

"Aliveness Mindset is a treasure trove of impactful practices."

—JIM DETHMER, founding partner of Conscious Leadership Group

SAMPLE

ALIVENESS MINDSET

LEAD
AND LIVE
WITH MORE
PASSION,
PURPOSE,
AND JOY

JACK CRAVEN

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AND LIVE
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PASSION,
PURPOSE,
AND JOY**

JACK CRAVEN



Aliveness Mindset: Lead and Live with More Passion, Purpose, and Joy

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*To my wife and partner-in-all things,
Judy. Thanks for changing my life.*

My love forever.

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INTRODUCTION

ALIVENESS STARTS WITH YOU

AS I WAS SCREAMING IN A CONFERENCE ROOM AT THE CHAMINADE resort in Santa Cruz, surrounded by twenty other business leaders, I realized you don't get to choose your epiphanies. They just happen.

My particular epiphany was simple: *I was angry*. On a deep, subconscious level that I had not admitted to anyone, including myself, I was lonely, unhappy, frustrated, and desperate for change.

I had no idea just how much needed to change. It was April 29, 2012, and I was attending a leadership retreat led by Jim Dethmer and Diana Chapman, cofounders of what would later become the Conscious Leadership Group (CLG). Going into the retreat, I was not planning on doing any screaming. I had every reason to be satisfied and excited about life. I was a happily married husband and the father of three girls. I had a law degree, which had been my dream as a teenager, and I had worked as a trial lawyer for the State's Attorney's Office in Chicago before going into private practice. After practicing law for five years, I decided to pivot and went into my family's business selling closeout consumer products to wholesalers and retail chains across North America. I was CEO of

that business for almost twenty years. We experienced tremendous growth, and we adapted and reinvented ourselves to overcome numerous challenges.

On the outside, I was successful and stable. I was an achiever, a visionary, a connector. I was someone people looked to for leadership and execution. I liked that. Checking things off my list gave me a rush. Tackling challenges and solving problems seemed to be what I was built for, and I ran full force at every obstacle I faced.

I was not in a healthy place on the inside. To deal with the inner void, I assumed more and more responsibility, which only deepened my sense of loneliness and frustration. The harder I worked, the worse I felt. I came to the point where I was putting in ten-hour days, six or seven days a week. I would often wake up at three in the morning in a state of anxiety, and I would start working just to stay caught up on everything I had on my plate.

I was living the polar opposite of a healthy, fulfilled existence, but I didn't know anything else. That was my normal.

Even though I was unhappy, I was always surprised when people told me I seemed serious, even somber. I guess I thought that because I didn't admit my frustration to myself, it wasn't visible to anyone else. Those comments were strange to me since I had always been a funny, happy person. Years before, I'd performed multiple times as a stand-up comic and done well. I always had a natural public presence and a quick sense of humor, and people typically liked and trusted me. What was happening?

I knew I should feel content, so I convinced myself I was. In actuality, I was living a life filled with obligations that I blamed on others. I *had* to be a great husband, a great father, a great son, a great brother, and a great CEO. I had to be perfect. I couldn't fail.

People depended on me. I didn't have the luxury of choosing a different path.

Or so I told myself.

That was my mental state when I arrived at the retreat. As a member of a business peer group called Young Presidents' Organization (YPO), I had attended many traditional leadership trainings. Within an hour, though, I realized this wasn't a typical leadership retreat. They didn't even have an agenda. We weren't there to learn from speakers at podiums, they said. We were there to help each other become more "conscious" as leaders. Whatever that meant.

At one point, we went around the room sharing why we were there. When it was my turn, I shared my story and why I chose to attend. I said I felt stuck both professionally and personally. I wanted support on how to reduce my suffering. I wanted to be happier. I wanted...actually, I hardly knew what I wanted. I just knew that it wasn't to keep doing what I was doing.

Jim and Diana asked me if I wanted to let go of any anger. That surprised me. I wasn't angry, I thought. I just wasn't happy. Back then, I didn't even realize I was feeling anger, let alone suppressing it.

