

**MICHAEL CARTWRIGHT**

WITH KEN ABRAHAM

# BELIEVABLE HOPE

*FIVE ESSENTIAL  
ELEMENTS*

*TO BEAT ANY ADDICTION*



**CREATE THE LIFE YOU LOVE**





## Hitting Bottom

Every week, I meet someone who says, “Michael, you don’t understand. You’re a successful businessman with a great family and a wonderful life. You can’t possibly understand what I’m going through. I’m depressed. I drink too much. I can’t shake the drugs. I’m trapped in a negative life. You don’t realize how tough it is for me to overcome my compulsive behavior.”

Oh? Really? As an eighteen-year-old, I had gotten so delusional that one day I pulled my car into Nashville’s West End Catholic Church parking lot, and with the car in “park,” I simply sat there with my foot on the accelerator, afraid to let up on the pedal because I was convinced that if I did, a bomb would explode in the car. For a long time, I sat there with the engine revved, the throttle fully open, the car roaring loudly in the parking lot.

Finally, I mustered the courage to open the door and dive out of the vehicle. The engine immediately calmed to a quiet purr, and much

to my surprise, the car did not blow up. I picked myself up off the pavement and stumbled toward the closest doors of the church. Once inside I found a priest and told him my story. He arranged for me to be seen by a doctor in Parthenon Pavilion Hospital, where the doctors diagnosed me with paranoid schizophrenia. I spent two weeks in the hospital. I left with a batch of prescriptions, but nothing else in my life had substantially changed.

Two years later, I broke again, this time in Florida. For a while, I had stayed off drugs and alcohol and had joined the military. When I entered the service, I checked off “No” on the form asking if I had any history of mental illness. I’m sorry now, but lying came all too naturally to me in those days. I had attended a military high school and was in good physical condition, so I doubt that anyone even checked into the details of my previous hospitalization. Later, I would be diagnosed with cyclic psychosis, a rare malady that mimics schizophrenia. My father suffered from a similar disease, as did my grandfather. Both men served their country well and had outstanding military careers, although they too found themselves in hospitals on more than one occasion, needing anti-psychotic medications simply to bring them back to their base lines. Perhaps because of their experience, I felt no qualms in signing up for the military.

I did well for about three months, and was preparing to attend Navy SEALs school, but then I became delusional and paranoid and had a psychotic break again. I felt as though I was in a scary movie, or a Vincent Van Gogh painting; the walls were melting, people were talking about killing me. Everywhere I looked, people were out there trying to get me. I was catatonic; I couldn’t speak.

I was admitted to a psychiatric hospital in Orlando, and remained there for five straight months. I was in despair. Totally frayed and fraz-

zled, I had suffered a psychotic break in which I felt as though somebody had poured battery acid over my brain. Exacerbating matters further, I was terrified because I couldn't control my body's responses.

The psychiatrists ordered a variety of heavy-duty medications designed to reduce my anxiety, but I was so delusional I refused to take the medicine, because I was convinced that the drugs were poison. When my mom and a girlfriend finally convinced me to try the medication, rather than causing me to feel better, I felt worse. Now, I realized that I had been living in delusion for months. *This is hell*, I thought. I had no desire to get out of bed; I couldn't handle a menial job such as washing dishes at a restaurant or mowing lawns. I couldn't sit in a classroom or think clearly enough to take a class in school. The teacher's voice got garbled among the various other voices I was hearing, taunting me, talking to me and about me. I couldn't think, my words came out as gibberish. I didn't want to live like this.

I wanted to die.

When the doctors discharged me after five months, I walked out of the hospital with a stack of prescriptions, still feeling depressed and despondent, and still on heavy doses of antipsychotic medications.

## Go Pull Some Weeds

I went back home to Nashville. As always, one of the first people I wanted to see was Grandmother Cartwright. We sat down together in her living room, and I tried to explain to her what had happened to me over the past five or six months and how miserable I still felt. Grandmother listened to my sad story empathetically, and she commiserated with me, but she wasn't about to let me wallow in my own poop.

"Michael," Grandma paused to make sure she had my full attention, then continued. "Everybody has *something*, some struggle, some

trauma, some issue with which they have to deal.” She looked deeply into my eyes. “It’s how you deal with that something that makes you who you are.”

