


# Joe Sweeney

*New York Times Bestselling Author of  
Networking Is a Contact Sport*



# MOVING THE NEEDLE

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**GET CLEAR, GET FREE,  
AND GET GOING IN YOUR CAREER,  
BUSINESS, AND LIFE**

**WILEY**



## Praise for *Moving the Needle*

“Joe’s game plan in *Moving the Needle* will help you on the road from success to significance.”

—**Bob Buford**, author of *Half Time*

“Joe’s program titled Operation Crossover, which he used his training for the U.S. Navy SEALs, taught me how to transition from military to civilian life. He has been a huge help to me personally and my fellow brothers in the SEAL teams. Joe helped me set a clearly defined goal for what I want next and helped me better understand how to put myself out there in the corporate world. With Joe’s help, I have made a successful transition from the SEALs to General Motors by using the principles in *Moving the Needle*.”

—**Patrick Bisher**, GM Group Leader, Production;  
former Navy SEAL

“Joe’s address to our leadership group at CUNA Mutual was a moving and inspirational experience for our team. He knows how to coach, lead, and inspire leaders.”

—**Bob Trunzo**, President of CUNA Mutual Group Insurance &  
Financial Services

“Joe Sweeney recently presented an inspirational keynote and workshop to our LexisNexis Women Connected group, which gave participants the tools to create game changers in their business and personal lives. Joe caused a powerful and positive paradigm shift for many who attended the workshop.”

—**Louise Jones, JD**, LexisNexis, Process Improvement  
Director—Customer Systems,  
North American Research Solutions

“One percent of the people in the world do what they say they will do. One percent of the people in the world give without expectation of return. One percent of the people of the world understand how to connect with people by being a value provider. Joe Sweeney is in the 1 percent bracket. He has set the standard for doing business ethically and enthusiastically. I heartily recommend that you buy *Moving the Needle* and hire Joe to inspire your people to greater heights.”

—**Jeffrey Gitomer**, best-selling author, keynote speaker, and sales authority

“Joe’s book reveals key concepts for getting clear, free, and making significant improvements in your professional and personal life.”

—**John Assaraf**, *New York Times* best-selling author of *The Answer* and *Having It All*, featured in the Blockbuster movie, *The Secret*

“*Moving the Needle* will help you to understand that we have been given a tremendous gift of longevity in our lives. Joe provides many tools for you to make the most out of this most precious gift of time.”

—**Ken Dychtwald, PhD**, author of *A New Purpose: Redefining Money, Family, Work, Retirement and Success*

“Over the years I’ve worked with Joe on various investment opportunities and have shared the principles from his book with my teams across the globe. Each and every time, Joe has added significant value to the process by providing simple, yet impactful insights that cause you to stop and reframe how you are approaching a project. Over the years nothing has impressed me more about Joe than what a great father he has been to his four children. To me, nothing tells you more about a person and his principles than how he treats and interacts with his family.”

—**Mark Pacchini**, former President of Foote Cone & Belding Advertising; current CEO of rVue, Inc.

“Joe was helpful when he talked to our coaching staff during our NCAA Final Four run. Many of the concepts in *Moving The Needle* helped our team get to the Final Four in Dallas.”

—**Bo Ryan**, Head Coach of the University of Wisconsin–Madison Badgers men’s basketball team

“Joe Sweeney has “moved the needle” for my students at the University of Minnesota each time he has visited. This book captures his message of why and how to get clear, get free, and get going. Students of all ages can benefit from his game plan.”

—**Joel Maturi**, Retired Director of Athletics, Current Instructor, University of Minnesota

“I strongly believe in the principles found in the following four books, so much so that I require all my employees to read them and am now adding a fifth—*Moving the Needle*.

*The Intelligent Investor* by Benjamin Graham

*The Power of Positive Thinking* by Norman Vincent Peale

*How to Win Friends & Influence People* by Dale Carnegie

*Networking Is a Contact Sport* by Joe Sweeney”

—**Ab Nicholas**, CEO of the Nicholas Company

“Joe’s address to more than 400 Army Reserve soldiers, many with extensive deployment experience, significantly helped them maintain balance in their lives as citizen soldiers. Joe was a game changer for our troops.”

