

An interview with Steve Kubicek, author of *UP and IN: Seven Keys to Unlocking Your Potential*

At its heart, *UP and IN* is a book about adopting an uplifted, inspired point of view. Why do you think this mindset is so important?

In sales training, I learned to answer a question with a question, and with that in mind: Would you rather approach someone who is wearing a frown or someone who is wearing a smile?

When we are in an up-and-in frame of mind, we become attractive to others (even to ourselves), but when we are in a down mood or having a one-person pity party, we become repellent. It is hard to excel when you are pushing others away.

Everyone has a potential greater than they have imagined for themselves. To tap into this potential, it is essential that they believe in the possibilities and then take the faithful steps necessary to push through each perceived barrier or limitation. When you persevere up a steep hiking trail, you nearly always find that the view at the summit is worth the sometimes stretching and painful steps to get there. If you didn't think so, why would you attempt the climb?

How long did it take to write *UP and IN*?

It took a lifetime—literally—as *UP and IN* is filled with stories from my life experiences. In July 2005 following my early retirement, I began to address a yearning to write that had been welling up in me for some time. I wrote and then rewrote *UP and IN* several times before deciding to rewrite it once more, this time in the daily reading format it has today. Thus, *UP and IN* is a product both of a few years and of a lifetime.

What is your hope for *UP and IN*?

I hope:

- That *UP and IN* genuinely helps people.
- That people will draw from *UP and IN* and be refreshed by it.
- That readers of *UP and IN* will accept the challenge to renew their minds about their potential and begin to outperform their wildest expectations.
- That people who read *UP and IN* will learn to practice the art of self-encouragement and intentionally strive to love the one in front of them.
- That readers will adopt a godly perspective about who they are in God's eyes and begin to exhibit love for their Father in heaven.

In the introduction to *UP and IN*, you say that there is “an epidemic” of down-and-out feelings. Do you think this is a new phenomenon? Why or why not? And what do you think is behind this epidemic?

The Bible teaches that there is a time for everything: “A time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance” (Ecclesiastes 3:4). Such times are seasonal. I suspect that during the time of the Civil

War or the Great Depression, most folks were feeling down. With that in mind, no: I do not think that the current epidemic of down-and-out feelings is a new phenomenon. Rather, as individuals or as communities or as a country, we have been allowing ourselves to feel down and remain down because of the negative and unhealthy thoughts we have chosen to embrace.

Unrealistic expectations and/or misplaced dependencies form the root of most depressive thoughts. To turn down feelings around, we must guard what thoughts we allow to take root in our minds and hearts. We can change our outlook by changing the way we look at things. For instance, if you change your expectations to realistic ones and place your dependencies on God rather than Washington or politicians or your work or other people, your feelings will improve dramatically.

Surely everyone has “down” moments. How do you find your way up?

You can count me in that number, for sure. Yes, I have my down moments, too, and sometimes they stretch beyond the moment. In fact, if I had no experience with melancholy, I would be a poor instructor, indeed. If you are feeling down or if you experience moments of melancholy, here’s the good news: You are not alone, nor are you strange.

Everyone needs encouragement. I believe it is part of our DNA, the way God wired us. And if we take Him at His word, we are to “encourage one another” (1 Thessalonians 5:11). You see, God knew we would need encouragement, and He provided for this need by providing uplifting people in our lives. This is why having a good friend, an encouraging spouse, a positive influencer, a life coach, or a role-model or mentor is important for everyone.

Another provision God has given to encourage us is His Scripture. Don’t let skepticism keep you from turning to this invaluable resource. The Bible instructs us to comfort those who need comforting with the comfort we ourselves have received.

God also tells us that He desires to be our comforter and encourager. In other words, He desires an active role in our lives. This is His best provision for encouragement. The times I have sensed God’s presence in my life are the most encouraging and inspiring moments. Thus, one of the ways that I transition from “down” moments is to remember my “Monument Moments.” Those are the monumental times when I truly perceived God’s active presence in my life.

Remembering that He loves me and is for me and is with me is a very practical and meaningful method of finding my way up. When things have you feeling down, remember that if God is for you (*and He is,*) then nothing can stand against you. Imagine yourself looking straight into the eyes of the obstacle that has you down and saying, “What is this circumstance that it should deny the child of the living God?” Then move forward and upward one persevering step of faith at a time. In the words of C.S. Lewis, go “further up and further in” each step of the way.

***UP and IN*, in many ways, is a loving tribute to a loving God. Do readers need to know the Bible in order to “get” the message of the book?**

This is a great question, and the short answer is no. I’m not a theologian. I think I’m very much like everyone else; I’m just an ordinary guy with an extraordinary God.

