

# The Elephant and the Twig

*The Art of Positive Thinking*

14 Golden Rules to Success and Happiness



Geoff Thompson

author of *Watch My Back* and *Fear*

summersdale self help

Copyright © Geoff Thompson 2000

Reprinted 2000

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced by any means,  
nor transmitted, nor translated into a machine language  
without the written permission of the publisher.

Summersdale Publishers Ltd  
46 West Street  
Chichester  
West Sussex  
PO19 1RP  
UK

[www.summersdale.com](http://www.summersdale.com)

[www.geoffthompson.com](http://www.geoffthompson.com)

Printed and bound in Great Britain.

ISBN 1 84024 115 2

The author would like to thank Summersdale Publishers Ltd for quotes taken from their book *Help! I want to work for myself* ISBN 184024 064 4

Cartoons by John Smyth.

## **About the author**

Geoff Thompson has written over twenty published books and is known worldwide for his bestselling autobiography *Watch My Back*, about his nine years working as a nightclub doorman. He currently has a quarter of a million books in print. He holds the rank of 6<sup>th</sup> Dan black belt in Japanese karate, 1<sup>st</sup> Dan in Judo and is also qualified to senior instructor level in various other forms of wrestling and martial arts. He has several scripts for stage, screen and TV in development with Destiny Films.

He has published several articles for *GQ* magazine, and has also been featured in *FHM*, *Maxim*, *Arena*, *Front* and *Loaded* magazines, and appeared many times on mainstream TV.

Geoff is currently a contributing editor for *Men's Fitness* magazine.

## **Other books and videos by Geoff Thompson**

### *Books:*

Watch My Back

Real Grappling

Real Punching

Real Kicking

Real Head, Knees & Elbows

Dead Or Alive – Self-protection

Three Second Fighter – The Sniper Option

Weight Training – For the Martial Artist

Animal Day – Pressure Testing the Martial Arts

Small Wars – How to Live a Stress Free Life

The Formula – Spiritual Guidance

Fear – The Friend of Exceptional People

The Fence

The Art Of Fighting Without Fighting

The Ground Fighting Series (books and videos):

Vol. One – Pins, the Bedrock

Vol. Two – Escapes

Vol. Three – Chokes and Strangles

Vol. Four – Arm Bars and Joint Locks

Vol. Five – Fighting From Your Back

Vol. Six – Fighting From Neutral Knees

**Blue Blood on the Mat**

by Athol Oakley, Foreword by Geoff Thompson

*Videos:*

**Lessons with Geoff Thompson**

**Animal Day** – Pressure Testing the Martial Arts

**Animal Day Part Two** – The Fights

**Three Second Fighter** – The Sniper Option

**Throws and Take-Downs** Vols. 1–6

**Real Punching** Vols. 1–3

**The Fence**

**Advanced Ground Fighting** Vols. 1–3

**Pavement Arena Part One**

**Pavement Arena Part Two** – The Protection Pyramid

**Pavement Arena Part Three** – Grappling: The Last Resort

**Pavement Arena Part Four** – Fit To Fight

For a free colour brochure of Geoff Thompson products ring/fax 02476 431100  
or write to Geoff Thompson @ PO Box 307 Coventry, West Midlands CV3 2YP.

All men dream; but not equally.  
Those who dream by night  
in the dusty recesses of their mind  
wake in the day to find that it was vanity:  
But the dreamers of the day are dangerous men,  
for they may act their dreams with eyes wide open,  
to make it possible.

**TE Lawrence**  
**The Seven Pillars of Wisdom**

## – Contents –

Foreword, by John Smyth	8
Introduction	12
Rule One – We're all dying so now is the time to act	17
Rule Two – You are your own god	20
Rule Three – You are what you think	28
Rule Four – How to get the energy for the journey	42
Rule Five – The power is yours alone	67
Rule Six – If your mind is not right, change it for one that is	73
Rule Seven – You need a goal to shoot at	90
Rule Eight – It's tenacity that determines capacity	100
Rule Nine – Use your time	118
Rule Ten – Develop your talent!	124
Rule Eleven – The secret of necessity and growth	133
Rule Twelve – Integrity (the master rule)	149
Rule Thirteen – The hidden power of books	156
Rule Fourteen – Handling criticism	161
Epilogue	175

– **Foreword** –

by John Smyth

‘But I’m a cartoonist, not a writer!’ I bleated. At the end of the phone line I could feel rather than hear Geoff laughing to himself.

