

**CHRISTO HALL**

**BEYOND  
THE  
BREAK**

**THE SURF-INSPIRED  
SUCCESS CODE  
FOR BUSINESS AND LIFE**

**WILEY**



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# INTRODUCTION

From my late teens I was a professional surfer, and I spent seven amazing years travelling the world competing on the world surfing circuit. Casting my mind back over my adventurous (and wild) professional surfing days, and bringing you the stories I share in this book, enabled me to recognise a pattern. Recurring fears surfaced in almost a systematic way, event after event. They are so clear to me now, but early in my career, on a day-to-day basis, the destructive thoughts were inescapable and hard to distinguish. A negative thought here, a feeling of discomfort there. En masse, they were enough to cause me to doubt myself, to procrastinate instead of making a decision, and to tear down careful planning.

It's incredible to me now to see how I would move through the same phases of anxiety leading up to each big surfing event or life decision. My inner voice would prod, prompt and nudge me away from my pre-event routine, sometimes over a period of weeks. My anxious mind would pull out every trick in the book — from giving me dreams about trying and failing, running late for an event or not being able to find my surfboard, to reminding me about every mistake I'd ever made or chastising me for skipping a workout.

But I also noticed another, more powerful, pattern. Many of my happiest moments in life came right after doing something that pushed me well outside my comfort zone. Making a difficult decision, pushing through a challenge against fear and taking action was fulfilling.

What I also realise now is that my surfing career had *transferrable skills*. Of course, I had massive concerns about ending a sports career, and being in my late twenties with no qualifications. But I found myself drawing on my professional surfing experience, and began to understand this experience was comparable to a powerful qualification. I'd had different life experiences to most people, and these experiences made me more effective in business. They gave me a process to compete in any space. They prepared me for business success.

Nothing has been handed to me or accidentally fallen in my lap. I've worked hard for my successes and taken chances to get ahead, overcoming mental and physical challenges.

I learnt from my surfing career *not* to shy away from challenges, but to embrace them as a pathway to happiness. The secret to fulfilment seems to be discomfort — or, at least, the path that pushes through the unfamiliar leads to discomfort, which (eventually) leads to fulfilment. (We certainly are strange creatures.)

I've realised the same mental challenges I faced in surfing are faced by all of us every single day. Sometimes these challenges are obvious, due to a large change or eruption of events, but often these challenges are almost unrecognisable because they happen so fast, or seem insignificant in the moment, only to reveal themselves when the tide goes out. However, your approach to these challenges — large and seemingly insignificant — has a huge impact on your results, and my lessons from the ocean will show you how to overcome them.

I've used the competitive knowledge I gained from professional surfing to build multiple successful businesses, and mentor others to generate hundreds of millions in additional revenue. All over the world and across many different types of media, I've been asked to share my unique approach to business — when in my mind, all I'm doing is surfing.

In *Beyond the Break* I do more than share my stories from seven years competing on the world surfing tour. I also give you strategies that can be applied to succeed in business, a career, sports or any hobby.

I provide insights into how to handle, and sometimes work with, your inner critic. (I've even given mine a name — introducing Bronco, everybody.) Similar to watching a set come in and picking the right wave to surf all the way to shore, I help you understand your limits, pick your battles and overcome failure. If you get dumped, you can dust yourself off, maybe spit out a mouthful of sand, learn your lessons and move on.

Most importantly, in this book I help you hone your mindset and find your true motivation — so you can carve through even the choppiest of seas.

So what are you waiting for? Grab your board, and let's go.



## CHAPTER 1

# HAWAII

***The biggest opportunities often appear to be mistakes***

The oppressive humidity was the first thing that hit me when I stepped through the doors of the Hawaii International Airport, weary after a nine-hour haul from Sydney. On the plane I'd been barely able to keep my eyes open, but now I was hyped on expectation. World surfing circuit here I come. I had been anxious for months, knowing that Hawaii, with its life-threatening powerful waves, was the ultimate testing ground for an up-and-coming professional surfer.

Beads of sweat gathered in my hairline as I dragged a suitcase and huge board bag off the walkway and set them down.

Keenan dumped his gear beside mine. 'Well, we're not in Narrabeen anymore. What time's our ride supposed to be here, Cristo?'

I pulled a printed page from a pocket of my board shorts and unfolded it. Our flight itinerary and some details I had scribbled

under it were all I had. 'It's five past midnight, so we landed a little early. The sponsor guy back home said a photographer they're using would pick us up. Should be here any minute.'

Several of the passengers glanced quizzically at us as they scurried towards hire cars and taxis. No doubt they were wondering where our parents were. I smiled to myself. Nope, this sixteen year old was going to take the world by storm single-handedly.

Hawaii was a mystery to me, other than what I knew from the televised world surfing competitions I'd watched over the years. The island had been shrouded in darkness as we landed and the bright fluorescent lighting of the airport looked pretty much like any other cement monstrosity, but it wouldn't be long before we were on the beach, in the waves.