I share my personal stories and use Scripture as it relates to these stories in relevant, practical, and authentic ways. I use Scripture to build up and to inspire. I do not believe readers need be concerned that I

will preach to them or look down on them. I present the truths within *UP and IN* using short, daily readings that are easy to understand and apply.

***UP and IN* includes a number of verses from the Bible. Do you have a favorite verse, and if so, what is it? Why does it speak to you?**

Joshua 1:9 NIV is the verse I reach for when I'm facing a challenge. It reads *"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."*

In writing *UP and IN*, you lifted the veil on your own life and shared many of your personal experiences—the good, the bad, and others in between. Was it difficult to share such personal experiences? What prompted you to include your stories in the book?

Real stories are the most engaging. When we hear them, we can place ourselves within them and make application for our own lives. Hearing how someone else made it through a similar circumstance encourages us to persevere, too.

I wrote *UP and IN* to help people. What better way to do this than by sharing about my personal experiences? Here's an *UP and IN* quote: "Sharing a life experience, like a well-timed throw rope, can act as a lifeline for someone else who is cascading down similar waters." I believe that.

You have a gift for taking an ordinary occurrence or happening and turning it into a valuable lesson or story. How did you develop your gift for telling and writing such stories?

Thank you; you are very kind to say so. I have been told that I have a knack for using analogies to teach rich principles. I do have a heart for mentoring, and I tend to look at things from various angles as I seek to make application for my life or as an uplifting principle for others.

I think you will agree with me that gifts are received, meaning that they come from a giver. I'm not sure if I was born with this gift or not. Perhaps so, but I likely refined the skill by hearing other speakers, reading other authors' works, listening to lyrics to songs, and reading Scripture.

Jesus is considered the greatest communicator in part because He uses relevant parables to convey truths that push beyond the mind and into our hearts. Similarly, I once used the love story embedded in the larger story of the feud between the *Hatfields and McCoys* to resolve a strained business relationship with an important international client. The principle in the story, namely that one person from each side of the feud was willing to step forward and risk reconciliation, helped me to restore the business relationship, starting with my counterpart in the negotiation. The story was effective in bridging our two different languages and unique cultures and set the stage for a very positive and mutually beneficial long-term business relationship.

What one piece of advice would you give to someone who feels overwhelmed or down and wants to make a change?

Put your heart into it. The first step is moving from wanting to make a change to committing to change. You can't see the view from the summit unless you are willing to take the steps necessary to elevate yourself. Embrace the changes needed, believe in yourself and in your yet-to-be-discovered potential, and begin the necessary climb one step of faith at a time. With proper thinking, planning, pursuit, and perseverance, in time you will begin to see a better view.

Do you think most people are, or are not, living up to their potential? What do you think stands in the way of someone living up to his or her potential?

Regardless of their level of success, most people allow themselves to be restrained at least to some extent. Most people settle into a comfort zone.

Think about it. Do you intentionally, continually stretch yourself beyond the area where you are most comfortable? If you are an Olympic contender, you do. Consider these quotes that I share in *UP and IN*:

“Our comfort zone is the enemy of our best future.”

“Complacency is a disease of the mind that degrades opportunity and limits futures.”

“We learn faster and mature best when we are challenged with problems to solve.”

Perhaps the biggest obstacle that stands in the way of someone living up to his or her potential is simply believing the myth about our limited potential. It is crucial to get past the myth and here's how: The first essential step is to discard such erroneous thoughts. The second step is envisioning ourselves at a higher level. Then, with this view in mind, we begin the climb along the path that will eventually result in being there. Think about it. When people enroll in college, don't they usually have graduation day (someday in the future) already fixed in their mind's eye?

Discipline yourself to set meaningful goals, picture the end result, and then head towards that vision, one faithful step at a time.

Why do you think people fear or resist change? What piece of advice would you offer to the change-averse among us?

Change usually results in forcing us outside of our comfort zone. We tend to resist change because it's uncomfortable. We look upon change as a burden to avoid rather than as an opportunity to seek. Stretching your muscles is uncomfortable too, but it's necessary if you are going to grow taller or stronger.

Change is an invisible encourager like the hidden steps of an escalator raising us up to new levels. And when we take the necessary steps that allow change to push us to new heights, we ultimately discover the uplifting benefit. Then we can review our journey, see the progressive work of change within our lives, and draw encouragement from the experience.

This look back helps us to be more receptive to subsequent changes, impressing within us the lesson to embrace change as truly being for our good. Remember that each change in our lives serves as a prerequisite preparing us for our next adventure.

What is next for you? Do you have other books in the works?

Appropriately enough, change is what is next! The upcoming release of the book is bringing about change in my life. Within the next month, I have three speaking engagements, and I suspect that more will follow soon.

I am excited to share that I actually do have another book in the works, scheduled for release November 5, 2013. The title of the book is *Visibly Struck*, and it is a novel based on the true experiences of George Washington.