

DON'T THINK

An Excerpt from

RELENTLESS: From Good to Great to Unstoppable

It was 10:00 p.m. when the black Suburban pulled up to the security gates of Attack Athletics, my training facility on the West Side of Chicago. Not unusual. Pro athletes would show up at all hours to the place where Michael Jordan, Kobe Bryant, and Dwyane Wade had permanent lockers, where countless superstars would work out or play ball or just hang out with other guys who got it.

On this particular night, though, only one guy is in the gym, and no one else knows he's there. Not his team, not the media, not his family. His teammates are in a hotel two thousand miles away; reporters are blowing up his phone with calls and texts.

And it's the middle of the NBA playoffs, with less than seventy-two hours until he has to be back on the court.

The night before, the whole world watched him limp off the floor in pain. Now everyone wants to know the story. Is he okay? Can he play? "I'm fine," he said at the postgame press conference. "He's fine," said the coach, who has no idea where his star is tonight. "We'll get him some treatment and he'll be good to go," said the GM, who already knows the player won't go near the team's training staff.

Finally, when he's alone in the privacy of his room at the team's hotel, he makes one call, to the confidential number saved in the phones of countless athletes around the world.

"Need some help," he says.

"How soon can you get here?" I answer.

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Getting to me without anyone knowing is the easy part when you're an elite athlete: call for a plane, grab your security guy, and go, confidentiality guaranteed. Typically, the hard part comes when you arrive, whether you're in need of emergency intervention or a long-term program or a psychological kick in the ass. Some guys arrive thinking they're going to fill out paperwork and stretch a little, and within the first hour they've sweated through three T-shirts and they're puking in a trash can.

But that night, the player and I knew the real issue wasn't physical; it's the end of the season, everyone has injuries. I'm not going to fix anything major in a few hours, and the team's training staff could have handled the usual aches and pains. Let's be honest: You don't secretly charter a plane and fly two thousand miles to get iced and taped. We can adapt around the limitation—here's how you adjust your shot, push off this way, land that way, do this before the game, do that at halftime, get something done to the shoes. Ignore the pain for now. You're going to be uncomfortable, get used to it. Lay out the whole script, leaving nothing to chance; if he follows the plan, he'll be physically ready to play. Or as ready as he can be.

But mentally, that's another story...and that's why he made the call to me. He's listening to all the talk about whether he'll be ready to go, whether he can get the job done, whether he's lost a few steps. And now he's not even sure himself.

The pressure is getting to him. External pressure that distracts and derails, not the internal pressure that can drive you to overcome anything.

And instead of shutting it all out and trusting his instincts and natural ability, he's thinking.

He flew two thousand miles to hear these two words: *Don't think.*

You already know what you have to do, and you know how to do it.

What's stopping you?

To be the best, whether in sports or business or any other aspect of life, it's never enough to just get to the top; you have to stay there, and then you have to climb higher, because there's always someone right behind you trying to catch up. Most people are willing to settle for "good enough." But if you want to be unstoppable, those words mean nothing to you. Being the best means engineering your life so you never stop until you get what you want, and then you keep going until you get what's next. And then you go for even more.

Relentless.

If that describes you, this book is your life story. You're what I call a Cleaner, the most intense and driven competitor imaginable. You refuse limitations. You quietly and forcefully do whatever it takes to get what you want. You understand the insatiable addiction to success; it defines your entire life.

If that doesn't describe you yet, congratulations: You are on a life-changing journey to discover the power you already possess.

This isn't about motivation. If you're reading this book, you're already motivated. Now you have to turn that into action and results. You can read clever motivational slogans all day and still have no idea how to get where you want to be. Wanting something won't get you anywhere. Trying to be someone you're not won't get you anywhere. Waiting for someone or something to light your fire won't get you anywhere.

So how are you going to get there?

Believe this: Everything you need to be great is already inside you. All your ambitions and secrets, your darkest dreams...they're waiting for you to just let go.

What's stopping you?

Most people give up because everyone has told them what they can't do, and it's easier to stay safe in the comfort zone. So they sit on the fence, unable to decide, unable to act.

But if you don't make a choice, the choice will be made for you. It's time to stop listening to what everyone else says about you, telling you what to do, how to act, how you should feel. Let them judge you by your results, and nothing else; it's none of their business how you get where you're going. If you're relentless, there is no halfway, no could or should or maybe. Don't tell me the glass is half full or half empty; you either have something in that glass or you don't.

Decide. Commit. Act. Succeed. Repeat.

Everything in this book is about raising your standard of excellence, going beyond what you already know and think, beyond what anyone has tried to teach you. Kobe says he wants six rings? I want him to have seven. A guy tells me he wants to come back from an injury in ten weeks? I'll get him there in eight. You want to drop thirty pounds? You'll drop thirty-four. That's how you become unstoppable—by placing no limits on yourself. Not just in sports, but in everything you do. I want you to want more and get everything you crave.