In the time it took me to down the last of the water I had in a plastic bottle, all the other passengers had cleared out. Keenan opened his board bag and checked that none of his seven boards had been damaged in transit. Stress head.

I raised a chin in question.

'All good,' he confirmed.

Ten minutes later, the lights went out at all the rental car stations. My gut twisted a little. Best laid plans and all ...

Keenan rubbed the back of his neck, pacing the empty forecourt.

'Maybe he's running late,' I offered. Orange light glowed above a public phone box. 'I haven't got a number for him, but we could phone the sponsor guy. You got coins?'

Keenan fished in his wallet and shook his head, showing me his palm with a few Australian coins on it. Not helpful.

The click of a deadbolt sliding into place sounded behind me. Keenan's eyes widened and we glanced at one another. The airport forecourt was quiet, lights going out inside the terminal. Even the taxi rank was empty. A lone stretch limousine driver paced the pavement as he finished up a smoke. We made eye contact and he nodded.

'You two need a ride?' he called, dropping the cigarette to the ground and twisting the ball of his foot on it.

'I guess so. How much?' I eyed the glossy, black vehicle that looked way out of our budget.

'Where are you headed?'

I looked at Keenan, who shrugged. The sponsor had organised all that stuff, supposedly.

'Um, North Shore.' That's all I could remember.

The driver frowned. 'That's a big area. Can you narrow it down?'

I shot Keenan a pleading look.

'It's near Rocky Point?' he suggested. 'I reckon he said the accommodation was just to the left of the Rocky Point beach track.'

Well, that would have to do for now.

'It's on my way home,' the driver said, 'so I'll do it for a hundred dollars. Are you meeting your family?'

'No, we're here to surf.' I stood tall and thrust my chest forward a little, proud.

'No kidding?' The driver helped store our luggage, the limousine so long our board bags fitted in the back with us. 'Wow, you'll get to surf the best waves in the world here, but beware — the waves here are also the most dangerous in the world.'

‘We sure hope we get some good ones.’ I handed over fifty US dollars and so did Keenan. It was all we had in our wallets but it wasn’t like we had any other option.

Less than an hour later we had arrived at Rocky Point, and were standing on the footpath in the dark, luggage at our feet.

‘You sure you boys will be all right on your own?’ The limo driver looked doubtful.

‘No worries.’ I flashed him a smile full of confidence I didn’t feel.

Palm leaves swayed overhead, dark silhouettes against a purple sky, as the limousine pulled away. The sound of rolling waves thundered nearby.

‘What now?’ Keenan tapped a foot, manically searching the empty street for answers.

He was a year older, so I left the worrying to him and figured out a solution.

I glanced at my watch: 3.30 am. ‘I need to crash, man. Let’s hit the beach and see if we can find our accommodation when it’s light.’

We tentatively made our way down a narrow track towards the beach, the moonlight so weak I could barely see a metre in front of me. The sand that trickled over and under my thong-clad feet was icy cold and dense bushes crowded the pathway, but the familiarity of the salt-laden air beckoned me forwards.

At the top of the beach, the power of the waves reverberated through the night air, filling me with excitement and apprehension in equal measure. I could just make out white water in the shallows and black nothingness beyond.

We laid our bags on the soft sand at the top of the beach and lay down, a jumper rolled up for a pillow, a hand and foot touching

each piece of luggage for security. My new Billabong hoodie provided minimal insulation from the sand and I curled into a ball to minimise the shivering.

Sleep came in fits, plagued by images of monster waves crushing me and waking to find my belongings stolen.



I woke with a start, hands grabbing for my luggage. Still where I left it.

Then I sprang to my feet, spitting sand from my mouth. Flicking my hands systematically through my hair and down my body, I dusted off the sand coating one side of me. A light breeze had picked up and I shivered, cold through to the bone. I prodded Keenan with one foot.

‘Screw this,’ I said. ‘I’m going to knock on doors until we find our accommodation. The sponsor said it was to the left of the Rocky Point track, right?’

Keenan nodded, rubbing sleepy eyes. ‘It’s still the middle of the night.’ He shivered. ‘But, okay. Let’s do this.’

I grabbed my luggage and dragged the lot back up the track, Keenan hustling to follow.

Standing on the quiet road, I looked at the houses on either side of the track. Was it left when facing the beach, or left when coming up from the beach?

‘This one’s got boards outside,’ Keenan stage-whispered, a sudden look of confidence in his eye.

Between the leaves of a lush garden, the faint glow of a lamp beckoned through a bare window. It was the only sign of life in the vicinity, so we crept towards the door.

The moment of truth was upon us as we stood like voyeurs on the dark porch, daring one another to intrude on a stranger in the middle of the night, but I was never one to back down in the face of a challenge. I took a deep breath, steeled myself and knocked forcefully. No going back now. Despite my show of bravery, I felt the urge to step back behind Keenan.

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**I was never one to back down in the face of a challenge.**

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We both flinched in the direction of the road, as though we might make a run for it. Then we heard it. Movement inside. Someone shuffled towards us. The door handle turned and I took a step back from the big, muscular French-Polynesian frowning down at me.

