

SHAWN D. NELSON



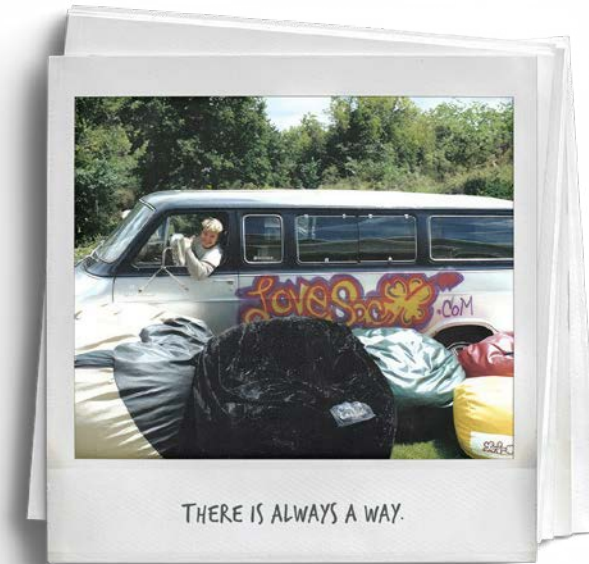
LET ME SAVE YOU 25 YEARS

MISTAKES, MIRACLES, AND LESSONS
FROM **THE LOVESAC** STORY

Forbes | Books

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LOVES.COM

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To Mom. I owe you my life.

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P R E F A C E

LOVE MATTERS

October 1988. I'm thirteen years old, sprawled out sideways on my own seat in the back of a school bus, headphones on, like a shield to the world, connected to my yellow Sports Edition Sony Walkman that I bought with the money I earned from mowing lawns. I'm feeling good. I'm seventh-grade class president and captain of the Academic Team at Evergreen Junior High School in Salt Lake City, Utah. Most of these other kids on the team are total nerds. They are literally a collection of the most misfit, uncool, lonely people in my grade. We are on our way home from another victory in the Granite District Academic Olympiads. We're undefeated. I'm always an anchor player, leading the "presentation team," tasked to deliver a short skit or multimedia project to be judged for big bonus points. Our part follows the trivia portion of the competition that occurs during the first hour, as we prepare our performance on a surprise topic. I'm creative. I've been on stage as a singer, dancer, and musician all my life. I always lead our little group to deliver a show-stopping routine. We always win. I'm thinking, "They're lucky to have me."

As I'm staring out the window doing the coolest-kid-on-the-bus thing, the song "Everybody Has a Dream" comes on. It's Billy Joel at his best, *The Stranger* album playing on a cassette tape handed down to me by my oldest

sister, Kristy. The song meanders through its gospel-style verses laid over a B-3 organ. It crescendos with the soulful chorus repeating its title lyrics on loop. I can't help but survey the smiles on the faces of every "nerd" in school as they're chatting, laughing, and teasing each other on the long bus ride home as this soundtrack echoes in my ears.

The chorus, "Everybody has a dream ... everybody has a dream ... *everybody has a dream*" repeats over and over again as I watch Poppy, with her tight braids and chronic dried flaky skin under chapped nostrils, laughing and playing hand-slap games with Kathy; David, goofing off with his tucked-in checkered shirt, hiked-up pants, and wavy well-combed hair laid over tor-

toiseshell glasses; or Marissa, laughing out loud, jostling her straight-cut bangs over chubby cheeks, her slight eyes pressed tighter thanks to her uniquely warm and perpetual smile.

At thirteen years old, I am suddenly overcome with emotion. What is happening to me? I feel something welling up inside. I instantly feel naked and ashamed.

Like a bucket of ice water to the face, I am somehow made abruptly and acutely aware of my unwitting bias, attitude, and ignorance toward these sweet people. I am the clown. I am the pitiful one. I am the loner in the back of the bus.

In that moment, at the tender age of thirteen, I experience an epiphany: These *people* are no different from me. They likely have mothers and fathers who believe they are the most incredible souls on earth. They will go on to do amazing things—perhaps even more so than the average "cool" kid in

THESE ARE PEOPLE WITH DREAMS NO LESS THAN MINE, AND I NEED TO LOVE AND RESPECT THEM.

our class. They are equally worthy of every opportunity, accolade, or award. These are people with dreams no less than mine, and I need to love and respect them. I need to love and respect *everyone* for that matter, just by virtue of their existence. *They* put up the bulk of the points for the win that *I* get to share in anyway. *I'm* lucky to have *them*.

In that moment, to the whir of the warm tape player spinning softly in my lap, I learned the most valuable lesson I could possibly acquire in this life. It is a lesson that has stuck with me over the years, even as I have struggled to live up to it along the way: LOVE MATTERS. Then I got off the bus.

As a seventh grader, eighth grader, a brainless high school student, and to this present day as an adult, I am sure to have ebbed in and out of sync with my most profound life lessons and realizations. But decades later now, I still believe *that* moment was some kind of a turning point for me, where even at a young age I developed a fundamental respect for people. I developed the capacity to be touched, to be considerate, and to be humbled by life's subtle lessons. While I wouldn't always demonstrate it day to day, the capacity and humility to see people for who they are, as *equals*, as fellow children of God became fundamental to how I have come to define the biggest of all four-letter words: LOVE.

Love, understood this way, would come to help even the most task-oriented and ambitious version of myself to stop and consider the point of view of others, including friends, business partners, employees, or even adversaries. The understanding and empathy pursuant to this would become a surprisingly powerful tool in business and in leadership ... albeit a topic not often spoken of in such worldly circles.

