ranging from the *Dynamic Achievers World*

Biography of Charlie “Tremendous” Jones

Network television series to the *Insights into Excellence* video training series.

The University of Southern California, University of Tennessee, and Pensacola Christian College are just a few of the institutions where Mr. Jones was featured as a guest lecturer.

He also served on the advisory boards of several organizations and was the president and founder of Life Management Services Inc. as well as Executive Books (now Tremendous Life Books) in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania.

In addition to being a dynamic speaker and businessman, Mr. Jones was also a great humanitarian, with a passion for helping individuals understand the value of reading. It was Mac McMillon whom Mr. Jones first heard say, “You are today what you’ll be five years from now, except for the people you meet and the books you read.” This statement eventually became one of Mr. Jones’s most quoted lines as he inspired individuals all over the world to read.

Through his publishing company and bookstore, Executive Books, Mr. Jones gave

Biography of Charlie “Tremendous” Jones

away millions of books, fulfilling his mission as a book evangelist. In addition to the generous donations the company still makes, the book business that Mr. Tremendous originated is presently thriving and generating millions of dollars in annual revenues under the direction of his daughter, Tracey Jones.

For more than 50 years Charlie Jones was passionate about exciting people to read, think, and share. In 2002 he received a Doctor of Humane Letters degree from Central Pennsylvania College, and in 2003 the college’s new library was named the Charles “T” Jones Leadership Library in recognition of his love for reading and sharing great books.

The Key to Excellence

Charlie “Tremendous” Jones

Only allow an emcee fifteen seconds to introduce me as a speaker. After more than thirty years of going to meetings and seminars, I’ve discovered something all of you know: the longer the emcee spends introducing the speaker, the deeper in trouble the poor speaker gets. Now, if you’ve been to as many meetings as I know you have, you know they usually begin like this: “Ladies and gentlemen, what a speaker we’ve got for you! Woo-hoo! He’s done this and that and that and this,” and little by little, when you rave like that over a speaker, you don’t realize it, but you alienate a lot of the young people because they begin to think, “Nobody’s that good!” So that’s why I’ve made it a point to give them fifteen seconds and then quickly cut them off.

The Key to Excellence

Normally they say, “Charlie Jones has six children.” That is true; we do have six children, but let me explain *why*. The reason we only have six children is my wife hates kids!

Then you’ll notice another thing. You’ll notice when they introduce speakers, they always give you their credentials to let you know you’re about to hear from another heavy hitter. They always throw in something like, “Mr. Jones built a \$100 million insurance business.” Then, when the meeting is over, some tiger will meet me out in the hall and ask, “Did you really do that?” I’ll say, “I sure did.” He’ll say, “Well, how many people did you have in your organization to do that?” I’ll say, “You mean full-time people? We never had any full-time people. We had the kind of organization where, when somebody would show up for a meeting, we’d have a victory rally!”

Naturally, the emcee would have told you about my book, too, and he’ll usually say, “Mr. Jones’s book is in its seventh printing.” Even that isn’t the whole truth. They don’t lie to you; they just won’t tell you the whole truth. My book *is* in its seventh printing, but

Charlie “Tremendous” Jones

the reason is the first six were blurred.

You know what I’ve done in the last few minutes? I’ve done the two things you’ve got to be learning to do if you’re going to have a tremendous life. Life *is* tremendous, but like it has already been said a lot of different ways, you have a *choice*. If your life is going to be tremendous, you’ll have to be learning to do the two things I’ve just done with you. Number one, if you’re going to have a tremendous life, you’ve got to be learning how to laugh at your failures. Laughing at your failures doesn’t mean you like to fail. It just means you’re learning to capitalize on what goes wrong. Otherwise you’ll never do as much as you could have done. Once a young man said to me, “Mr. Jones, what’s an ingredient of success?” Good judgment. “Well, how do you get that?” Experience. “Well, how do you get *that*?” Poor judgment! It is impossible for any normal person to like to fail, but if you’re not learning how to capitalize on what goes wrong, you’ll never do as much as you could have done.