I don't care how good you think you are, or how great others think you are—you can improve, and you will. Being relentless means demanding more of yourself than anyone else could ever demand of you, knowing that every time you stop, you can still do more. You must do more.

The minute your mind thinks, "Done," your instincts say, "Next."

What you won't find in this book is a lot of garbage about "passion" and "inner drive." I don't have any feel-good strategies for dreamers who love to talk about "thinking outside the box." There is no box. I'm going to show you

how to stop thinking about how you're going to think, and do something instead.

In these pages, you'll hear a lot about champions such as Michael Jordan and Kobe Bryant and Dwyane Wade, and many other successful people in and out of sports. But this isn't a basketball book, and I'm not going to tell you how to be the next Michael Jordan. No one will ever be Michael Jordan, and Kobe and Dwyane will be the first to agree. Will you ever play basketball like any of those guys? Probably not. Can you learn from their work ethic and relentless drive and uncompromising focus on their goals? Absolutely. Can you improve your chances of success by learning about others who succeeded, and those who didn't? Of course.

Success isn't the same as talent. The world is full of incredibly talented people who never succeed at anything. They show up, do what they do, and if it doesn't work out, they blame everyone else because they believe talent should be enough. It's not. If you want to be truly successful, you can't be content with "pretty good." You need to find an extra gear.

Look, I'm not a psychologist or a psychiatrist or a social worker. I didn't sit in a classroom for decades doing studies and collecting data to analyze and writing papers on the theories of excellence and elite performance. But I guarantee you that everything I know, everything in this book, comes from unlimited access to some of the most excellent and elite performers in the world; I understand how they think, how they learn, how they succeed and fail...what drives them to be relentless. It's not all pretty, but it's all true. Everything I've learned from them, everything I teach them, I'm sharing with you here. It's not science. It's raw animal instinct.

This book is about following those instincts, facing the truth, and getting rid of the excuses that stand between you and your goals, no matter how complex and unattainable they may seem, no matter how many people tell you it can't be done. It *can* be done.

Here's the key: I'm not going to tell you how to change. People don't change. I want you to trust who you already are, and get to that zone where you can shut out all the noise, all the negativity and fear and distractions and lies, and achieve whatever you want, in whatever you do.

To get you there, I'm going to talk about some provocative topics, and you'll get no apologies from me if that makes you uncomfortable. Success is about dealing with reality, facing your demons and addictions, and not putting a smiley face on everything you do. If you need a pat on the back and a "Good job!" to get your ass off the couch, this is not the book for you. Because if you want to be unstoppable, you have to face who you really are and make it work

for you, not against you. Truly relentless people, the Cleaners—are predators, with dark sides that refuse to be taught to be good. And whether you know it or not, you *do* have a dark side. Use it well and it can be your greatest gift.

If you're aiming to be the best at what you do, you can't worry about whether your actions will upset other people, or what they'll think of you. We're taking all the emotion out of this, and doing whatever it takes to get to where you want to be. Selfish? Probably. Egocentric? Definitely. If that's a problem for you, read the book and see if you feel differently afterward.

From this point, your strategy is to make everyone else get on your level; you're not going down to theirs. You're not competing with anyone else, ever again. They're going to have to compete with you. From now on, the end result is all that matters.

In the case of my late-night visitor, he had lost his connection to that end result. He was so distracted by his fear of losing that he couldn't focus on what he had to do to win, couldn't stem the wave of frustration and emotion that was drowning all his natural ability and confidence. His negativity on the court was evident; he was rolling his eyes at his teammates and coaches, grimacing as if he were dying out there. His teammates began to see that, and suddenly they were like troops marching into battle without their leader, completely shutting down. That's how great teams lose: The leader doesn't show up. It happens in business every day, when the boss shows his frustration in meetings or snaps at his employees. He's not confident, he's not cool, he's not on his game, and it comes out in little ways he might think no one else perceives. But you can be sure everyone picks up on it and panics.

How do you prevent that panic from turning into a total collapse? Sometimes you need to step away and get back to that calm, cool place where you're in total control. Could my player have called me to fly to wherever he was? Sure, that happens every season with different guys. They know if they need me, I'm there. But in this case, the player knew he needed space, and he was willing to risk the consequences if he got caught leaving the team. He knew it was on him to

get back in the zone, that deeply personal space where you can quiet your mind until you have no thoughts; it's just you and your instincts, focused and unemotional. Where you feel no external pressure, just the internal pressure to prove yourself, over and over, because you want it for yourself, not anyone else.