—**Brigadier General John C. Hanley**, Commander, 3rd Battle Command Training Brigade, 75th Battle Command Training Division

“I have watched the concepts of the Winning Game Plan be implemented with many companies over the years and employ them often in my current role at Turtle Wax. The system works by creating positive daily changes in your professional and personal life.”

—**Mark Leopold**, CEO of Turtle Wax Inc.

“Last fall Joe implemented the Winning Game Plan with our commercial banking team. It was so successful that we asked him to come back this year and repeat the program with our retail bankers. The program has made a real difference in the professional and personal lives of our employees.”

—**Jay Mack**, President and CEO of Town Bank

“*Moving the Needle* is a playbook to be used by the health care industry. Getting clear, free, and going is the foundation for untangling the complexity that exists today and creating a future of more affordable, accessible, and higher-quality care. Joe Sweeney does it again.”

—**Greg Borca**, national health care entrepreneur

“Reading *Networking Is a Contact Sport* and *Moving the Needle* were watershed moments in my career. Five years ago, I never would have believed that I could be in a business development role at my firm. Understanding your approach to sales and implementing the 5/10/15 program helped transform my daily routine. Your insights helped me to see that in my business, wealth management, networking, and sales are all about understanding people’s needs and helping them find the right solution.

—**John V. Celentani**, Northern Trust

“*Moving the Needle* will help you and your team become the best version of yourselves.”

—**Matthew Kelly**, *The New York Times* bestselling author of  
*The Dream Manager*

“Joe Sweeney’s approach to improving personal performance is spot on. In both business and on the race track, the competitive set is fierce. You have to move the needle, or you will be left behind.”

—**Mike Welsh**, Vice President, Commercial Development,  
Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing; Former Director, Sports and  
Event Marketing, Miller Brewing Company

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CAREER, BUSINESS, AND LIFE**

**JOE SWEENEY  
WITH MIKE YORKEY**

**WILEY**

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# Foreword

When I was in the major leagues, I played for the San Diego Padres, New York Yankees, California Angels, Toronto Blue Jays, Minnesota Twins, and Cleveland Indians from 1973–1995 and reached the pinnacle of performance, including the All-Star team for a dozen of those years.

I crossed paths with literally hundreds of sports icons and business personalities over the years. These meetings and interactions gave me insight on how to better myself and my performance as I learned something from many of them. The wisdom from my composite experiences helped me become a communicator through print, radio, and speaking platforms as well.

One of those people I learned from was Mark McCormack, a Cleveland lawyer who was instrumental in establishing the field of Sports Marketing. He started negotiating contracts and managing the careers of golf's Big Three: Arnold Palmer, Jack Nicklaus, and Gary Player. His company, International Marketing Group (IMG), grew to represent athletes from every professional sport, including Major League Baseball.

Because of my thirst for knowledge and personal and professional improvement, I picked up Mark's fascinating book, *What They Don't Teach You at Harvard Business School*. The basic thrust of the book was to teach you to read people, create the right first impression, and run meetings well. Many of his concepts were based on common-sense street smarts and a get-it-done attitude. For me, it was a must-read.

Mark McCormack is no longer with us today, but I know someone who reminds me a lot of him. After meeting through a mutual business group, Joe Sweeney has become a good friend of mine over the years. I've personally seen and experienced Joe's knack for combining his love of business and his passion for sports as

part of his multifaceted career. He and I agree that the common element in these endeavors is our ability to network, connect, and communicate with others.

Joe's latest book, *Moving the Needle*, is a collection of tools, insights, and experiences rolled into a system of what works in the business and sports worlds. This book reminds me of *What They Don't Teach You at Harvard Business School* because it is filled with many of the same common-sense approaches to business and dealing with people. Sports provide a playground for life, and the lessons learned on the sports field can be readily implemented in all aspects of our daily lives. Joe's concepts are really about creating a practical system to improve human performance. *Moving the Needle* is about how to bring your A-game to your endeavors.