They suggested that I scream to release what had built up inside. Normally I'd be concerned about how I looked to a roomful of leaders I had just met, but I had been optionless for so long I was willing to try anything to release my fears and frustrations. I felt angry that my work life wasn't fulfilling, and scared that I felt stuck and didn't know what to do.

I didn't realize how much emotion I was repressing until I started screaming. Again. And again. And *again*. Until my voice was hoarse. When I stopped screaming, I felt raw, vulnerable, and embarrassed. But I also felt lighter. The other leaders that weekend

were surprised yet supportive. (And I had no reason to be embarrassed; others faced similar challenges and experienced their own epiphanies. I'll share more about their reactions to mine in chapter 6.)

I knew that I wasn't going to keep pretending anymore. I wasn't going to keep burying my feelings. I didn't know how it was going to happen, but I knew I was determined to make changes.

And I did.

When I look back on that weekend, I can see how many things began to shift that day. It was imperceptible at first, but over time a monumental change occurred. I began to take seriously the questions my heart had been asking all along. What did I want out of life? What was I searching for? And just as importantly, why was I resisting the answers?

I didn't have the words for it then, but I was on a search for aliveness. My *aliveness*. That deep, inner satisfaction that comes from being authentically yourself, fully aligned and engaged and connected.

This book was born out of that time of wrestling with myself, along with my years of leadership coaching since then. Since transitioning to becoming an executive coach in 2015, I've worked with hundreds of business leaders who are on that same search. This book contains the principles and strategies I often share with them as well as many of their stories. I'll also share pieces of my own journey to illustrate different points.

How about you? You might not feel the need to scream, but are there areas where you feel frustrated or bottled up? Trapped by life's demands and high expectations—your own and others? Can you relate to those feelings of anger, fear, or pressure?

If so, I want to invite you to take seriously the questions your heart is asking. I'm talking about that small, too-easily ignored voice that refuses to give up on your aliveness. If you listen to that

voice, you'll find that it is advocating for *you*. For the real you, the authentic you, the best version of you.

Learning to walk in aliveness is primarily about internal changes, not external changes. You don't necessarily have to quit your job, close your company, fire your board, sell your house, move to an exotic country, buy a yacht, take up skydiving, or anything else so dramatic. However, when you change on the inside, things often change on the outside. Those changes are up to you. You have full autonomy over the process.

This book is designed for leaders who want to pursue aliveness and are willing to do *whatever* it takes to make those changes happen. It is for people who are fully committed, who want to live with more purpose and passion, who desire to feel more alive every day. It is for those who are willing to question beliefs that are limiting them and make critical shifts that will catapult them into the best versions of themselves.

In the pages ahead, I will show you how to recognize, embrace, and increase your aliveness. I call this commitment to aliveness "Living All In." It's my life motto and the goal I strive to reach every day: to live fully engaged, fully alive, fully present. It's about making the most of the life I've been given.

Living All In is a lifestyle and a process, not a one-time decision or an instant change. That means you don't have to be in a hurry to fix everything all at once, but you do have to make a long-term commitment to keep discovering who you really are and how you can align your day-to-day experience with your authentic self.

You'll find that self-discovery is a circular process. You learn a little about yourself, so you lean into that and start to live it out. That new way of living, in turn, reveals more about yourself, which you then add to your tool kit and put into practice. That opens up even greater understanding and perspective, which expands your experience further...ad infinitum.

I'm going to warn you: the process can be messy. Even scary. It can be intimidating to be fully honest with yourself and with what you want and need in life. It can be challenging to consider what the pursuit of aliveness might mean for your schedule, your team, your family, your income. It can be difficult to accept this new version of you. You don't have to rush or force anything, but you do need to expect ambiguity, take your time, and—most importantly—commit to the journey.

These principles work. They produce results. It doesn't happen automatically or overnight, but if you focus on becoming more aware of yourself and more tenaciously devoted to the kind of life you want and need, things will change for the better.

As we begin, I invite you to make a commitment to yourself. Not to me, not to anyone around you, but to *you*.

Commit to honesty.

Commit to the process.