Number two, if you’re going to have a

The Key to Excellence

tremendous life, you'll have to be learning how to get people to laugh at themselves. A few years ago a young man whom everybody loved killed himself. His name was Freddie Prinze. If you remember, they called him "Chico." You also remember the morning after Chico died, the newspaper said that when his heart stopped beating, a young nurse fell over his chest, beating on his heart, screaming, "Please, don't die, Freddie! The world needs all the laughter it can get!" You know what hit me when I read that? It's the same thing that still hits me every time I make the point. Why is it so few people in life ever learn to capitalize on their failures and learn how to laugh at themselves, even people who want to be successful and so-called leaders?

Why is it so few people in life ever start learning that life is not for me to get you to notice me or laugh at me? Life is not for you to get people to notice you or laugh at you. Life is for each of us to be learning to see things more like they really are and, while learning how to get people in our spheres of influence to laugh a little at themselves, we

Charlie “Tremendous” Jones

all get a bigger, better job done. I hope my contribution here will be twofold. First, because we thought and laughed together for a few minutes, you'll hate to fail as much as you ever hated it in your life. But when you do fail you'll be better equipped to get a laugh and get on with it. And second, when you go back to the trenches to do your fighting and achieving wherever you do it, you'll be better equipped to get some people to laugh at themselves while we all get a bigger, better job done.

I would like to share with you some of the greatest things I've been learning over the years in working with people. I've discovered in working with people that life is not a joke. You don't have to be a comedian to be successful. But I've been learning this perhaps more than any other single thing about working with people: I've been learning that young people hurt just like old people, and I've been learning that old people hurt just like young people. I've been learning that sometimes rich people hurt like poor people, and sometimes well people hurt like sick people. I've discovered you can't take hurt

The Key to Excellence

out of life, even your own, but there are some ways to make hurt *better* rather than *bitter*.

The greatest tool I've discovered in my life to make hurt better rather than bitter is a tool called laughter. Now we know Norman Cousins and many other great people in the field are actually experimenting with laughter and getting results with laughter on cancer patients. I'm flying back home Sunday for a surprise birthday party for a dear friend of mine who is eighty years old. He'd be dead right now, but because of the past four months of prayer, laughter, and other things, this man is going to have a surprise birthday party. Laughter. And yet there are people who don't know how to use laughter.

Now, this group in the room with me today is basically a laughing group. I'll tell you how I can tell. I didn't even tell a joke and you started laughing. I could tell right away you were laughers, because when the emcee stood up here to start the session out, I heard a lot of snickers all around. That tipped me off because laughers love to laugh. You don't even need to tell a joke. All

Charlie “Tremendous” Jones

you do for a laugh is just pause awhile and you're off and having fun. Did you ever notice it's hard to be serious with laughers? They want to laugh when you want to be serious. Did you ever notice that? Nothing funny and everybody is laughing already. I also stood back there and studied every person here, and I can tell you there are several nonlaughers in this group. I won't point you out. You know who you are.

You are going to be thrilled with what I've got for you if you're not a laugher. According to my research, nonlaughers have just as much fun as laughers. They just don't like to show it. So, if you're a nonlaugher and you're surrounded by a bunch of laughers, let me tell you: don't you let those laughers intimidate you, because you don't have to laugh to make money. You don't have to laugh to have fun. You don't have to laugh to recruit or train. But I'll tell you what I've been learning about people. I've been learning that half the success in a home, half the success in a church, half the success in a sale and interview, half the success in anything is *atmosphere*. And any-

The Key to Excellence

body with any sensitivity knows atmosphere doesn't come out of thin air. Somebody has to create atmosphere.

You tell me a quicker, cheaper way to create some atmosphere than a good smile or a good laugh. So, today, practice. The meeting is almost over. The seminar is almost over. You're going back to the trenches, so practice now. When you feel like laughing, let it out. When you feel like laughing, let it out. If you don't, it sinks back down into your hips. I can see it's too late for a lot of you!

Now, I see there are a lot of nonjoggers here today, and I can always tell a nonjogger. When you have a forty-four-inch waist that's a nonjogger, and I love them. I love ya! Let me tell you why I love you guys with forty-four-inch waists: because I think jogging ought to be a sin. I don't know of anything more idiotic than running around in the morning, chasing nothing, with a bunch of dogs nipping at your heels. In fact, you're going to like my new book. It's going to be called, *I'm Okay, You're Fat*. Maynard Hutchins, that great man of wisdom, once said, "When I feel like exercising, I just lie

Charlie “Tremendous” Jones

down until the feeling goes away.” God bless that man. That is what I call preaching!