‘You’re articulate,’ he said, ‘you’ve written articles for magazines.’

I considered the brief scribblings that I’d put together for a rock music paper.

‘But, but...’ (I really did say ‘But, but...’ When I was a child I suffered with a very bad stammer. This had been largely cured by a sympathetic speech therapist, nevertheless sometimes in extremes it returns, and now seemed about the right time for it to do so again.) I was thinking, ‘Why doesn’t he get one of his heavyweight pals from the hallowed halls of Academe to do the job? Surely nowadays, when you need someone to puff your book you want someone with a bit of *gravitas* – a lettered professor, a judge, a captain of industry, a well-known retired gangster. Someone the public respects. Not a bloke that draws funny faces.’

And so...*The Elephant and the Twig*. This is a book that needed a bold man as its author. The premise is simple: ‘I, Geoff Thompson, am a very happy and successful person. You can be too.’ However well-intentioned and kindly meant, this sort of suggestion usually elicits a brief shocked silence followed by cries of outrage and horror. Who is this upstart who strides into the light of our campfire, beating his chest, proclaiming his success and happiness and frightening the horses? Those that have not yet recovered from surprise at the sheer vaunting cheek of the man, stare in silent amazement. Others, quicker to action, seek the sturdy branch of a nearby tree

## FOREWORD

and a length of stout rope. How dare this man, infuriatingly optimistic and irredeemably bald as he is, dare to say that his life is full of joy? What self-deluding and outrageous fantasy is he pursuing? And... 'We can all be happy too!' The man is obviously mad, a charlatan, a necromancer come to bind us with spells. (There is, of course, the possibility that he is a well-known and retired gangster and that his claims to success and happiness are therefore quite genuine, but this is unlikely.)

While the crowd leads the Thompson, still smiling infuriatingly, toward the scaffold, let's for a moment consider his ravings. Let him meet his maker with his foolish optimism, his baseless belief in his fellow man and woman, and most particularly, his horrid and seemingly unassailable belief in HIMSELF as ashes in his mouth. Hearsay must not be allowed to flourish.

What are the facts? Admittedly we live in what the Chinese describe in an ancient curse as 'interesting times'. There is a malaise in society. Truth is, many people feel impotent, alienated, believing that their contribution to the world is, and ever shall be, as nothing. Like the poet Keats, they think their epitaph will read: 'Here lies one whose name is writ in water.' (I think that Geoff would prefer the last words of Albert, the Prince Consort, who, upon breaking wind as he lay on his death bed, is said to have cried: 'As long as I can fart there's life in me yet!') Less poetic but certainly more optimistic.

We must concede the sad fact that legions feel trapped in dead-end jobs, unsatisfied, recriminating, bitter, quite literally wishing their lives away. Low self-esteem hides itself in racism, tribalism and general misanthropy. Few believe that any real contentment, let alone fulfilment, in their working lives is possible. How many people rise forlornly from their beds on a Monday morning dreading another week of the daily grind?

## THE ELEPHANT AND THE TWIG

Geoff Thompson believes that people have the power within themselves to break free of the work that is killing their hopes and dreams, and that they can be the persons that they wish to be. Once imbued with determination and confidence, they can become artists, writers, musicians, financial wizards, inventors, leaders of industry and nations. The reach of aspiration is limitless.

He also makes the case for satisfaction and real joy in humble but *committed* work that, although not especially financially rewarding, is of equal worth alongside the careers of the great and the good. Perhaps this work might be in caring for others or raising a family with love and wisdom. Even tasks, which to others might seem ostensibly mundane, can give to those that perform them with diligence and care, the deep satisfaction of a job well done.