I played professional baseball for 22 years, where there are 162 games a year—and more with playoffs and the World Series. To reach the top, I had to prepare for all of those 2,973 regular season and 26 postseason games I played in: pitch by pitch, offense to defense, inning by inning, game by game, and year to year. Although I displayed peak performance quite often, the only constant was the playing of the National Anthem. Each game unfolded differently.

Performing well is not always easy, but with the correct system and discipline, you can work to be your best every day and avoid those huge performance fluctuations that people call “slumps.” You can be sure that I've used many of these tools outlined in *Moving the Needle* to help me be my best on the field, in the boardroom, and in life.

Last, it's Joe's contention, and one I wholeheartedly agree with, that too many people are “stuck” these days and not moving forward in life. If you've ever thought that you needed a system to provide clarity about what you want to do and where you want to go in your career, in business, or in life, then you've come to the right place. Let *Moving the Needle* lead you in the right direction.

—Dave Winfield,  
Hall of Fame Major League Baseball Player



# Acknowledgments

To my parents, Ray and Marian Sweeney—who taught all of their 10 children that moving the needle wasn’t about being better than anybody else, but being the best version of yourself, and that you had to work on this every day.

To my wife, Tami—the kindest and most caring woman I know, who gave me the freedom to pursue my passions.

To my four children, Kyle, Conor, Kelly, and Brendan and their significant others—who remind me on a daily basis of what is important and give me the why to keep going.

To my friends and wingmen—who have kept me on track and given me clarity when I needed it most.

To Sister Camille Kliebhan, OSF, for her grace, beauty, and wisdom and for teaching me that every day is full of grace-filled moments.

To the men and woman of our military, and especially the friends at the Navy Special Warfare Center in Coronado, California, for making the ultimate sacrifice—your lives—to protect our freedoms and liberties. Thank you for showing me how to be constantly grateful and to make every day count.

To the many teachers and mentors who have provided the tools and insights to help us get clear, get free, and get going in our businesses, careers, and lives.

And especially to Mike Yorkey, Colleen Heffron, and Shannon Vargo, who made *Moving the Needle* possible.



# Introduction

## *Why This Book?*

It matters not whether we live up to the expectations of our fathers, but rather, we as fathers, live up to the expectations of our children.

—SAMUEL C. JOHNSON, author of  
*Reflections of Lake Owen*

Is there a moment in time you can look back on and recognize that fate, Divine Providence—or whatever you want to call it—steered you in a certain direction and changed your life?

That happened to me. Four years ago, I was in downtown St. Paul, Minnesota, hanging out in a spacious condo atop the Saint Paul Hotel. The residence belonged to my good friend Craig Leipold, the owner of the Minnesota Wild National Hockey League team.

We were killing time before walking to the Xcel Energy Center for the start of the Minnesota Wild game. A green leather-bound book on the coffee table caught my eye. The title was *Reflections of Lake Owen*, and the author was Samuel C. Johnson, who was Craig's father-in-law and the patriarch of a family company that bore his name and made consumer products, including Johnson Wax, Windex glass cleaner, and Ziploc bags. The book was some type of memoir.

I sat down on the couch and flipped open to the first few pages. Johnson's words from the prologue hit me like a dump load of snow from a full Zamboni.

"My dear grandchildren" is how the prologue began. What followed were the words he hoped his grandchildren would read

some day. After wishing he could protect them from the pains and hurts that would surely happen in life, he said that unfortunately, there was nothing he could do after he was gone, which is why he wanted to share his advice and lessons on life in the form of a book.

His words and insights resonated with me and inspired me to do the same for my family. This was exactly what I wanted to do for my children and grandchildren—to teach them the lessons I had learned in life.

After flying back to my hometown of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, I couldn't get Johnson's message out of my head. I had to share the lessons I'd learned in life with my children. Having never written a book in my life, I wasn't about to produce a 200-page memoir like Johnson did, so I settled on 14 one-page chapters. Each chapter had a message and a moral to it.