Now, listen and get this through your head. You don’t have to laugh to be successful. You don’t have to laugh to make money, but you’ve got to be downright insensitive today not to know that people hurt. While you can’t take the hurt out of their life or yours, you can at least learn how to make the hurt better rather than bitter. One time a guy said to me, “I wish I had more of a sense of humor.” I said, “What would you do with it? You’re not using the little you have now!” Everybody has a sense of humor. If you don’t use it, you may as well not have it. It’s like a brain. Did you ever notice that? Did you ever notice how many people walk around dead long before they’re buried? But thank God he made us so we don’t stink until they put us in the ground. There’s always one sitting here thinking, “I don’t get it.” Like that guy who tried to be tactful by saying, “Somebody around here, their deodorant doesn’t work.” His friend turned to him and said, “It can’t be me; I don’t use any.”

The Key to Excellence

These are exciting days. Aren't these exciting days? But how much excitement do you run into when you're going into the office in the morning? How many people greet you at the door and say, "Woo-hoo, let me at 'em!" You don't hear that. I'll tell you what you hear. I know what you hear. You hear what I hear! "I want to quit, I want to quit." I tell them, "You can't quit! You ain't done nothin' yet!" I was afraid to go to my office for fear they were waiting for me to come in so they could say, "Hello, Charlie. We quit!" I'd say, "All right, I quit, too! I'm not staying here alone anymore!" They'd quit in the morning, quit at noon. I give them more money, they quit. I give them a new title, they quit. QUIT, QUIT, QUIT!

I would say to myself, *Why do these thumb-suckers want to quit again?* You know what they used to say to me? They would say to me, "I think I'm going to quit because I can't communicate." Now, ladies and gentlemen, if I have to sit through one more seminar on communication, I'm giving up. You say, "Don't you believe there's a communication problem?" Don't talk to me

Charlie “Tremendous” Jones

so stupid! If you're married, you have a communication problem. If you're raising children, you've got a communication problem. After spending thousands of hours and thousands of dollars on communication, the problem is worse today than when we started talking. So, we've got a problem. Let's move on to something new! They say, "We've got to communicate with our young people, we've got to communicate with our neighbor." I say, "Our neighbor? I'm not doing too well with my wife right now." You say, "Well, you're not against your neighbor." I'm not against my wife; it only seems that way to *her*!

Sure, there's a communication problem, but it's not from my mouth to your ears as much as it is from my heart to my mouth. Unless you have tremendous inner dialogue, you cannot have good outer dialogue. All I hear is, "I'm so lonely." Well, no wonder you're lonely, you thumb-sucker! They say, "I don't have anybody to talk to." The way you talk, no wonder! Now, I don't want to be mean and I know I use a little bit of a shock treatment, but I want you to laugh and think

The Key to Excellence

and see something you know. I'll tell you where the problem lies and I can work on it, and you can, too, *and* your life will be more tremendous.

The real one is identification. You say, "What do you mean by 'identification'?" I mean that I've been learning over the years if I can identify with you we can say a great deal without saying very much. If I don't identify, a barrier goes up—and even if you love me, you can't get it down. The harder you try to get it down, the more it goes up. I don't know why it is, but you know it is. I've known families who lived in the same house together all their lives and died as strangers.

Now, let me quickly tell you three things I've learned over the years to prove my point. Remember years ago when they talked about the generation gap? There never was a generation gap. There was an ideological gap. Young liberals have always identified with the liberals. Young conservatives have always identified with the conservatives. There never was a generation gap. It was ideological. In other words, if I identify with you, we can say a lot. If I don't, we can

Charlie “Tremendous” Jones

live in the same house and die strangers. Let me prove it. Let me take a quick moment and share with you a few things I’ve been learning over the years. Thirty-seven years learning to be a husband. Thirty-six years learning to raise children. Thirty-five years learning to build a business. Now watch, as I share these things with you, watch how your guard goes down and you didn’t know it went down. Watch how you begin to think *with* me rather than listen *to* me. Watch how *you* begin to figure *you* out rather than figure *me* out. Watch how you begin to laugh at *your* heartaches and frustrations rather than *my* punch lines.