As you explore what your heart wants, and as you glimpse the thrill, energy, and fulfillment that aliveness offers, you'll need to be truthful with yourself and tenacious in your commitment to authenticity and alignment.

Aliveness starts with you.

Are you ready? Your journey starts now.

PART I

**INTRODUCING
ALIVENESS**

THIS IS WHAT I WANT

LET ME ASK YOU A QUESTION. IT'S A SIMPLE QUESTION BUT AN important one.

When have you felt most alive?

I don't mean "alive" in the biological sense. I mean alive on the inside. Truly alive. Fully alive. *Most alive*. I-never-want-this-feeling-to-end kind of alive.

Take a second to think about it. Is it when you're with your family? In nature? Closing a deal? Solving a problem? Traveling to new places? Riding a bike? Laughing with friends? Relaxing with your family? Making a difference in the world and giving back?

It might help to think back over your past, starting with your childhood. Can you remember specific moments when you felt fully, truly alive? Let your mind travel back over the years and reconnect with those memories, no matter how random or insignificant they might seem.

Maybe you took a family vacation to the beach, and to this day you remember the joy and love you felt then. Maybe that was a moment you felt truly alive.

Maybe you used to spend Saturday mornings at your grandmother's house, eating chocolate chip cookies and watching cartoons; that feeling of security and familiarity defined your childhood, and you felt alive.

Maybe you remember being in science class doing experiments, and you burned your eyebrows off because you mixed the wrong chemicals, but you loved how alive you felt when you experimented and explored.

Maybe you played sports, and you felt most alive when the game was on the line and you had the ball.

Maybe you remember feeling alive during your college years, when you were discovering who you are and learning to “adult” for the first time.

Maybe the moments of aliveness that you remember are more recent. It could have been at your job, when you discovered that you excelled in times of crisis, and you realized that you were made for this. Or maybe you took a trip somewhere with your friends, and you all laughed until you couldn’t breathe, and you didn’t want the feeling to ever end. Maybe your kids are little, and when you tuck them in you feel a deep rush of love, and for you, that is the very definition of being alive. Maybe it’s a time you went skydiving, or a hike into the mountains alone, or a trip to a foreign country. Maybe it was when you fell in love. Maybe it was your wedding day. Maybe it was holding your baby for the first time.

Whenever or wherever it was, you found yourself saying, *Damn, this feels right! This feels like me. This is what I want. I wish it could be this way all the time.* Let me ask you a second question. As you think back on those specific moments of aliveness, *what does aliveness feel like to you?* In other words, if you could extract the essence from those moments and memories, what specific words would you use to describe it?

This is important because aliveness doesn’t feel the same for everyone. If you’re going to become more alive, you have to learn to identify, describe, and ultimately experience your own version of aliveness. So don’t rush through this or skip over it. Take a minute and try to connect to those memories. Relive the

emotions you experienced when you were there. Imagine how your body felt, what feelings were in your heart, what thoughts were in your mind. Try to recall the sensations in your body and in your emotions.

It's possible you've never stopped to think about this before, so be thoughtful as you answer. If you'd like, write it down in the space at the end of this chapter. Try to sum up your specific experience of aliveness in a few words. Whatever answer you write is the correct one. Just jot down whatever words come to mind to describe how aliveness feels in your body, your emotions, and your mind.

Over the years, I've asked my clients the same two questions:

1. When have you felt most alive?
2. What does aliveness feel like to you?

No two people have given me the same answer. Aliveness is unique because humans are unique, and no one can tell you exactly how, when, and why to feel most alive. There are common themes, but at the end of the day, we all experience life differently, and the words we choose to describe our best, most authentic, most satisfying moments are deeply personal. If you are having a hard time capturing the feeling, try describing it aspirationally.

For me, for example, aliveness feels like “giddy.” That’s an unusual word, maybe, but it’s perfect for me. My senses are heightened, peace and satisfaction are at their peak, tension and fear have dissipated, and waves of joy and peace dominate my senses. There is an element of playful energy. It feels tingly, like electricity is coursing through my body.