The necromancer's 'secret' is that the ordinary man or woman can make themselves extraordinary – neither by genetics nor by any mysterious 'gift', neither by inheritance nor blind luck, but by an act of will. Central to Geoff's philosophy is that this power, this ability to recognise one's own potential is not itself a gift given by good fortune to a happy few, but is part of every person's make-up; part of everyone's birthright as surely as we are given a head, heart and eyes to see. Geoff's forte is in pointing out the ways in which this will to succeed can be nurtured and trained.

Despite considerable prowess in martial arts, in business and as a writer, Geoff unashamedly proclaims and indeed jealously defends his claim to be 'ordinary'. His contention is that success should be the natural lot of mankind. This is no false humility, as a brief anecdote will illustrate.

Geoff was engaged for a signing of his books at Foyles bookshop in London, possibly the most famous booksellers in the world. This was part of a major book-signing tour that Geoff and his wife Sharon had arranged right across the

## FOREWORD

country. To promote the events, Geoff asked me to paint a seven-foot high advertising sign that would travel with him. On the morning of the important promotion at Foyles, I phoned Geoff. Crucified with embarrassment, I confessed that on the advertising sign that had been couriered up to the venue that morning, incorporating a huge smiling picture of him, I had made an elementary spelling mistake. In similar (happily few) circumstances I have had clients curse me to seven generations and wish that a murrain fall upon my flocks, so I made the phone call with some trepidation.

'Don't worry,' said Geoff, 'if there's a dumb spelling mistake on my sign it'll just make people more certain that I'm an ordinary bloke who makes cock-ups just the same as they do. In fact, I may get a few in just to have a laugh at me and that'll be fine too.'

Geoff talked at length to a spellbound audience. He stressed his belief that violence is only the option of the last resort. He spoke of the value of spirituality, morality and positivity. He appealed to his listeners to train body and mind in tandem and to take joy in discovering the potential within themselves. His audience was receptive and enthusiastic and he sold a large number of books. Strangely enough, he spent a very substantial part of his time talking about other people's books, praising them and encouraging them to buy them (instead of his own books?). I turned to Sharon and said, 'He's flogging everyone else's books when he's supposed to be selling his own!'

She looked at me and smiled, 'He always does that,' she said.

## – Introduction –

Have you ever heard the story of the Elephant and the Twig? In India they train obedience in young elephants (to stop them from escaping) by tying them to a huge, immovable object, like a tree, when they are still very young. The tree is so large that no matter how hard the baby elephant pulls and tugs it cannot break free. This develops what is known as 'learned helplessness' in the creature. After trying so hard and for so long to break the hold, only to be thwarted time and again, it eventually believes that, no matter what it does, it cannot escape. Ultimately, as a fully-grown adult weighing several tons, they can tie it to a twig and it won't escape, in fact it won't even try.

Often in life we're the very same; if told enough times that we cannot escape mediocrity, or that we cannot escape our environment, then eventually that belief will become so strong, so real, that we, like the elephant, will believe it; it will become our truth. Subsequently, due to our limiting belief system, we tend to think small. When I worked in a factory my life revolved around getting paid on a Friday; my thoughts were no bigger than that. Mondays were such a dread that often my weekends were spoiled in anticipation of having to go back to the oil, the grime and the procrastination. This was my lot, though I always suspected there might be greener pastures, if I ever even thought about escaping I was held back by an invisible force-field, a huge immovable object, that seemed impossible to break through. It took me thirty years and many failed attempts to leave my nightmarish reality and live my dreams but when I finally did I realised that 'the immovable' was actually not immovable at all, it was just a twig and that I could break it whenever I wanted to. I escaped into the great and exciting unknown, away from bullying foremen and the shrill of spinning lathes, away from the life I

## INTRODUCTION

never wanted to lead. On my journey from the factory to freedom I learned fourteen golden rules that have helped my success and happiness to grow beyond measure. I'd like to share them with you in this book.