A few weeks later, I was having dinner with a few of my close friends at a downtown Milwaukee restaurant. These were the guys I could trust implicitly and whose advice I respected. They wanted to know how things were since our youngest child, Brendan, went off to college.

"Well, I've written a book," I joked, choosing not to tell them it was only 14 pages long. My buddies asked to hear more, so I shared what I did and some of the lessons I learned.

My friend Mark Pacchini slapped his hand on the table and said, "That's a book people should read. You could help so many."

I was flattered that Mark would say that. He ran the ad agency Foote, Cone & Belding in Chicago—it represented international corporations, including Boeing, KFC, Kraft Foods, Taco Bell, and the MillerCoors brewing company.

"What you have to say could help CEOs, sales organizations, college students, and members of the military coming back from the service," he said. "You should publish it."

I was pleased that Mark had faith in me. He believed my business background and life experiences could translate into a powerful business tool to benefit others. I was an investment banker with Corporate Financial Advisors in Milwaukee, but during my nearly 30 years in business, my favorite times were those spent consulting, speaking, and training. Over the years, I have been a businessman,

an entrepreneur who bought and sold companies, as well as a sports agent for NFL players, baseball players, and golfers.

So I took the plunge. I worked with Mike Yorkey, a Southern California writer, to get the prose right. The result was *Networking Is a Contact Sport*, which was released in 2010. I learned early on that the relationships I made while running my business were more valuable than any ad campaign, cost-saving initiative, or product launch. The art of truly connecting with another—and all that entails—can at once be the simplest, most complex, and most rewarding talents one can endeavor to develop. We are trained in how to use systems, how to prepare presentation decks, and how to negotiate contracts, yet we are never taught how to engage, connect, or build a network. I wanted to write a book that would help others in business overcome insecurities, learn more effective networking skills, and establish deep, loyal, and meaningful relationships.

The message resonated so much that I developed a *Networking Is a Contact Sport* workshop and workbook that showed people how, through a series of exercises, they could actually develop skills to be better at building relationships. After attending my networking workshops, people asked me whether I had anything else that could help their teams operate at this elevated level in other aspects of their roles. “Can you help move the needle at our company and improve our overall performance?” the managers asked.

Hearing their requests got me thinking again. Was there a need for an in-depth, ongoing training program that focused on business and personal development? There had to be because when business leaders were asking me whether I had anything else to share, what they were really asking was this:

“Can you help us change human behavior?”

Part of what has made me so interested in the field of networking has been my insatiable curiosity about what makes people tick. People love sharing what motivates them or makes them behave in a certain way; showing interest in learning about them creates an instant bond. Here are two questions I always ask people I meet:

*Why do you do what you do in life?*

*Why have you made the decisions you’ve made?*

So, when dozens of business leaders approached me about what other programs I had in the works, I asked more questions. The leaders told me they were not looking just for motivation or inspiration. They wanted to know how they could improve their performance as well as that of their employees.

Invariably, three issues consistently popped up. Whether they were business leaders, managers, employees, teachers, or parents, they all reported having a hard time with:

- Getting clear
- Getting free
- Getting going

This observation applied to their professional, as well as their personal, lives. They were glued to the ground, unsure of the path they should take or whether they had the freedom to move forward. They weren't getting anywhere, be it in life, in business, or in relationships. In other words, they couldn't get clear, get free, or get going to achieve their goals.

Because of what the marketplace was saying, I decided to write *Moving the Needle* and share a collection of innovative tools that I've used over the past several decades to help me get clear, get free, and get going. To ensure the lessons of this book are adopted, I also developed a 52-week program to help people get clear, get free, and get going. (You can find out more about the 52-Week Winning Game Plan for Business and Personal Development in the back of the book. If you don't have 52 weeks to get going, this program can be adapted to shorter times, such as 16 weeks or 8 weeks.)

That said, *Moving the Needle* is about changing human behavior. For example, if you want to lose 50 pounds, I could help you accomplish that goal, as I've done with a few close friends. Much like changing behavior after reading a book or listening to a 1-hour keynote is challenging, losing 50 pounds after 1 hour in the gym is just as difficult. That's why I have developed a program to help you change behaviors.