Square jaw, wide forehead, low-set brows...I knew this guy. 'Vetea David? No way.'

Oh hell, he was definitely going to pummel us for banging on his door in the middle of the night.

The big Tahitian's face softened and pearly whites flashed. 'You two lost?'

'Sorry for waking you, mate,' Keenan said. 'We're here to surf from Australia, but our ride didn't show up at the airport and we're not sure exactly where our accommodation is. It's somewhere around here. We both ride for Gorilla Grip.' Genius move by Keenan, I thought, to find something in common by mentioning Gorilla Grip, knowing that Vetea was also a team rider.

'Hey, no worries. I went to bed early and was up. Call me Poto. I'm hitting the waves shortly if you wanna bring your stuff in and come along.'

Shortly? It was still dark. Keenan shrugged at me.

‘Thanks, that’d be cool,’ I said.

We hurried to grab our gear.

Keenan whispered, ‘We’re hanging out with bloody Vetea David!’

I just grinned, taking it as a good sign. The surfing gods were finally favouring us today.

Some kind of jungle dance music was playing on the stereo, and it lent a surreal atmosphere to sitting at a melamine kitchen table while one of the big names in surfing rolled a fat smoke. He puffed away, while recapping the previous day’s events at the Pipe Masters competition. This comp was the pinnacle of world surfing events, and pretty soon I’d be riding the world-famous Pipeline break too.

‘Where you boys say you were from?’

‘We flew in from Australia at midnight,’ I told him, ‘and some photographer was supposed to pick us up.’

‘Oh, hell. There’s a photographer dude staying here,’ Poto said, ‘and he mentioned something about picking a couple of teenagers up. Man, he went to a strip club earlier, to kill some time. Ha ha.’

A least someone was having fun. I was knackered from the long flight and shivering on the beach. My body screamed for sleep, but my mind was racing. This was the big league and I was on my way to surfing the greatest waves on Earth with the world’s top surfers.

Poto sucked the last of his smoke and ground out the butt in an ashtray. ‘Let’s go surfing.’

I glanced out the window. Still dark. *This is it, Christo. Surfing Pipeline in the dark. I guess this is how you die.* I forced the nagging voice out of my head. This is what I came here for; to ride monster waves.

‘How big do you think the waves will be?’ I asked nervously, opening my board bag.

‘It’s gonna be big. Take your biggest board. Yesterday, it was a ten-foot Hawaiian swell.’

Keenan pulled a board from his bag. ‘Hawaiian?’

Poto laughed, a rich, melodic sound. ‘When they say ten-foot here, it’s more like fifteen to twenty.’

‘Holy shit.’ My gut dropped. I sized up my suddenly insignificant seven-foot, six-inch board against Poto’s massive board.

‘The way surfers measure wave height must be the eighth wonder of the world, bro. Or maybe the early surfers were too stoned to judge.’ Poto laughed heartily.

‘Or maybe they had enormous balls.’

‘Yeah,’ Keenan piped in. ‘I’ve said it’s only eight foot out there when everyone else was saying it was ten, just to sound more hard core.’

‘Well, it’s much worse in Hawaii, bro.’ Poto clapped me on the back. ‘Big boys with big balls riding massive waves. They’ll say it’s a small swell when they’re riding neck-breakers.’

‘So, how big are you expecting the waves to be this morning?’ I tried to sound offhand, as though it wasn’t an issue for me.

‘Big.’ Was all Poto said.

Shit. He rides massive waves every other day and he’s calling today’s swell big... I gulp down a frisson of panic. Sure, I’d ridden a six-foot, eight-inch board before, but I’d hoped to ease into the bigger waves and new bigger equipment. Clearly Poto was more of a baptism by fire kind of guy.

We loaded the boards into Poto's rental car and five minutes later arrived at Ehukai Beach, home to the surf break known as Pipeline.

The thunder of monstrous waves smashing onto the shallow volcanic reef filled the still night air. My heart skipped a beat. It wasn't just the sound; I could *feel* the power of the waves vibrating underfoot. I glanced at Keenan, who widened his eyes in a silent communication of unease. I'd never planned on riding my first big wave in the dark but I was a pro surfer now. Despite my instincts telling me to stop, I was going to stare these monsters in the eye and make this happen — even if I couldn't see them.

I slung my board under one arm and followed Poto down a dirt track, into the darkness.

The houses either side of the beach access were being shook at their foundations by the deep rumble of the crashing waves.

Seaspray floated through the air and coated my skin, and the familiar taste of it on my tongue drew me closer. Thank goodness for an unimpeded moon, which cast just enough light that I could see where to place each foot.

We emerged on the beach, eyes searching for the waves but only able to glimpse white water in the shallows. Waves were right in front of me — almost close enough to reach out and touch — and yet I was faced with the black hole of a dragon's mouth. A rumble built in its belly to become a roar that rushed at me, tingling through my hands and feet, exhaling salty mist in my face. It was a force to be reckoned with.

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