Ready? Here we go. I now will share with you the greatest single thing I’ve been learning in thirty-five years. What I’m going to share with you is almost too much wisdom for some of you young people, but I’m going to give it to you because you’re not going to understand it anyway. But you old geezers are going to love it!

Now, are you listening carefully to me? Don’t miss this. Haven’t you noticed all this week the big speakers make you wait to the

The Key to Excellence

end of the talk to give you the good stuff? Did you ever notice that? Not me! I give you the best stuff right now. So, if you have to leave early or go to the bathroom, you didn't miss anything! Here it comes. Here comes the greatest thing I've been learning in thirty-five years. What I'm going to share with you now is not theoretical, it's experiential. Seventeen years of this reinforced by working in one office. You are going to say, "Oh, thank God for that one thought! That made the whole thing worthwhile!" Ready or not, here it comes. This is the greatest single thing I've been learning in thirty-five years. The greatest thing I've been learning in thirty-five years of business is . . .

NOTHING WORKS!

Let me say it again. I love truth. *Nothing works!* You say, "What do you mean, 'Nothing works'?" I mean nothing works! Your boss knows nothing works. That's why he's here today. Do you think your boss would be here if he knew it worked? He would not be here; he'd be over in Santa Fe or up in Minneapolis watching it work! You

Charlie “Tremendous” Jones

ask, “Well, why did he come?” I’ll tell you why he came. He came because he knows it’s more fun failing here with us than failing back in his office alone. That’s what it is!

Listen carefully. I want you to learn to get people to laugh, but don’t you ever be a comedian. We’re not comedians. We get people to laugh, but not at our jokes. We get them to laugh at points. You watch; every time I get you laughing, I’ll drive home a point. Why the point? I’ll tell you. Do you know the value of a meeting? Did you recognize yet the value of this meeting? Is it to hear the speakers? No, that’s secondary. The number-one value of this meeting is people coming together with other people, who have common goals and dreams and hopes, who are giving some time to make it happen and participating in it happening. And somehow or other it seems, over the years, at a few meetings a year, greater relationships are established than in some people’s own families. That’s because you don’t get this type of interaction from a book or CD, you see. It’s about just being *here*. Oh, somebody can listen to those CDs, but it

The Key to Excellence

won't be like it was for someone like *you* who sat here with the other people who laughed and who realized they have ups and downs and heartaches and joys and successes and failures. People are a therapy. You know how you can tell when something is wrong in your life? When you wake up in the morning you say, "I sure hope I don't have to meet up with any people." Did you ever hear this one? A guy proclaims, "I never get going till ten in the morning." Well, then stay in bed till 11:00! We got enough troubles at the office now, you thumbsucker! Or the one who says, "I never get going until the second cup of coffee." Well, then *start* with the second!

I'll tell you another great therapy. How about the therapy of music? Chopin, Bach, bluegrass, Sousa, big band, any kind of music. There have been times in my life when I've been so depressed, so licked, so discouraged, and so down—not for a day, not for a week, but for months. And nothing could be more discouraging to me than some mixed-up fool saying, "Hang in there, son, things are going to get better." Don't tell me

Charlie “Tremendous” Jones

that. I don't care if things *don't* get better, I'm just asking God don't let them get *worse*! I don't need a way out; I need something to sustain me to hang in there. I don't need the problem to go away; I need to catch some sense of the problem to make the problem worthwhile as I live through it. There have been times in my life I've been so down, so depressed, I couldn't even pray. You say, “Well, I was never that low.” You never had my manager, either, or my mother-in-law. My mother-in-law is a test pilot at a broom factory. There have been times in my life when I was licked, and it was music with a great Christian message where the Word sustained my heart. I needed sustaining.

And another therapy is work, just plain work. You say, “They're not paying me what I'm worth now.” You work anyway. You work if you get paid. You work if you don't get paid. You say, “What if I don't have a job?” You work anyway. You say you can't work without a job. Don't you tell me that. My father raised five of us in the Depression with no mother years ago when there was no

The Key to Excellence

work. He worked. And you know you can't live without breathing. You can't work; you can't live right without working. It's life. *Work.*

You say, "What do you mean, 'Nothing works'?" I mean nothing works! What used to make me more tired than covering miles in the morning was coming back to the office where some thumb-sucker was waiting to say, "Mr. Jones, I don't believe this is going to work." I'd say, "I know it doesn't work, that's why I hired you. If it worked, I could give it to my brother-in-law who is on unemployment, not you!" Now listen, how long do you have to live before we discover God never made anything to work for us? He made us to prepare our *lives* to do a job and to discipline *ourselves* to do it and in the process of us making things work, that's how *we* get made. Yet all I hear is, "You think this is going to work?" No, and you'd better shut your mouth!

