

Jack Skeen | Greg Miller | Aaron Hill



THE  
**CIRCLE**  
BLUEPRINT

**Decoding** the  
**Conscious** and **Unconscious**  
**Factors** that  
**Determine Your Success**

WILEY



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## About the Circle Blueprint System

**T**he **Circle Blueprint** is a revolutionary life improvement system that is designed to help you on your path to happiness and success. It's made up of three components:

**PART 1: THE BOOK.** *The Circle Blueprint: Decoding the Conscious and Unconscious Factors that Determine Your Success* by Jack Skeen, Greg Miller, and Aaron Hill delves into the theory behind the system. It zeroes in on four developmental areas—*Independence, Power, Humility, and Purpose*—that combine to make you a “whole” and balanced person. Importantly, the authors explain the real meanings of these four words. (You might be surprised to learn their meanings have gotten lost over time.)

The authors paint a vivid picture of what these concepts look like in the life of a person who has mastered them (and conversely what they might look like when you haven't). They give you the language to *finally* understand on a deep level what's wrong in your life.

**PART 2: THE ASSESSMENT.** This scientifically validated psychometric self-assessment tool reveals your inherent personality traits as they pertain to the concepts in the book. It tells you exactly where you fall on a “mastery” spectrum in the book's four developmental areas—unearthing exactly where you are limiting your greatness. This is the self-awareness piece that truly sparks change and pushes you to move toward balance, wholeness, and a life in which you thrive. By the way, your results are 100 percent confidential, so you can feel free to be completely honest when you answer the questions.

**PART 3: THE SUPPLEMENTAL WORKBOOKS.** These four workbooks are filled with step-by-step instruction to help you master the four key developmental areas. This is where you “do the work.” Some people choose to engage a coach during this phase, though it's not required.

Here are seven benefits of the Circle Blueprint System:

**It's incredibly comprehensive.** It covers a broad spectrum of behaviors and works well for many different personality types. Also,

it sparks improvement (often dramatic improvement) in both the personal and professional areas of your life.

**It's personalized.** Many self-help books and programs are “one size fits all.” They give generic advice on what to do without first showing you where you are on your journey *right now*. (This is why most don't work.) Thanks to the thorough and accurate assessment, the Circle Blueprint System is all about YOU and how you view yourself. Then, depending where you fall on the five-point mastery scale—whose levels range from “hanging on” to “thriving”—you're directed to the appropriate starting point in the appropriate workbook. You start where you are.

**It's private.** Sometimes people feel uncomfortable revealing personal information about themselves. That's why the system is designed for privacy from beginning to end. Participants are reassured by the knowledge that their assessment results and all subsequent improvement work are completely confidential.

**It's flexible.** You can read the book first . . . or jump right into the assessment . . . or take the assessment in stages as you follow the book. You can focus your efforts on mastering one of the four developmental areas or all of them. You can take advantage of specialized coaching if you like—or you can work on yourself without engaging any outside help. You can go as deeply as you want and move as quickly as you want.

**It's cost effective.** While it is beneficial for many people, coaching is *not* required. Once you've purchased the materials you're fully emancipated to work by yourself, at the cadence that appeals to you.

**It fosters rapid improvement.** Once you become aware of your weaknesses you can improve very, very quickly. It's not unusual for a person to move from “hanging on” to “thriving” in the blink of an eye.

**It's a pathway to lasting change.** Again, “awareness” is the magic key. Once you know *exactly* what your problems are—what's holding you back from having the life you want—you almost *have* to address them. You know ignoring them is only hurting yourself. And once you see and feel the improvements in your life, you'll do anything to keep from going back to where you started.

For more information about the Circle Blueprint System, please visit [www.thecircleblueprint.com](http://www.thecircleblueprint.com).



## Foreword

This book is all about becoming a happy, balanced, thriving person who lives a meaningful life. Not coincidentally, this is the kind of person who makes a great leader.

Interestingly, the heart and soul of leadership have not changed in the past 50 years. I have found that the qualities and traits that create the kind of person who inspires others to follow and brings out the best in them are the same qualities and traits they've always been. In an age of dizzying change, I find it very reassuring to know that some things remain steadfast!

As a private equity investor who partners with companies to support long-term growth, I am incredibly interested in the subject of what great leaders look like. In fact, I will invest only in companies whose leadership teams are made up of balanced, thriving people.

It's my belief that no organization can thrive over time, financially or otherwise, without a subset of fundamentally good people at the top, people who care about those they work with and sincerely want to help develop them. The deep-rooted goal of such leaders is to build a strong business that serves the customer, the employees, and the owners—and they wake up each morning with that in mind.