“But Grandmother, what am I going to do? I’d have a hard time getting a job or making it through college. I don’t have anything going for myself.”

“Well, honey, at least you have your legs. You have your sight. Let’s get out a sheet of paper and list all the positives, all the good things you still have in life.”

“Grandmother!” I said, the exasperation in my voice all too evident. “I’m hearing things. The medication I’m taking makes me feel so zonked out, I can hardly keep my eyes open. I’m depressed over everything that has happened. My whole world has crashed down around me. I thought I was going to become a Navy SEAL and now that dream has gone away, too, and you want me to list all the *positives* in my life? What positives? I’m sorry. I can’t seem to find any.”

“Oh, of course you can, Michael. Let’s write them all down.” She reached in a desk and pulled out a yellow tablet pad. “Let’s think about it. You still can see. Here, write this down, ‘I still have my sight.’” She handed the tablet and a pen to me.

I knew it was useless to argue with Grandmother, and I respected her too much to complain, so I dutifully took the pen and wrote, “I can see,” on the tablet.

“Good!” Grandmother gushed as though we’d just won the Publishers Clearinghouse Sweepstakes. “Now, what else are you grateful for?”

“I can walk. I still have my legs,” I said.

“That’s right. Yes, indeed. That’s at least two things that you can be thankful for. Write that down.”

I scribbled the words on the pad.

“What else?” Grandmother prompted.

“I still have you to help me.”

“Oh, yes. That’s a very good one. Put that down on paper.”

We continued like that for a half hour or more. Every time I got stymied, Grandmother interjected something else for which I could give thanks. After a while she said, “You just need to go pull some weeds. Come on outside and help me. Get your eyes off yourself for a while, do some hard work, and you’ll feel much better.” I reluctantly went outside and helped Grandma pull the weeds out of her flower garden. I totally missed the point that in reality I was pulling weeds out of my own life. But that day was the beginning of a major turnaround in my life.

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Grandmother gave me a book to read, *The Power of Positive Thinking*, and I was captivated by the stories. The pages were filled with simple stories of ordinary people who had found real purpose in their lives, healing for their pains, freedom from their self-imposed constraints, and a new outlook on the future. Inside, my heart pounded with excitement as I said to myself, *Yes! That is what I want.*

Believe you can, and you can. Belief is one of the most powerful of problem dissolvers. When you believe that a difficulty can be overcome, you are more than halfway to victory over it already.

—Norman Vincent Peale

I wish I could say that I took Grandma's advice to heart and my life was instantly transformed. But true transformation usually doesn't work that way, and unfortunately, before long, I slipped right back into the same patterns. By the time I began contemplating changing my lifestyle, I had been in several psychiatric hospitals. I had mental illness as well as alcohol and drug problems. Everything about my life looked as though I would end up in jail, a drug addict or an alcoholic, or a hopeless, homeless bum, living on the streets. I was going for broke—and I almost made it.

## A Fresh Start

It doesn't take a lot to develop believable hope—the absolutely essential, critically necessary belief that you can actually make a fresh start—but it must come from somewhere, and it usually requires a source outside yourself. I had one person who was dropping positive autosuggestions into my mind: *You are a good person. You can have a good life.* That person was Grandmother Cartwright.

I never forgot the things that she poured into me, but I regret that I fooled around and wasted so much time before taking her words to heart. When the light finally came on for me, I was nearly twenty-four years old. I was lying in bed after an all-night bender when a voice in my mind said, "You are better than this. Your life is worth more than drowning in alcohol and drugs."

My mind was racing, my heart pounding. I sensed that I was at a crossroads. "Please, God. I'll do anything," I prayed.

A thought formulated in my mind, and something seemed to say to me, "Go to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting." I took that as an answer to my prayer.

I searched out the location of an Alcoholics Anonymous group,



and the very next day I went to my first AA meeting. For more than ninety days, I attended at least one meeting and sometimes two every single day. That might not have happened had my grandmother not instilled within me a believable hope that I could change. From that first AA meeting to today, I've not had another drink or used any form of illegal drugs.

### **Believable Hope, the Critical Element**

You must have believable hope that transformation is possible. But what is *believable hope*, and how can you find it?