Here's another thing I've been learning. I've been learning that I cannot help any of you. You say, "Well, why do they have you speaking today?" I was wondering that

Charlie “Tremendous” Jones

myself. You ask, “What do you mean you can’t help me?” This is what I mean: I’ve given a lot of help to people with *bad* attitudes and watched them shrink, and I’ve given little or no help to people with *good* attitudes and watched them grow. I’ve been learning that whether anyone likes it or not, real help is not pumped into you by a bribing superior or a motivational guru. *Real* help is drawn out of anybody who commits their life to do something and is willing to do it even if it kills them. Now, let me tell you how I know I can’t help you. If I could help anybody I’d go home right now and help my six kids, not you. The only trouble is when I’m home helping them, I seem to be hurting them more than I’m helping them. So, I finally figured out the only way I can help my own kids more is learning how to hinder them less. Now, it takes a lot of learning to figure out how to help somebody more by hindering them less. Imagine what will happen if the Congress ever figures that out.

This brings me to another subject. Do you know how I can tell when a politician is lying? When their lips are moving. I’m not

The Key to Excellence

down on politicians, but I tell you I'm different from most Americans, and you know what makes me different from most Americans? I'm one of the few Americans who knows that conservatives lie just like liberals lie, but I always vote for conservatives because I love conservative lies more than liberal lies. But I know one thing: when America turns around, and she is, it won't be because of anyone in Washington. It will be when Americans do more and do better and demand less.

By the way, do you remember that cold spell last spring in Denver? I was there. I didn't see this, so don't quote me on this. But somebody told me that day it was so cold in Denver, they saw a politician with his hands in his own pockets. That's what I heard! And I want to tell you what's wrong with America. We don't understand language. You and I have to get down to the basics of the language. You understand language and you're going to understand politics. "Poly" means "many," and "tics" means "blood-suckers." Now, that puts it all together. Do you know why so many politicians sleep so

Charlie “Tremendous” Jones

good at night? Well, I’ll tell you why. They lie on both sides, that’s why!

Here’s another lesson for you: don’t you ever be critical and negative of somebody unless you do it with fun and then throw in something good. I was just being critical of politicians. Well, one of these days I want you to come on over to the East Coast to a town called Baltimore, Maryland. It used to be the eyesore of America. I fly to Baltimore a lot because we live up in Camp Hill, Pennsylvania, and I want to tell you what you’re going to see when you come to Baltimore. You’re going to see something like Sydney Harbor in Australia. You’re going to see one of the most beautiful cities in the world now because a selfless, dedicated *politician* gave his life to making that town what it is. There’s always someone doing something good like that.

Now, one other thing I have to share with you: I’ve been learning over the years to have my doubts about a man who says he puts his work ahead of his family, and I have my doubts about a man who says he puts his family ahead of his work. I’ll tell you why.

The Key to Excellence

Over the years, I've learned that people who talk about what they put first usually don't put anything first but themselves and use what they *say* they put first as an excuse to get out of doing what they should have done. I've been learning that you can't be better with your work the right way without being better with your family, and you can't be better with your family the right way without being better with your work. They complement each other.

Many of you have purchased my book *Life Is Tremendous*. It's sold over a million copies. It's not a book on leadership. Even though we talk about the Seven Laws of Leadership, that's not it. It's not a book on decision making, even though we talk about decision making. Do you know what the book's about? It's a basic, down-to-earth book about what my son, Jeffrey, taught me when I taught him how to sell greeting cards at age six. That's in chapter 2. When I taught Jeffrey how to sell greeting cards at six to earn his spending money, he taught me more about selling than any course I've ever taken. When my oldest, Jere, went to col-

Charlie “Tremendous” Jones

lege, he taught me more about growing as a person and reaching people’s hearts with truth that was already there. This book is just a book showing how my children taught me more about managing and recruiting than any course I ever took, and my work taught me more about my family than any psychology I’ve ever read.