In his classic book *Good to Great*, Jim Collins writes extensively about getting the right people on the bus. By this, he means leaders who are humble but also driven to do what's best for the company. Collins's book is a wonderful, empirically based work that explores how to use these "right people" to create great companies. It's a valuable resource. But what Collins doesn't really address is how to develop the leaders themselves.

That's where *The Circle Blueprint* steps in. Where Collins veers "right" into the business side of this topic, Jack Skeen, Greg Miller, and Aaron Hill veer "left" into the personal development arena.

Becoming a balanced "whole person" starts with self-awareness. In my experience, most people really aren't self-aware. That's why I'm pleased to say that this thoughtfully organized book; the proprietary,

scientifically validated assessment; and the accompanying workbooks are all aimed at creating that self-awareness—a necessary first step to becoming a great leader.

The program then provides a very specific framework to help leaders move on from their new place of self-awareness and work to become balanced, fulfilled, successful human beings.

This framework is quite comprehensive, and in my mind that's what makes the program unique and valuable. Too many leader development programs are random, scattershot, and generalized. When you're a leader participating in such a program, you really don't know where your "problem areas" lie and therefore can't possibly know where to focus your improvement efforts.

The Circle Blueprint approach measures the right things, gives specific feedback on how you're wired and how you can best align to the world around you, and offers practical guidance for moving forward on your journey. Plus, you can start from exactly where you are in terms of both how well you've mastered the crucial elements of the Circle and where you are in your career.

When I saw the four developmental areas that Jack, Greg, and Aaron focused on in their book—*independence*, *power*, *humility*, and *purpose*—I was quite pleased. They resonated with me in terms of both my own journey and the qualities I see in the leaders I work with every day.

I also like that they get to the heart of what the traits and concepts really mean. Over time, the perception people have about these words has shifted, and most of us have the wrong idea about their original meaning.

Take *independence*. People think it means being self-sufficient—able to pay your bills, make your own decisions, forge your own destiny. But what it really means is being totally free from the need to please others or win their approval. You're free to do what *you* believe is right, not what someone else thinks is right. This is a rare trait, but it is essential to being a great leader.

I have found that when people lack independence, they also lack self-confidence. They can't act decisively. Such people might be good managers, but they can never be great leaders.

The authors say that if you don't possess true independence you'll never be able to tap into your true *power*. This is another area

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where most people lose their way. They focus on the conventional definition, which centers on attaining and exerting power, rather than seeking to discover it within themselves. True power should be viewed as your own unique, special skill that makes you good at what you do.

We all have a power center. Some people find it. Others never do. And still others find it and use it in destructive ways. While often powerful, these folks are not great leaders.

Next comes *humility*. Many leaders struggle with this area. They seem to have a fundamental misunderstanding about how leaders “should” behave and present themselves. People in my generation tend to think that leaders must be dominant, commanding figures.

I have found the opposite is true. The leaders who inspire the most confidence in others are those who listen five times more than they speak, who don’t have an overinflated view of their own importance, who don’t mind admitting they don’t have all the answers.

The fourth developmental area is *purpose*. I believe that in most instances, this is more of a personal trait than a corporate one. Purpose-driven for-profit enterprises are rare. On the other hand, there are many leaders who have a strong internal sense that they are working toward a purpose greater than themselves—and these leaders are quite powerful.

In the past, a company’s “purpose” was usually discussed in the context of making money. However, this mindset has shifted a bit over the last couple of decades. The most successful newer businesses like Apple, Amazon, and Uber are built on the notion of addressing a human need in a new way—a purpose envisioned by someone who saw the world differently.

I’d like to close by saying that this book comes at the right moment in time. There is a growing need for great leaders to help organizations navigate the tumultuous waters of today’s marketplace and economy. And for individual leaders there is also a great need—to perform well and improve quickly.

The reality is that we can no longer wait until we’re 50 years old with a lifetime of experience under our belt to operate at the top of our game. Things simply move much faster now, and expectations are much higher. And that’s why the program described in this book is so valuable—it gives companies a way to know how their leaders

are developing and gives leaders a set path to follow as they forge ahead on their journey.

This is not just a business issue. Far from it. It's a matter of physical, emotional, and spiritual health as well. In the middle of so much uncertainty—with the old ways and old rules giving way to new paradigms and new ways of working and living—we owe it to ourselves to become the best, happiest, most fulfilled, contented, and successful human beings possible.

We all know people who are financially successful but unhappy and dysfunctional. Yet the good news is that we live in a time of ever-increasing awareness about the value of happiness and peace. More and more people are realizing that *enduring* is no longer enough. We deserve better. No matter where we are in our careers, we want happy lives, healthy relationships, and a sense of purpose and meaning.

We owe it to ourselves and the people around us to not merely survive but to thrive—and *The Circle Blueprint* offers us a way to get there.