From this pivotal moment, I developed a *conscience*, some ability to really care, and a willingness to stick my neck out for any underdog. Over time I would become more open-minded, more inviting, more vulnerable, more self-aware, and more willing to self-deprecate and sacrifice my own

“face” to help save that of others. With more than twenty-five years of reflection, I have come to realize that this bundle of learned attributes has played a major role in whatever success I have achieved, over and above any raw talent or ability I may have been born with. Love, as a foundational principle, helped make me who I am. But it is the biggest word, and I continue to fall short of it, daily.

In that moment, I also *learned* that I have much to *learn*. This life can teach us the most poignant things in the most unlikely and unpredictable ways if we’re willing to *listen* and if we’re willing to be brutally honest with ourselves. How could I possibly have known that just ten years later I would accidentally set in motion a series of events that would force-feed me every other important lesson along the way? The story of Lovesac, captured in this book.

And isn’t it poetic that twenty years after *that* it would allow me to bring just a *bit* of LOVE to the most barren landscape of all, Wall Street, in the form of a billion-dollar market cap brand (Nasdaq: LOVE) with the opportunity to affect millions of lives for decades to come? And that is just one example. Now twenty-five years into this Lovesac business and counting, I recognize that all I have accomplished never needed to take this long or be quite so difficult in the first place, had I only known then what I have come to know now: Love Matters.

INTRODUCTION

This book is for anyone with aspirations to do anything. The following twenty-five chapters compress the twenty-five-year history to date of Lovesac, a company I set in motion when I was eighteen, into a quick read *with* pictures! These are twenty-five little stories, each followed by twenty-five little lessons that I learned along the way. I call them “Shawnisms.”

I’ve tried to be very honest about my feelings and failings as we go. I’ve included many of the mistakes and miracles that have added up to some kind of success. Over many years, The Lovesac Company would grow into a billion-dollar publicly traded corporation able to employ thousands. You’ll see in a very practical way how these principles can apply to anyone, engaged in anything. If you can learn from *my* mistakes, however, then perhaps *your* ambitions, big or small, can be realized in less than the twenty-five-plus years it has taken me to finally learn something and get somewhere with mine.

But I’m still on the journey myself. Still building. Still reaching. Still trying to wake up tomorrow and do a little better at following my own advice today. It’s a never-ending pursuit, but the journey *is* the gift. With an open mind, an honest heart, some ambition, time, help, and a little bit of luck—*all* things are possible. I hope you find that to be true, and I hope this little book can be useful to you as you *make* it so.

So with that, let me save you twenty-five years.



THE FIRST

June 1995. I'm sitting on my parents' couch one summer morning, about ten days after graduating high school. I'm watching *The Price Is Right*, eating a bowl of Cap'n Crunch. A thought enters my brain from wherever thoughts like this come from: "It would be funny to make a really big beanbag—like big enough to fill the whole living room floor." I get off the couch and drive down to the JoAnn Fabrics store on 3300 South in Salt Lake City, Utah, not far from my home.

I'm on a mission to find about ten yards of beanbag chair fabric. The clearance table has a remnant of black vinyl and tan vinyl that should be just enough by my estimates. I race home, shove our couches to the side, and roll the vinyl out across the entire living room floor. Using a baseball as my guide I eyeball and draw two figure-eight

patterns on the fuzzy backside of the fabric and cut them out with orange-handled scissors from the penholder next to the phone in our kitchen. I jam my mom's sewing machine. My friend's mom finishes the job, installing a zipper for stuffing. Three weeks of chopping up old blankets, packing peanuts, and camping mattresses in the basement using a wooden paper cutter-chopping-thing from the office closet. Stuffing it took way longer than I thought it would, but the Sac is born.

The very first Sac is out and about, riding along in the back of the truck as an accomplice to all our mindless summer night adventures. Camping. Drive-in movies. Fireworks at the park, rock festivals—everybody loves it. Everybody wants one.

“Where'd you get that thing?” “That's huge!” “I've never seen anything like that!” “Make me one!”

To flop into it is immediately shocking—it's not a beanbag at all. There aren't any beanbag beads in it. Instead, it's filled mostly with chopped-up foam that squishes and forms to your every nook and cranny making you feel weightless. It is an eight-foot-in-diameter comfort cloud that involuntarily puts a smile on anyone's face just to behold its ridiculousness—let alone on contact. But it would be three years until someone finally convinces me to go through the trouble to make another one.

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LESSON # 1

JUST DO SOMETHING

Do it now. Don't wait. Do *something* to take whatever wild idea is nagging at you and see if you can't move it forward—even an inch. Take that first step. Immediately, if you can. Why not? It is amazing what can be learned from actually doing *anything* versus just thinking about it or talking about it forever. Don't think too hard. It may take a thousand starts before one of these ideas takes root and turns into something lasting. This giant beanbag was

GET OFF THE COUCH, AND GO MAKE SOMETHING HAPPEN.

lead. Lovesac is living proof of this. The world is full of people with good ideas. The thing that separates the champions from the rest is *action*—and then sustained action.

certainly not the first time in my life I acted decisively and impulsively. This was just another one of my hare-brained schemes brought to life. It is shocking where even the silliest ideas can

This disposition to *do* things is not a one-time event either, and it need not apply only to business or entrepreneurship. Whatever our “job” is, we can likely do it better just by *acting* on some of the bright ideas we have, instead of brooding or—worse—complaining about the status quo, unwilling to change it.

How can we build a great culture? How can we get ahead in our career? How can we build better relationships with our partners? How can we get good at something totally new? How can we know what to do next with our lives? How can we grow closer to our families or kids?

Simply *do* the things you think of! Develop a bias for action. Don't wait. Err on the side of *trying* the things that come to your mind without putting them off. Pick up and go. Sign up for the class. Take the risk. Prototype it. Don't just talk—*do*.

Get off the couch (says the couch guy), and go make something happen. *Right now*.