So, when you hear me talk to a group, whether I have a half hour or three hours, you’ll hear me talk about Gloria and my kids. As I’ve mentioned already, we’ve got six kids. Perhaps you ought to know they’re all boys, except four. And we have them all ages. We have one boy working on a doctorate in chemistry. I have another son who’s in Dallas, works for TI. He’s an engineer. I have a young daughter, Tracey; this is her third week at the Air Force Academy. I have another one, graduated magna cum laude. When I ever graduated from anything, it was “Lawdy, how come?” We’ve got kids in college, high school. I tell people I’m afraid to call home and ask what’s new.

Years ago, when we started having a family, I had a bad habit of listening. You say, “I

The Key to Excellence

thought that was a *good* habit?” You’re wrong. Listening is a very bad habit unless you’re learning how to listen less and think more. You want to know what’s killing America more than politics? TV that taught us how to quit reading and start watching; how to start listening and quit thinking; how to sit in the same room and act like you’re together when you’re a thousand miles apart. Now, I’m not talking about just TV. I’m talking about the art of listening less and thinking more. Daniel Boorstin has a great line in his book *Democracy and Its Discontents*. Boorstin said the old Puritans could never be disillusioned because they never suffered any illusions. It’s a great line. The next time you’re panicking with disillusionment, ask who set you up—who it was that was thinking and *memorizing* rather than thinking and *realizing*.

Galileo said you don’t teach people something new; you help them discover the truth they know and then let them live it out. When you *think*, you *realize* it and live it out. What a difference. So, keep on listening, but make sure you listen less and think

Charlie “Tremendous” Jones

more. Don't listen more and think less. Now, I'm guilty. I was always listening. People say to me, “God has given you these children for you to teach.” That sounded great to me. So, like every dad, I began teaching them. The only trouble was, the more I tried to teach them, the less those boneheads seemed to learn. Then one day I got to thinking. What happens when you think? You begin to see things like they are. One day I got to thinking: God never gave my kids to me for me to teach *them*. He gave me to them for them to teach *me*.

All right, kids. I can hardly wait for you to grow up and get some kids of your own so your kids can start teaching you what you're teaching me, because so far, this is awful one-sided! You say, “What good does that do?” It does no good at all! It just helps us live with the problem. After all, what is driving Americans nuts? We think you get *rid* of problems. You don't get rid of problems. You *build* on problems, you *create* problems, and you grow through them. Every time I pick up the phone a guy says, “I got a program that's going to solve all your prob-

The Key to Excellence

lems, and it's only going to cost \$10,000." I say, "That solves your problem, but how about mine?" I come into my office and they're waiting on me. "I got a problem!" Of course you got a problem! You're not dead! He said, "Would you help me with my problem?" I said, "You wait your turn. I'm dying with mine now." You say, "I'll bet you didn't help your people talking like that." I help my people more when I talk like this than years ago when I sat in my office and let them think that I was God Number Two and all you had to do was come in and I put sprinkles of whiffenpoof dust on you so you can go back into the field and fail more gracefully. Now, I want my kids to know that problems are a way of life. I don't like it either, but that's the way life is.

Well, I've done you enough damage. I may as well quit now. I want to close. I wish I could take hours and hours on my favorite subject: the power of books. I heard this statement years ago and remind myself of it every day of my life now. I love to say it again today. Truth never gets old; it gets more rare, real, and fresh every day of your

Charlie “Tremendous” Jones

life. You are the same today you're going to be five years from now, except for two things: the people you meet and the books you read. The people you meet and the books you read. Hang around thinkers; you will be a better thinker. Hang around achievers; you will be better achievers. Hang around givers; you will be a better giver. Hang around a bunch of thumb-sucking, complaining, griping boneheads and you will be a better thumb-sucking, complaining, griping bonehead. Now, there's only one trouble: when you leave here today, you can't take any of the speakers home. But their books are lying out there, and if you thought you enjoyed them today, wait until you get home tonight or next week and your heart's aching a little bit and you need to be refreshed. You sit down and read that book. You'll love him and you'll know him and you'll understand it and you'll see so many things you didn't see today. Wait till you take the book home and read it. *The power of a book!* Let me tell you about one in particular, *The Common Denominator of Success*, by Albert E. N. Gray. It has been my calling

The Key to Excellence

card for years. I don't have business cards. You say, "Why not?" Because I'm sensitive and it hurts me when they throw my card away. I don't know what's wrong with me, but I can't stand rejection! So this book is what I give them instead.