John M. Goense

## Introduction

**A**re you as happy as you would like to be? Don't think too hard about this question; it's a simple yes or no. If the answer is honestly yes, put the book down and look for something else to read. If the answer is no—not that you're unhappy, just not as happy as you would like to be—then this book is for you. Our guess is that if you picked the book up in the first place you are searching for something more. You might not know exactly what it is, but you hope the “more” is out there and if it is, you want it.

You have been successful . . . at least to some extent. You have probably worked hard at life. You may have a good education. Perhaps you have risen to some level of leadership at work, or raised a family, or put away some money for retirement.

But do you ever ask yourself, “Is this all there is?”

We have asked thousands of people one very simple question: “Are you thriving in your life?” We use the word “thriving” to describe a life where nothing is missing, where you have it all. Thriving doesn't mean you are particularly wealthy or popular but that your life is rich, happy, and meaningful. Those who are thriving have found the more that others seek. We asked them to choose one of the following descriptions of their lives:

- 1.** I am hanging on by my fingernails. Despite all I have accomplished my life isn't good at all.
- 2.** I am eroding. I'm not desperate but my life is a grind and does not seem to be headed in a positive direction.
- 3.** I am treading water—just sort of enduring my situation. My life isn't bad, but I would not say it is good, either.
- 4.** I am growing. My life is on a positive trajectory. Certainly, it could be better, but I am reasonably satisfied and optimistic about the future.
- 5.** I am thriving. I am creatively engaged in my work and life. I am at the top of my game. I feel energized, balanced, healthy, and happy.

Approximately one-third were reluctant to choose a response because the question itself made them uncomfortable. Almost no one chose number five—I am thriving. Most people responded that they were eroding or treading water—enduring their life rather than living it purposefully.

What is true about your life?

We all know stories about people who appear to be thriving. People like Warren Buffett who, at 86 years old and despite his wealth, goes to work every day. You might expect a man who has achieved such financial success to have cashed out and retired to a tropical island, or to have spent at least some part of his wealth on a lavish lifestyle. Not so with Mr. Buffett. He lives in a very modest home—actually the first house he purchased in Omaha, Nebraska. He drives an ordinary car and works in the same office he and his partner have occupied since they started their business. Mr. Buffett does not work because he has to. He works because he wants to. It brings him life. He thrives in what he does.

But, thriving is not only for those who are financially successful. Perhaps you know a couple who, after years of marriage, are still in love. They are thriving in their relationship. Or, people who feel deeply satisfied with their lives, who are making a difference in the world around them. It is not always the rich and famous who live great lives. In fact, more often than not, it is easier for ordinary people to find the pathway that leads to true satisfaction and deep joy.

Marianne Williamson, in *A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of "A Course in Miracles,"* wrote:

*Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, "Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?" Actually, who are you not to be? . . . We are all meant to shine, as children do . . . And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.*

Williamson speaks to a deep truth; that every one of us has such potential for greatness that it is difficult for us to comprehend or

accept. She is calling us to give up our proclivity for mediocrity and to stretch for greatness. As we shine, our light encourages others to shine, as well. Each of us has the ability to radiate a deep joy and contentment while exuding a power more than sufficient to change the world.

It is your right to shine, to thrive, to live a life of purpose and meaning. It is your right to wake up every day saying, “Wow, my life is amazing,” and to radiate joy, power, and peace every moment of every day for the rest of your life. It is your right to thrive.

Thriving is unrelated to material success. Does this surprise you? Certainly, we need money to support our lives, but excessive wealth does not add to life satisfaction. Many very wealthy and outwardly successful men and women feel neither secure nor happy. We know of a man who is desperately working toward his goal of building a \$100 million nest egg. He claims he will feel safe enough to relax when he has reached that goal. If this is the standard for well-being and security, very few of us will ever experience it. Our friend is looking for security where it cannot be found. Until he looks in the right place—inside his own life—he will live with constant anxiety. If he arrives at his goal, he may discover he feels no more secure, and he may just move the goal to \$200 million.

You probably are not worth hundreds of millions of dollars, or tens of millions. Most likely not even a million, or a hundred thousand dollars. You find this story to be amusing, if not ridiculous. But if you make \$40,000 a year and think you would be unburdened if you only made \$100,000, you are playing the same game. Security, peace, and success are not tied to increased financial wealth.

In his book, *Drive*, Dan Pink observed that thought workers (those who don't work with their hands for a living) are not motivated by money. Once they are paid sufficient money to meet their needs, three things increased their motivation: (1) Autonomy. People liked to have control over how they approached their work and how they did their work; (2) Mastery. People are naturally motivated to improve their skills; and (3) Purpose. People want to feel like their work matters, that it contributes to something bigger than themselves. (Pink 2009) Pink discovered the importance of what we call the Circle

Blueprint: a map of life choices that shape the quality, satisfaction, and impact of your life. We all long to live satisfying, meaningful lives. Money has its place, but it is not the primary driver of thriving.