I'm amazed actually that it took me so long to realise that I could break the twig, because in retrospect I can see it was something I always knew, it was a belief that had been looking for crystallisation for some time, but my own fears refused to allow it form. It's almost as though it had been waiting for the right moment to manifest. Whenever my dreams threatened to come true I pulled back in alarm; the unfulfilled desire suddenly seemed a lot more reassuring than the real thing.

Once I did break the twig I realised that this is our world, we can have whatever we want, we can be whoever we want and do whatever it is that our hearts desire. If we don't want to turn a lathe, sweep a floor, deliver the milk or press keys on a supermarket till we don't have to. We are where we are through choice. The moment we decide to choose better will be the last moment we turn a lathe, and the first moment we start doing whatever it is we want to do with our very short lives.

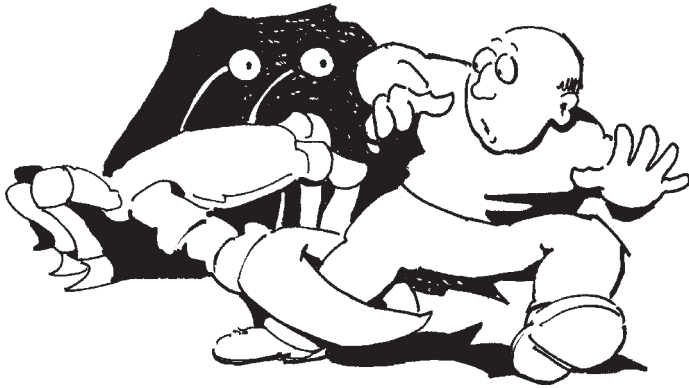
It is our thoughts that trap us – they make it so – but equally it is our thoughts that can set us free.

### **Catching Crabs**

I watched a documentary about how fishermen catch crabs (no! Not that kind). They use a mesh basket with a hole in the lid just big enough for the crabs to climb through. Once more than one crab has crawled into the basket the fishermen take the lid off; many of these gentle creatures of the sea climb in, but none climb out. Eventually the basket fills to the brim with crustaceans yet, despite the fact that there is no lid to keep them there, they still don't escape. Every time one tries to exit the cage the others pull him back again.

## THE ELEPHANT AND THE TWIG

I was amazed, aghast. It was the factory. It was the story of my life. Every time I'd ever tried to leave a bad job, to break away, my peers would do the exact same thing, they'd pull me back; 'What do you want to leave for? This is a steady job, this is a good number this, it's safe.' Or, 'You don't want to do that (whatever my new idea was), there's no security in that.' One day, tired of the same old narrative I replied to one of the old-timers, 'But I hate it here.'



*It was the factory*

'You haven't even given it a chance!' he scolded, 'you've only been here five minutes (I'd been there six years), this is a good number, jobs like this don't grow on trees.'

'So how long have you been here then?' I asked, suitably reprimanded.

The old guy thought for a second and said, 'Oh, about thirty years.'

'And what do you think of it?'

'It's crap,' he said without hesitation, 'I hate the place.'

Similarly when I told my (ex) wife that I wanted to leave a steady job (that word again) at the chemical factory she went white, her face looked like it'd been rolled in flour. 'But what will we do, what about the mortgage, what if it doesn't work out, what if...'

## INTRODUCTION

It only usually took a few 'what if's' to get my bottom twitching, and after the fear injection she'd rub in the usual calming balm of, 'It's not that bad there, you'll be all right, give it a bit of time, your dad's not done bad out of the factory.'