Successful people have something in common with failures. Do you know what it is? They hate to do the exact same things. The only difference between a success and a failure is successful people make themselves do what they hate and a failure waits for the manager to *make* him do it. You know who needs to read this? Me. How about you? I want to make the point because no matter how much I talk about books there'll be somebody going out that door today saying, "He'll never make me read a book!" You're right! I discovered you can take a horse to water but you can't make him drink, but you can put some salt in his oats and make him thirsty! Right here in Phoenix is a wonderful man named Og Mandino. You all have most of his books. It's funny how many of you missed this one: *Og Mandino's University of Success*. Og Mandino took the fifty greatest

Charlie “Tremendous” Jones

books he had ever read on motivation, put one chapter of each of them in one book. You can buy the fifty greatest chapters from the fifty greatest books liked by the world’s number-one author on motivation, and yet the average person who wants to be successful will say, “Well, if the manager doesn’t buy it for me, I’ll never read it.” For you managers, the book list is out on the table for you. There’s a little gem called *The Wit and Wisdom of General George S. Patton* on it. Patton says if everybody is thinking alike, somebody ain’t thinking. I like that. Patton said, “The test of success is not what you do when you’re on top. Success is how high you bounce when you hit bottom.”

I’ve got to tell you about a book that changed my married life. You say, “Was your marriage really as bad as you say it was?” I don’t want to talk about it. No two people ever hated each other like Gloria and I used to hate each other. But one day, one day, I grew so much I accepted her like she was. And do you know what she did to spite me? She changed! You ask, “What happened? Who changed?”

The Key to Excellence

One day, Gloria began to read some of my favorite books, like Dr. A. W. Tozer's *The Pursuit of God*. Today, because of this book, Gloria lives and believes more what I believe than *I* believe, so she humbles me to death. This is the book that taught Gloria and me the secret to a happy marriage is not sex, it's not love—although a little of that would be nice. The secret to a happy marriage is commitment. And you know what you discover after twenty or thirty years of commitment? You discover a thing called acceptance. You know what you discover after five or ten years of acceptance? The thrill of getting to know somebody you live with and slept with all those years and falling in love with before you die.

Well, ladies and gentlemen, you see, I got to tell you if life is going to be tremendous, you ought to have a partner. And gals, if you're married to a man, that's tough; but if you got a man with drive, that's tougher. Sir, if you're married to woman, that's tough; but if you're married to a woman with drive, that's tougher. And you young ladies who aren't married today, let me tell you how to

Charlie “Tremendous” Jones

find the right man. Quit looking, there aren't any. Get something with pants on and pray! Now, I've saved you a lot of time, I'll tell you that.

Do you know what commitment means? Commitment means learning to enjoy each other when you're apart. I've been away nine days on this trip. I'm going to fly home tomorrow, but every night I'm away. . . . Sometimes I've been so busy in church and colleges and civic groups and life insurance groups and speaking, I don't think I've been home more than fifteen nights for dinner in any month of thirty-seven years. And some woman will say to me, “How can your wife stand you working like that?” Well, I'll tell you how she stands it. She has no choice. We're married. Now, shut up. Because, you see, friend, when you're committed, you start learning to enjoy each other when you're apart. So, last night when I came back from Cleveland where I was yesterday, I opened up my shaving kit and I got out my love note. Every night I'm away, Gloria has a love note in my shaving kit, and when I leave to go away, when Gloria is making the

The Key to Excellence

coffee or getting ready to take me to the airport, I write her love notes and I put them on her pillow. And Jamie, my youngest, puts them on when I'm not home, and so when Gloria turns down her bedspread at night to go to bed and I'm not in that bed, she'll find a love note from me telling her how I love her. . . .