Believable hope, in contrast to mere positive affirmations espoused by motivational speakers, preachers, and politicians, is based on evidence that change has been experienced by others in conditions similar to yours and is absolutely possible for you. It helps to have some positive role models, mentors, or sponsors, or some reason to believe that you can actually change.

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**Where can you find believable hope in your life,  
or in the lives of people you are trying to help?**

**How can you develop believable hope (or help someone  
else to develop it) if you don't already have it?**

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Reading books about it, attending seminars, viewing and listening to audio/video materials, talking with others who have overcome life challenges—all of these are helpful. One of the most effective means of developing believable hope is to enroll in a residential program

where you can immerse yourself in a new mindset. Sometimes simply knowing that somebody believes in you provides the believable hope that you can be better.

The first step to becoming is to will it.

—Mother Teresa

Many people discover believable hope when they seek help from a Higher Power, a power greater than themselves. That's what happened to Tony Newman.

When Tony first showed up at our treatment center, wanting to help serve addicts and alcoholics by driving our van transporting patients, I had no idea that he was one of the world's premier musicians. He was also a former drug addict and alcoholic who nearly destroyed himself.

Tony grew up in London with alcoholic parents, so it wasn't surprising that he began drinking by the time he was thirteen years of age. He began playing drums about the same time. Playing in the band represented freedom to the teenager, and alcohol represented acceptance with his bandmates. He turned professional around age seventeen, and by that time he was full-fledged alcoholic. Every time he drank, he got drunk, but because he was so talented, despite his drinking, he was able to get good jobs.

Hanging out with musicians, one of the band members said, "Let's go down to the pub."

That seemed like a good idea to Tony. "What do you drink?" the young musician asked when they arrived.

"We drink Dairy Maid." The beer bottle label displayed a young woman milking a cow. The implied message was that drinking beer

was as safe as drinking milk. Safe or not, Tony got smashed.

To his alcohol consumption, Tony added a form of speed that “felt almost like two thousand beers.” He quickly found that he could not take speed and play drums well. Nor could he play drunk. As the quintessential professional with a goal of being the world’s best and fastest drummer, it embarrassed Tony so much that he played poorly when he drank, he adjusted his drinking patterns. He did the first show, then had two or three beers, but would not get drunk. Then following the second show, he would get plastered.

In the early 1960s, Tony was playing with the iconic Little Richard when he met a rising band from Liverpool known as the Beatles. By 1963, Tony was flying high, literally. He was playing with some of the premier music groups in the world, but spent most of his earnings on alcohol.

In the mid-’60s, Tony played with a band known as Sounds Incorporated, touring with the Beatles. Most musicians at least tried to straighten up when they came home off the road, but not Tony. For him, life was truly consumed by sex, drugs, and rock and roll. He was never fully present with his wife and young son.

Never did anyone attempt to help Tony deal with his drinking and drugging. In 1969, Jeff Beck called Tony to play for him. Tony performed at Woodstock and hung out with some of the most famous rock musicians of his day, many of whom were stoned; heroin and cocaine were the drugs of choice that weekend.

The drinking continued, as Tony wrecked one sports car after another. In three successive weekends, he crashed three priceless vehicles. He rationalized that it was simply a streak of bad luck. Tony recalls, “I didn’t get in trouble every time I drank, but every time I got in trouble, I was drunk or high.”

In 1976, Tony played a live concert with David Bowie in Philadelphia. The record company was recording the concert, but that didn't prevent Tony from stuffing his nose with cocaine prior to going on stage. Tony recalls, "I couldn't possibly pack any more cocaine into my nose. It was blocked solid. I didn't know where I was, and could hardly find the stage. *Where am I?* My mind was flying in several directions at once. I felt like I was in a round-about with five different exits and I couldn't tell which one to take."

Years later, Bowie rereleased the album digitally. They remixed the recording and David cleaned up some of the vocals and guitars, but he left Tony's drums totally intact.

David asked Tony to come back and work with him and write some songs. Tony was so out of it, he gave Bowie a list of demands including a steep daily rate as well as transportation by means of a private jet and all sorts of foolish perks. Essentially, Tony turned Bowie down because it would interfere with his drinking and drugging.