Thriving is the result of tending to what you put in your Circle and mastering the elements of your Circle Blueprint. All of us have the ability to thrive in our lives but many of us have lost track of the path toward thriving and get stuck just enduring or even worse, eroding or hanging on. We end up settling for less. This book was designed to help you rediscover the path that leads to thriving.

One client said, “Using these concepts helped me understand my unique map, the way I am wired on the inside and how to best align with the world around me. I transitioned out of a career I didn’t love and started an entirely new one. Now I am much more successful. I find joy and deep satisfaction every day.” Another told us that these concepts helped him find his happiness: “While working through the Circle Blueprint, it hit me one day. I felt a sense of freedom and joy I hadn’t felt since I was a kid—well before I worried about being popular at school or stressed about pleasing others with what I did in sports or at work. The funny thing is, it was there the whole time, I hadn’t really changed, I just needed to free myself to be happy—and the Circle Blueprint helped me do that.”

Our hope is that you will find in this book encouragement and the tools to thrive in your own life. This book is the starting point in a system we have created and designed to move you forward on a path to true contentment in your life. The book introduces and explains both concepts and elements required to create and sustain you on your path. We also acknowledge that a book isn’t always adequate to equip you to apply these concepts to your unique life situation. To help you more directly apply the Circle Blueprint to your life, we created the second part of the system: a psychometrically validated self-assessment designed to bring forward your latent dispositional enduring personality traits as they pertain to the concepts and elements of your Circle. Once these areas have been self-assessed, the final piece of the system includes workbooks and exercises created to help you move through each element as you gain mastery and balance in your Circle. This system has been designed to allow you to move through your development at your own pace and in total privacy.



# Chapter 1

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## The Circle Blueprint

What is the Circle Blueprint? The Circle Blueprint is a framework that illustrates the conscious and unconscious factors that determine the quality of a person's life. Your Circle encompasses values, dreams, character traits, causes, people—what truly matters to you. It determines who you will become and what you will accomplish. It defines your purpose and ultimately your happiness and satisfaction.

Everyone has a Circle. Your Circle probably includes people you love, such as family members and friends, or causes you care about, like saving the whales, defending your country, or taking a stand for the rights of others. It might include character traits such as honesty, responsibility, or self-discipline. You may have personal hopes, dreams, or goals in your Circle: finishing your undergraduate degree, working for a certain company, writing a novel, or running a marathon.

In terms of human development, everyone starts off with a small Circle that includes only self-centered values: comfort, safety, pleasure. Infants are exclusively focused only on the comfort of a full stomach, a dry diaper, and a warm bed. As we grow, life challenges us with opportunities to expand our world that require adding new things to our Circle. The “terrible twos” are noted for a push for independence that shows up in endless questions and persistent defiance. Going to school requires following rules, forming friendships, and

learning new skills. Adolescence brings the challenge of breaking away from your family to find your unique place in the world. Each stage of life changes the composition of your Circle. New content is added that changes the mix and balance, and other times, content has to be removed to bring balance. Imagine an adult wearing a diaper and having a pacifier in his or her mouth—these items were long discarded, and much as we remove these items from our lives as we grow, we also have to remove items from our Circle at times if they unbalance our Circle. How we negotiate these challenges of adding and subtracting significantly impacts the quality of our adult lives.

By the time we have reached young adulthood, most people—but not all—have expanded their Circle with activities beyond pleasure, self-protection, and other self-focused values. Those whose development has been stunted by trauma or neglect will still prioritize values that are life-limiting. A person whose Circle is filled with activities limited to pleasure, for example, may take drugs or steal without concern for the future or other people. Even those who grew up in healthy and happy homes can fail to fully develop their Circle and, so, they limit their success and life satisfaction. They may have not completed a fundamental developmental challenge, stopped adding new and more meaningful content to their Circle, or failed to keep the elements of their Circle in balance.

Self-focused values such as pleasure and self-protection are not inherently bad. You might listen to music or read classic novels because they give you pleasure. A healthy degree of self-protection will enable you to set appropriate boundaries and avoid dark alleys. But self-focused values are inherently limited in the degree to which they allow your Circle to grow—and when your Circle stays small, your accomplishments stay small. In the same way a child's world expands when she learns to walk, the quality and impact of our lives expand as we increase what is in our Circle and as we balance our Circle.

The ways you choose to spend your time is the starting place to understand the size and richness of your Circle. Everyone fills every