Maybe for you, aliveness would feel more like calmness, adventure, rest, energy, peace, connection, significance, curiosity, generosity, freedom, thrill, love, joy, delight, gratitude, belonging, impact, or one of a thousand other words. That’s why I started out

by inviting you to explore what aliveness feels like to you. You get to describe it for yourself.

One of my clients described his feeling of aliveness as “like a kid getting out of bed on the first day of vacation.” Another said it was like “being in the flow.” Another said, “It feels like I live life on the balls of my feet, and I’m ready to jump.” I love all of those descriptions.

As you connect to what makes you feel this way, it’s possible that even the thought of your aliveness triggers a response in your body. You can imagine it and feel it all at once. It’s energizing and invigorating.

Now ask yourself, *What if I could always feel that way, or feel that way more often? How would that change my life?*

Can you imagine that? Can you visualize a version of you that spends more time in aliveness than out of it?

I find that for many people, aliveness is a foreign concept because they’ve never been challenged to imagine a better quality of life than what they are experiencing. They have material and career goals, but those are superficial metrics of success. What about success on the inside? What about a lifestyle characterized by peace, joy, fulfillment, and positive energy? Some people seem to spend more time analyzing Amazon reviews for products they might buy than they do evaluating the quality of their own life. They’re more concerned with choosing the right Netflix show than choosing a lifestyle that aligns with their values and priorities.

Take a moment to think not just about what aliveness feels like to you but about your *level* of aliveness. Do you regularly experience your personal definition of aliveness in your family; in your career and workplace; in your mental, emotional, and physical health; and in your friendships? Or do you have a sense that you’re going through all the right motions but somehow life is eluding

you? It's one thing to experience aliveness from time to time, but it's another to experience it as *a way of life* and in *all areas of your life*.

That brings us to the best part. This is the heart of this book, and I'll keep coming back to it.

You can take your personal version of aliveness into every aspect of your day-to-day life.

That might be hard to believe if you feel trapped and suppressed by circumstances beyond your control. I know the feeling. I've learned that you don't have to wait for anything around you to change before you feel more alive *because aliveness starts within you*. It's something you control, and you can choose to engage it in nearly any situation.

That doesn't mean that, in my case, I act giddy all the time. I don't have tingly feelings all day, every day. I don't walk around with a goofy smile on my face or ignore reality. It means I let that feeling, that experience of aliveness that I have defined for myself, become the filter and the frame for how I see the world. And when I do, I bring a better version of myself to my daily tasks.

In other words, aliveness is found at the intersection of *what makes you feel most alive* and *how you approach your day-to-day life*.

If either of those is out of whack—for example, if you don't know what aliveness feels like for you or your lifestyle isn't aligned with those things—then it will be hard or even impossible to experience ongoing aliveness. You'll be biologically alive, but you'll struggle to enjoy life to the fullest.

I know this from experience, as I'll share in the pages ahead. Not just mine, either, but that of hundreds of CEOs and other business leaders I've had the privilege of coaching. I'm so passionate about aliveness because the truths I'm going to share literally saved my life. I was fifty years old and on track to burn out, break down, or give up. I had resigned myself to

the unsatisfying life I had rather than standing up for the life I really wanted.

That is, until I decided to do whatever it took to experience aliveness.

And then everything changed.

Today, I am a better leader, a better husband, a better father, and a better friend. I feel reborn. I have a new excitement about life, and I'm convinced the decades ahead will be the best of my life. The leaders I work with tell me my energy and passion are contagious.

That's what I want for everyone I meet. It's what I want for my wife and my kids. It's what I want for my friends. It's what I want for the leaders I coach.

And it's what I want for you.

I don't just want you to know *about* aliveness; I want you to *experience* it on a daily basis. I want you to learn how to take your personal brand of aliveness into your everyday life. I promise you, it will change everything.

So what, exactly, is aliveness? Here's my definition:

Aliveness is a state of being characterized by bringing the best version of yourself into your day-to-day experience through identifying and adopting mindsets and actions that align with your unique way of being fully alive.

It's a long definition, but it's important. Let's take a quick look at each phrase.