I felt like a little crab at the bottom of a basket full of big fat crabs. My belief system was almost non-existent. In the end, I caught the very infectious *steady job* malarkey myself, it is very catching, and as soon as an aspiration found form in my mind it was clubbed to death by my own inner voice, 'Who are you kidding? Who do you think you are? What's wrong with the job you've already got? It's a steady number, it was good enough for you dad . . .' etc. I'd been pulled back so many times that in the end self-deprecation and disbelief became a part of my inner core and the moment an entrepreneurial thought swam into my mind it was drowned out by the voice of my inner warders. Many times I picked up my pen in a fit of inspiration to write (what I dreamed would be) the next bestseller, only to be thwarted by a faulty internal dialogue that was stronger than my will to continue. The pen would be discarded and replaced by bicycle clips and a ride to the factory for a night shift that I absolutely abhorred. Even today, twenty years on, the very thought of that long ride still inspires a depression that makes me feel so grateful to have found a way out. I used to sit in the works canteen in the dead of night when everyone else was tucked up in bed and think, 'What can I do to get out of this nightmare?' I felt so trapped. I had a family, a mortgage, HP payments, three children and a cat to feed, so many things that seemed to glue me to a job I hated. And the longer I stayed the more glue I attached. But I could never think of anything else I wanted to do other than write, I had allowed others (and myself) to convince me that this (writing) was not a real option and that I was dreaming, so I resigned myself to following in family footsteps and settling for the oil and grime.

## THE ELEPHANT AND THE TWIG

I did a fair bit of moaning about the job too, I hated the hours, the dirt, the foremen, and I told everyone who'd listen that if it wasn't for my wife I'd be off like a shot, it was her fault (I told them) that I was there because she wouldn't let me leave. Then one day, after my usual moan, she did something unprecedented, she told me to shut my moaning gob and get a job that I did like if I was so unhappy. She gave me her permission. Well, I nearly fell over I was so shocked. And that was when the realisation hit, the truth. She wasn't holding me back at all, it wasn't her fault that I was stuck in a nightmarish employ, neither was it the fault of the old-timers or my peers; the fault was entirely mine. I was there out of choice.

Blaming others for my predicament was my way of hiding from the fact that I was scared, I had a choice but was frightened to choose better. I realised at this point that I was looking in the mirror not at a hard-done-by twenty-something but at a frightened youth with a penchant for procrastination and blame – if I didn't want to stay in a job, if I really wanted to leave the factory, leave the city, or even leave the country for that matter, nothing, no one would be able to stop me. If I put my heart and soul into doing something, and believed it could be done, had a little faith in my own power, even mountains would tremble. I could do anything, be anything and go anywhere. This was my world, my incarnation, and the free will I had given over to my influences I snatched back and started my journey. And I had a great vehicle too, probably the best bit of kit I'd ever own – my own unique body.

Shortly after the realisation (and the shock), I left a steady job of seven years, with no other job to go to and no idea of how I was going to make a living, and entered the real world, a world of opportunity and excitement; and I've never looked back. It was brilliant, exciting and scary, so much to do, so many places to go. I made a decision – I broke the twig.

– Rule One –

## **We're all dying so now is the time to act**

I have some good news for you and some bad news – as the joke goes. The bad news – and I'm very sorry that I have to be the one to tell you (someone has to do it) – is that we are all dying! It's true, I've checked it out, in fact I've double and triple checked it, I've had it substantiated and, well, there's no easy way to say it, we *are* dying. It's something that I always kind of knew, but never really chose to think about too much. But the fact is, within the next seventy or eighty years – depending on how old we are and how long we last – we are all going to be either coffin dwellers or trampled ash in the 'Rose Garden' at some local cemetery. Scary! Strange thing is, when we are brown bread the same rule will apply to the next generation of people that read this book; they've only got seventy to eighty years left too. So Rule One in the fourteen golden rules to success and happiness is: **'We are all dying so now is the time to act.'**

The good news is that now we have acknowledged our own mortality, and accepted the fact that we could be brown bread tomorrow, we can really start to live. All those plans that you have on the back burner, you know, the great things that you are going to do with your life 'when the time is right' (the time is never *quite* right I find) need to be brought forward and done now, this minute, pronto, in a hurry, as quick as your little legs will carry you. The novel that you want to write, the trip to the Grand Canyon you've always wanted to take, the vocational job you see in your mind's eye, the West End play you want to produce, you have to do them now. We're dying see! So putting them on the back burner