The downward spiral in Tony's life continued in 1978 when he moved to Nashville. By that time he had left his wife and kids, and had actually attempted getting clean, to no avail. He played with various groups and in studio recordings on numerous hit records, but he was lethargic and didn't want to work. All he wanted to do was drink and do drugs; worse yet, he was beginning to become shaky and had the DTs. He was at war with everyone, and most of all, he was at war with himself.

He had been playing with rock groups and punk rock groups in England, but in Music City, he took a job with country artist Crystal Gayle. The style of music had no calming influence on Tony. He was out of control, drinking, drugging, getting naked on airplanes, and acting out in every outlandish way anyone suggested. Tony was

obsessed with always getting more—more of sex, drugs, and alcohol—but found he was receiving less and less satisfaction from his indulgence. He tried drinking just enough to keep himself leveled out, but it never worked that way. A girlfriend took Tony to a twelve-step meeting. Tony and the woman left the meeting and went out and got drunk.

One night at a bar, the bartender told a friend of Tony's, "That Tony Newman. He's not going to be with us much longer."

Not long after that, Tony whipped his young son with an equestrian riding stick. When he realized what he had done, the horror of his actions brought Tony to his knees. Tony Newman was ready to change. *This has got to stop*, Tony told himself.

But not before he had one more binge.

Tony and a friend holed up in a Nashville hotel, drinking and using drugs for days, so much so that they were spitting up blood. "I can't do this anymore," Tony said. Tony's friend drove him to a local rehabilitation center, where Tony checked in and began the detoxification process. He joined the twelve-step program at the center.

One day, Tony's counselors told him to go outside and pray to a loving, Higher Power and ask for help. Tony did. He went outside, looked up, and admitted, "I'm powerless over alcohol. My life is totally unmanageable. Please help me." The keys to sobriety were his willingness to ask for help and his willingness to change.

"Give me all your burdens," Tony sensed the Higher Power speaking to him. So Tony did. He prayed in almost childlike faith, "Help." That simple prayer provided Tony the believable hope he needed to stop drinking and doing drugs. Within two weeks, Tony was free of the drugs and alcohol that had ruled his life for decades. All of his crutches were gone.

Now he had to learn how to live clean. He discovered that getting sober involved more than merely laying down the drugs and alcohol. He had to get sober sexually; he had to get sober financially; he had to get sober emotionally with his family members, especially his wife.

The next thirty days were difficult, but Tony refused to drink or do drugs. His maintenance plan was simple. He asked for help. He has done the same thing every morning since—he has simply asked for help. Today, Tony has been clean and sober for more than twenty-eight years. He changed people, places, and things, especially his obsession with drugs, alcohol, and sex. “As the counselors told me,” Tony quips, “There’s a slip under every skirt.”

Once he left the treatment facility, Tony found it was important to be willing to separate himself from people, places, or things that might pull him back toward a life of drugs and alcohol. Because of his diligence, Tony has never had a relapse. He is committed to not drinking or using drugs. “I choose to ask for help every morning,” Tony says. “I use deep breathing exercises and prayer when I feel myself getting anxious. I take five or ten deep breaths, breathing and praying, and it helps me to refocus my mind on what I want, rather than what I don’t want.”

Tony readily acknowledges that by calling out to a loving Higher Power, he found the believable hope he needed to make lasting positive changes in his life. Today, Tony is married to a master’s-level clinician who runs a major rehabilitation center. Tony works as a house manager at a treatment facility in Las Vegas. He still plays drums, and his children are carrying on his legacy as a world-class drummer.

“I’ve made amends as best I can,” Tony admits, “so I don’t live in the past. I can’t change the insane things I have done. I can only make good choices in the future.”

God enters by a private door into each individual.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Tim Sanders, the former chief solutions officer at Yahoo!, and currently the CEO of Net Minds, is the author of the book *Love Is the Killer App*. Tim says, “My faith in God has given me incredible resiliency. When you have faith in a Higher Power, you cannot, *will* not fail.”<sup>1</sup> I agree.

Discovering believable hope motivates a person to reach out and help someone else. In fact, since substance abusers, alcoholics, and people who are prone to life-controlling issues are notoriously self-absorbed, it is a good sign that you are on the right path when you sense the desire within you to help someone facing a battle you have already encountered.