"Forget about losing," I tell him, looking for that "click" behind the eyes when you know the guy gets it. "Forget about trying, because if you're just trying, then losing is still an option. You want to be the best? Then you ignore

the pain and the exhaustion and the pressure to please everyone else. You don't let your enemies take your balls, you don't let them set up shop in your head. When all hell breaks loose on the outside, you barely notice; you're calm on the inside because you're ready, prepared, and the best at what you do. You don't tell anyone how you're going to handle the situation, you just handle it. Everyone else is panicking and choking, and you say, 'No problem.' You step on the other guy's throat, and you finish the fight.

"And afterward you don't explain how you did it. They won't understand, and they don't have to. Just take a moment alone to recognize what you accomplished, and move on to the next challenge."

By now it's early morning; his plane is waiting to take him back. "Finish it," I say again. Click. He gets it. Time to go.

He turns to his security guy and says, "We've just been to Oz."

Relentless is about achieving the impossible. I know for a fact that anyone can do it. When I was still in high school, just a five-eleven basketball player in Chicago, I was watching a North Carolina game on television and saw Michael Jordan for the first time. He was a skinny freshman with moves I had never seen, completely instinctive and natural; he just knew what to do out there without even thinking about it. I didn't know anything about him, but I knew this kid was going to be a superstar.

Several years later, I had a master's degree in exercise science and was working as a trainer at a Chicago health club, and Michael was still skinny, but now he was a superstar with the Chicago Bulls. I had contacted the Bulls numerous times in the 1980s when I became a trainer, hoping for a shot at working with any of the players. I wrote letters to every player *except* Michael because I figured if he wanted a trainer, he would already have one, and it wouldn't be a guy like me who was just getting started. No one was interested. At that time, basketball players still weren't into weight training; the old-school belief was that a bulky upper body would mess up your shot.

Then in 1989, I saw a small newspaper story about how Michael was sick of being outmuscled by the world champion Detroit Pistons and the rest of the league. Once again I contacted the Bulls and talked my way into a meeting with the team doctor, John Hefferon, and the head athletic trainer, Mark Pfeil. What were the chances they would advise their superstar player to work with this unknown trainer who had never trained a professional athlete? None, everyone said. Forget it. Impossible.

Of course, everything is impossible until someone does it. Michael had worked with a trainer once, injured his back during the workout, and was hesitant about trying again. Yet he also instinctively knew it wasn't enough to have the greatest basketball skills in the history of the game. If he wanted to be more than a legend, if he was truly going to become an icon, he would also need to take his body to the ultimate level, and he was willing to do whatever was necessary to make that happen. So he told John and Mark to find someone who understood exactly what he needed.

A few days after my first meeting with the Bulls, they called me to meet again at their suburban practice facility. I figured it was another interview with the training staff. I had no idea I was being taken to a meeting with Michael Jordan at his home.

Michael and I talked for an hour, and I laid out the whole plan, showing him how we would slowly make him stronger and minimize the risk of injury, explaining how every physical change would affect his shot and how we would make adjustments along the way, getting his whole body working in balance for maximum peak performance, and probably extending his career.

He listened closely to everything I had to say before he responded.

Not possible, he finally said. It's too good. It just doesn't sound right.

It's right, I told him: "I'll give you a thirty-day schedule detailing exactly what we're going to do, how it's going to affect your body, your game, your overall strength. I'll tell you how you're going to feel so you can adjust to the changes we're going to make. We'll plan what you'll eat, when you'll eat it, when you'll sleep. We'll look at every detail, leaving nothing to chance. You'll see how everything works together."

He gave me thirty days.

I stayed for fifteen years.

When he finally retired, he said, "If I ever see you in my neighborhood again, I'm going to shoot you."

We learned from each other. We never saw obstacles or problems, we only saw situations in need of solutions. And since there had never been a player like Michael Jordan, we encountered a lot of situations without known solutions. We learned, we made mistakes, we learned from our mistakes. We kept learning.

Michael wasn't the best because he could fly through the air and make impossible shots; he was the best because he was relentless about winning, relentless in his belief that there's no such thing as "good enough." No matter how many times he won, no matter how great he became, he always wanted

more, and he was always willing to do whatever it took—and then some—to get it.

For more than two decades, those values have been the cornerstone of all my work with hundreds of athletes, and now they are the cornerstone of this book. *Relentless* is about never being satisfied, always driving to be the best, and then getting even better. It's about finding the gear that gets you to the next level...even when the next level doesn't yet exist. It's about facing your fears, getting rid of the poisons that guarantee you will fail. Being feared and respected for your mental strength and toughness, not just your physical abilities.

Whatever's in your glass, empty it right now, and let me refill it from scratch. Forget what you thought, what you believed, whatever opinions you have...we start over right now. Empty glass. Those last few drops are the mental barriers that will prevent you from being better. We're going somewhere completely new.