Well, folks, please read. Don't read to be smart; read to be real. Don't read to be big; read to be down to earth. Don't read to memorize; read to realize. Don't read to learn; read sometimes to unlearn. And don't read a lot; read just enough to keep yourself hungry and curious and getting younger as you're growing older. *Read*. When Jere Jones was fourteen years old, I made him a deal. He wanted to buy a car when he turned sixteen. I said, "Here's the deal. I'm going to pay you \$10 for the books you read. Read a book and give me a book report, and I'll put \$10 in a car fund for you. Give me another book report, \$10 in the car fund. So, in two years, if you read in style, you'll drive in style. But if you read like a bum, you're going to drive like a bum." Overnight, he developed a fan-

Charlie “Tremendous” Jones

tastic hunger for reading. He read twenty-two books. Did he buy a car? No, he kept the money and used my car and my gas! When Jere went to college, he wrote me a postcard every day for four years. You know what's on the cards? Thoughts from books I paid him to read in high school. My granddaughter, Christine, is twelve. She gave me five book reports for her Christmas-shopping money. The contract is laying out there on the table for you. In Fort Wayne, a man came to me and said, “Mr. Jones, thank you for getting me reading years ago, because now my grandchildren read, and here's my record—seven years, six grandchildren, twenty-seven thousand pages in three hundred books!” That grandfather did more with that piece of paper I leave with you today to make your life more tremendous than had he given each of them a million dollars.

Remember, if you're ever going to have a tremendous life, you don't really need to laugh, you don't need to think. You know there's only one thing you got to do to have a tremendous life. Do you know what it is? Sure you know. You got to be learning to be

The Key to Excellence

thankful. The first mark of greatness is thankfulness. The first sign of smallness is thanklessness. An attitude of gratitude flavors everything you do. When we eat at our house, we always give thanks. This is the way we pray when we eat: *Dear God, we thank you for this food, but Lord we want you to know if we had no food, we'd thank you just the same. Because, God, we want you to know we're not thankful for just what you give us, we're thankful most of all for the privilege of learning to be thankful, for the privilege of just learning to be thankful.*

Thank you very much for a wonderful day, and I hope you get reading and sharing and thanking somebody for this wonderful day.

READING CONTRACT

BECAUSE, (name) and (name) have agreed to certain things regarding the reading of books and the reward for this reading, this agreement is made:

BECAUSE, this reading will increase (child's) store of knowledge, increase his ability to **LEARN**, and help him master the problems of living, (adult) wishes to encourage this reading.

THEREFORE, (adult) agrees to REWARD (child) for each book read that is not part of the regular school requirements. These are to be (child's) choice of Historical Fiction, Autobiography, or similar books.

The reward shall be ____ cents for each and every page including the Preface and Table of Contents (if these are also read as they should be.) However, no reward shall be less than ____ cents.

Since part of the idea is to teach the value of books, to teach the value of thrift, and to teach the value of helping others:

(Child) agrees (1) to use the first ten percent (ten cents out of each dollar) to help others. Suggested uses are United Fund, Sunday School, Church, Red Cross, or Missionary work.

(2) Of the remaining 90% (90 cents of each dollar), (child) agrees to put 45 cents (or 1/2) in a bank

account to grow for future education or similar use.

(3) The remaining 45% (45 cents of each dollar) (child) may spend as he sees fit, subject only to guidance from his Father and Mother (gifts, bicycle, football for himself—are suggestions).

(Child) also agrees to write to (adult) the (1) name of the book (2) name of the author (3) and a one or two sentence statement telling what the book is about and what he learned from it.

This agreement shall be in full force and effect when signed by both parties and it shall be effective for 1 year from such date. It shall be renewed each year unless either party notifies the other that he wishes to discontinue or cancel.

Signed and agreed to this _____ day of _____,
20____ in the Year of our Lord, A.D.

print or sign (child)

signature (adult)

Life-Changing Classics, Volume XIII

In *The Key to Excellence*, Charlie “Tremendous” Jones shares some of the greatest lessons he learned through many years of working with people. Filled with classic Charlie Jones wisdom coupled with humor, this easy-to-read book reflects his keys to excellence in business, ministry, home and work.

“I wish I could take hours and hours on my favorite subject: the power of books. I heard this statement years ago and remind myself of it every day of my life now. I love to say it again today. Truth never gets old; it gets more rare, real, and fresh every day of your life. You are the same today you’re going to be five years from now, except for two things: the people you meet and the books you read. Hang around thinkers; you will be a better thinker. Hang around achievers; you will be better achievers. Hang around givers; you will be a better giver. Hang around a bunch of thumb-sucking, complaining, griping boneheads and you will be a better thumb-sucking, complaining, griping bonehead..”

—CHARLIE “TREMENDOUS” JONES

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