So ask yourself:

- Am I stuck?
- Am I having a hard time figuring out what I want to do next in my career?
- Have I recently experienced a change or unforeseen event that forced me to rethink my plans for the future?
- Do I know how to move forward from where I am right now?
- Do I have a game plan and an end goal in sight?

When I talk about getting clear, getting free, and getting going—the mantra of this book—I’ve found that often people have achieved one or two of these goals but not all three. For instance, you may be clear about what you want to do and actually be progressing toward that goal, but you don’t feel free. You may be free to embark on a path of your choosing or to change your course, but you’re not clear about your goals and aspirations. To live a fulfilling life, you need to understand all three of these principles.

The issue people most commonly cite when I ask them what is holding them back is a lack of clarity. They might be successful in their careers or feeling free because they have their own company, but they’re not clear on where they should be going next. When I coach people, I ask, “What does success look like to you? Starting your own company? Doubling sales in the next year? Spending more time at home?”

*I don’t know, Joe. I just want to get up every day and do a good job and be successful.*

These days, that’s not enough. What you’re going to learn about in *Moving the Needle* is how you can get clear so that you can get free and get going. After I break down each directive, I’ll guide you through a series of short exercises at the end of each chapter so that you’ll be pointed in the right direction. You’ll find that everything works logically, but you’ll need to study each chapter and thoughtfully respond to the questions to get the most out of this book.

I urge you to see this through. The principles are meant to be tenets you incorporate into your life each day. It will be fun to challenge yourself to move the needle and make improvements or a key transition in life.

*Moving the Needle* is for anyone looking to get better in his or her career, business, or life. It doesn't matter who you are or what stage of life you're in. You may be a college student, a returning military veteran, an intern trying to get a foot in the door, an account executive stuck in middle management, an entrepreneur wondering how to grow a business, or a CEO trying to turn around a sad-looking balance sheet. Each one of you will be on your way to get clear, get free, and get going by the time you finish *Moving the Needle*.

After working with world-class athletes and successful executives for decades, one thing is clear: *What people can achieve is nothing short of astonishing, but to deliver extraordinary results consistently requires coaching.* That is where this book comes in.

*Moving the Needle* is designed to help you define your goals, focus your efforts, and give you the tools you need to create a system that will help you not only establish, but also maintain clarity, freedom, and motivation.

When I have employed the tools and systems in this book, my life has become richer and fuller and blessed with experiences, purpose, and meaning. *And so can yours.* My hope is that you use this book and employ these systems to get clear, get free, and get going and to make game changers a daily experience. Have fun with this, and find some friends to share these exercises with you.

### **A Closing Thought**

After watching and studying athletes and successful executives for decades, I have concluded that nobody plays consistently at a high level without coaching.

—Joe Sweeney



## SECTION

# Get Clear



Get clear, get free, and get going.

Of these three simple directives, getting clear—defined here as having clarity of mind and striving with a sense of purpose—is the most important and the toughest to do. Maintaining perspective on business and life is a skill that takes decades to master, if it's mastered at all.

Identifying what's most important to you and what isn't is fundamental to getting clarity. If you don't take these steps to determine what's key in your life, then you'll be unsure and unclear about where you should be going or what you should be doing.

Often, people who are unclear focus on the details of day-to-day life because they're unable to concentrate on long-term goals. When you aren't sure what you truly want to do or are afraid to pursue it, paralysis sets in. Many fall into a state of stasis and

wait for opportunities to come along, but this means they settle on whatever opportunities come their way rather than seeking out favorable moments that are right for them. One thing successful people have in common is an absolute sense of mission—at all costs.

As you read this section, think about what matters most to you, what you're doing that detracts or distracts from that, and what it would take to get rid of the clutter in your life and get clear. Once you identify and acknowledge the goals that are most important to you—and identify the obstacles to them, whether real or imagined, self-imposed, or forced on you—you will begin to have clarity and a sense of purpose about the future. Better yet, you'll feel much more confident about the direction you're heading.