- *State of being* means aliveness is more than what you do or how you feel. It's how you exist and experience life. The goal isn't just to feel alive; it's to *be* alive.

- *The best version of yourself* refers to the fullest, most authentic, most fulfilled version of yourself. It's the "you" that is aligned with who you want to be and how you want to show up in life.
- *Day-to-day experience* means that aliveness is practical and present. It should influence every area of your life, every day of your life, in any situation or circumstance.
- *Identifying and adopting the mindsets and actions* is all about the process of finding what works for you. It's about alignment with how you experience being alive. This means you've got some work to do. This is *your* aliveness. If you want it, you have to start by defining it. Your mindsets and actions should promote aliveness, not block it, which means you have to understand what makes you tick and be willing to change things that are misaligned.
- Finally, *that align with your unique way of being fully alive* points to the process of shifting your inner and outer worlds to create better alignment. You have a distinctive way of experiencing aliveness, and your goal is to align your mindsets and actions with that experience. You'll spend the rest of your life getting better and better at this because you are a *complex* person and a *changing* person.

If you haven't done so already, I encourage you to write down your answers to the questions I asked above. You can use the space below if you'd like. These are just your initial thoughts, so don't worry about getting your wording exactly right at this point. We're going to be refining it as we move through the book, so this is just the starting line, not the finish.

-
1. I have felt most alive when I ... (write down three examples)
 2. For me, aliveness feels like _____ in my body.
 3. What pictures and images of me (and others) best reflect when I am feeling alive?
 4. How often do I feel authentically alive in my day-to-day life? How many times do I feel this way per day or week, and for how many hours or minutes?
 5. What if I could feel aliveness more often? How would that change my life?
-

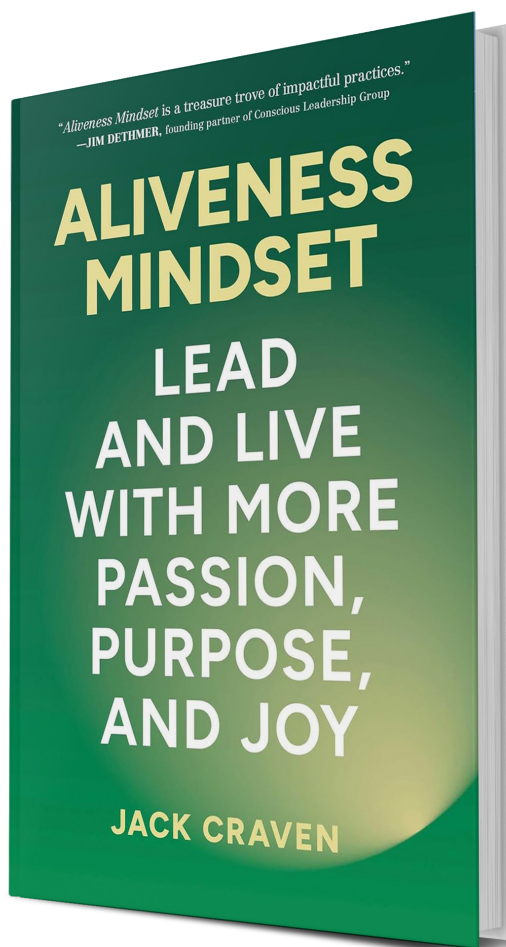
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JACK CRAVEN HAS ALWAYS SHAPED HIS PROFESSIONAL JOURNEY around his passions. Starting out as a trial lawyer with the Chicago State's Attorney Office, he moved into private practice and later took on the role of CEO for his family's business for nearly two decades. Yet his move into executive coaching stands out as the most challenging—and rewarding—chapter of his career. It was during this time that Jack created his “Living All In” philosophy. He has utilized his extensive professional and personal growth journey to empower individuals to discover deeper purpose, joy, and happiness in their lives.

Since 2007, Jack has also been an active member and Certified Facilitator for the Young Presidents' Organization (YPO), the world's leading community for chief executives.

Just as passionate about his personal pursuits, Jack loves keeping fit, reading, volunteering in his Chicago community, and spending quality time with his wife, three daughters, and Riley! This is his debut book.

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