I was pleasantly surprised one day when I saw Oscar- and Emmy Award-winning movie star Sir Anthony Hopkins show up as a volunteer at one of our treatment centers, willing to mentor other men who were in a recovery program struggling with alcoholism. Tony Hopkins understood their dilemma well.

He described his own battle with the bottle in terms closely akin to some of the exorcisms the celebrated actor has conducted on the big screen—the difference being, Anthony’s demons were real. In recounting his drinking problem, he confessed, “It was like being possessed by a demon, an addiction, and I could not stop.”

In his desperation, Anthony asked for help, and a woman told him to trust in God. Although he considered himself an atheist at that time, Anthony Hopkins humbled himself. “I said, ‘Well, why not?’” the actor told CNN’s Piers Morgan in an interview.

“I was hell bent on destruction. And I just asked for a little bit of help, and suddenly, pow! It was just like, bingo,” the actor recalled. To date, Sir Anthony has been sober for more than thirty-five years, thanks to discovering help from Above. Besides expertly portraying fascinating characters in movies, Anthony Hopkins often volunteers to help others fighting the demons of alcoholism and addictions.

“It was such a quantum leap, from this to that,” Hopkins acknowledged.<sup>2</sup> That is believable hope.

## The Powerful Influence of a Mentor

Believable hope is the essential foundation upon which positive change can be built, and one of the best ways to groom believable hope is by finding and emulating a mentor. A mentor’s experience often can provide a positive frame of reference. A good mentor will cause you to say, “If that person can change, so can I.” Being surrounded by people who have made the same sort of positive changes that you desire, and who will encourage you to do something similar, is invaluable in producing believable hope. You have to truly believe that you not only *can* change, but you *will*.

Testimony in church can inspire you to have faith. The value of sponsors in Alcoholics Anonymous is similar; the support systems of the most successful weight-loss programs all incorporate the power of personal examples. On the other hand, those who have never seen people who have achieved their goals have more difficulty believing it is possible.

Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence.

—Helen Keller



## **It Can't Be Done . . . Until You Believe It Can Be Done**

For years, nobody in the world of track and field thought it humanly possible to run a mile in less than four minutes. Nobody, that is, until Roger Bannister, a twenty-five-year-old British medical student, did it. Once Bannister broke the four-minute barrier, the number of runners who have accomplished that goal has soared. What changed?

Nothing, except the runners now had believable hope that a four-minute mile was possible.

You need some frame of reference to foster belief. Think about it: Prior to July 1969, many people did not believe it was possible to travel to the moon. But once Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin landed on the Sea of Tranquility, stepped out and kicked up some moon dust, and planted an American flag on the surface, every little boy and girl in the United States knew that it was possible to travel to the moon and beyond.

Why is *The Biggest Loser* television program so inspiring? Because we can see heavily overweight people on television losing weight in a progressive manner, going from 500 pounds to 200 pounds. Something within us says, "If he did it, I can do it, too." Suddenly, you have a frame of reference that gives you hope. You have to believe that you can get up out of the gutter, that you can go from sick and homeless to healthy and prosperous.

If you don't have believable hope, you won't have a tangible target at which to aim. You won't know where you are going, or what the goal is, and even if you do, you won't believe the goal is achievable. For a goal to become a reality, you must believe that you can accomplish it. Or you never will.

In the process of developing believable hope, beware of setting unrealistic goals. Some people want to lose fifty pounds in a week, and that simply isn't going to happen. The change has to be incremental, with a workable plan and progressive results, to become permanent.

If my grandmother hadn't have been a stabilizing force in my life, I may not have believed a stable life was possible. Had I not known some friends whose parents were wealthy, I may not have imagined that it was possible for a guy like me to have anything other than a meager existence. But armed with the knowledge that a meaningful life was possible, I wanted it.

Alcoholics Anonymous encourages getting a sponsor because it helps to be around someone who has done what you hope to do. The same is true with weight loss. If you hope to lose weight, get around people who have lost weight and figure out what they did to accomplish their goals. Allow their experience to build believable hope within you. When I wanted to lose a significant amount of weight, my friends Darren and Dan gave me the believable hope I needed. Darren had once been an overweight kid, just like me, but he had lost the weight, and that inspired me to believe that I could slim down as well. My friend Dan confronted me about being overweight, and was a constant encouragement to me. Because of them, I recognized my problem and took steps to overcome it.



