

# EARNED, NOT GIVEN

Sweat Equity for a Second Chance



A guidebook to working your way back up

**WALT ADKINS JR.**



**EARNED, NOT GIVEN**

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Chance**

A Guidebook to Working Your Way Back  
Up

Walt Adkins Jr.

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# Dedication

*To the common and uncommon mentors  
who taught me*

that responsibility matters,  
work builds dignity,  
and excuses don't build a future.

*To Larry Winget,*

for reminding people that success begins  
with ownership.

*To Mike Rowe and the  
MikeRoweWORKS Foundation,*

for honoring honest work and restoring  
respect to skilled trades.

***To Dave Ramsey — EntreLeadership,***

for shaping how I think about leadership,  
ownership, accountability,

and building organizations that serve  
people well.

***To John Maxwell,***

for leadership lessons built on character,  
influence, and consistency.

***To Jesse Duplantis,***

for bold faith and belief in what's  
possible.

***To Mark and Cindy Bowe,***

for championing the principle

“Work hard, be kind, and take pride” —

words that have become foundational to how I live, work, and rebuild.

*And to every employer and client who helped shape my character, integrity, and my personal comeback story — thank you.*

Your expectations, trust, and opportunities helped build the man I am today.

*And to every man and woman*

*working their way back —*

showing up, staying steady,

and refusing to quit on themselves —

this book is for you.

**(Note: The Dedications noted are for purposes of honor and gratitude. In no way did anyone mentioned give permission nor endorsement for this work. They are just a handful of the hero's that have influenced my journey on one way or another. To them I'm grateful.)**

# Foreword

(By the Author — until an external foreword is added)

There are plenty of books about success.

Plenty about motivation.

Plenty about dreaming big.

This is not one of those books.

This book is about earning your way back

—  
through work, discipline, honesty, and responsibility.

It's written for people who've been knocked down.

For people rebuilding their finances, their reputation, their confidence, or their future.

For people who are tired of shortcuts, tired of excuses, and ready to do the real work.

There's nothing glamorous about starting over.

There's nothing flashy about showing up every day.

But there is something powerful about a person

who decides to stop waiting

and start building.

This book won't promise overnight success.

It won't offer hype.

It won't pretend the road is easy.

What it will do is remind you  
that your comeback is possible —  
and that it's built the honest way:  
earned, not given.

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# Chapter One

## **No One Is Coming to Save You**

There's a hard truth most of us don't want to face:

No one is coming to save you.

Not the government.

Not your boss.

Not your family.

Not your friends.

Not a program.

Not a miracle.

Not “someday.”

That doesn't mean people don't care.

It doesn't mean help doesn't exist.

It doesn't mean grace isn't real.

It means this:

Your life changes when you decide to change it.

Waiting to be rescued keeps you stuck.

Waiting for someone else to fix it keeps you dependent.

Waiting for the perfect moment keeps you frozen.

There comes a point where you have to look in the mirror and say:

“If this is going to get better, it starts with me.”

That moment is uncomfortable.

It strips away excuses.

It removes the safety net of blame.

It forces ownership.

But it also gives you something powerful:

Control.

You may not control what happened to you.

You may not control the hand you were dealt.

You may not control how hard life hit.

But you do control what you do next.

And that's where the comeback begins.

# Waiting Costs You More Than Action Ever Will

Waiting feels safer than trying.

Blaming feels easier than building.

Excuses feel lighter than effort.

But the cost of waiting adds up:

- Lost time
- Lost confidence
- Lost health
- Lost income
- Lost momentum
- Lost self-respect

The truth is, nobody builds your future while you wait.

Progress doesn't come from wishing.

It comes from showing up — even when you don't feel ready.

Even when you don't feel motivated.

Even when you're scared.

Even when you're tired.

Especially then.

# Accountability Is Not Cruel — It's Empowering

This book isn't here to shame you.

It's here to remind you of something you may have forgotten:

You still have power.

Taking responsibility doesn't mean blaming yourself for everything.

It means refusing to stay powerless.

It means saying:

- “I can't change the past — but I can change today.”

- “I can’t control everything — but I can control my effort.”
- “I may be behind — but I’m not done.”

Accountability isn’t punishment.

It’s permission to rebuild.

# The Turning Point Starts With Ownership

If your health needs work — you own that.

If your finances need work — you own that.

If your mindset needs work — you own that.

If your future needs work — you own that.

Not because it's fair.

Not because it's easy.

But because ownership is where progress starts.

You don't need permission to start over.

You don't need approval to do better.

You don't need a rescue plan.

You need a decision.

A decision to stop waiting.

A decision to stop outsourcing  
responsibility.

A decision to start doing the work — one  
step at a.

# **No One Is Coming — And That's Good News**

Here's the part most people miss:

If no one is coming to save you...

That means you get to save yourself.

You get to rebuild.

You get to improve.

You get to change direction.

You get to rise — earned, not handed.

And every step you take from here  
forward

will belong to you.

Not because you were rescued.

But because you showed up.





# Chapter Two

## **You Don't Need Motivation. You Need to Make a Choice – and Stand by It.**

Most people wait on motivation.

They say things like:

“I’ll start when I feel ready.”

“I’ll get serious when I’m inspired.”

“I’ll change when I feel motivated.”

But motivation is unreliable.

It comes and goes.

It shows up when life feels easy —  
and disappears when life gets hard.

If you build your future on motivation,  
you'll quit every time it fades.

Real change doesn't start with motivation.  
It starts with a decision.

# **Motivation Is a Feeling. Choices Are a Foundation.**

Feelings shift.

Energy rises and falls.

Confidence wavers.

But a choice can hold steady.

A choice says:

- “I’m doing this whether I feel like it or not.”
- “I’m not quitting just because today is hard.”
- “I made a commitment — and I’m honoring it.”

You don't need to feel inspired to show up.

You don't need to feel confident to take a step.

You don't need to feel ready to begin.

You need to decide —

and then keep deciding when it gets uncomfortable.

# Standing by Your Choice Is Where Strength Is Built

Anyone can start something when they feel good.

Character is built when you:

- Keep going when you're tired
- Show up when it's inconvenient
- Stay committed when progress feels slow
- Hold your word when no one is watching

That's where discipline forms.

That's where self-respect grows.

That's where momentum begins.

Not in excitement.

In follow-through.

# **You Won't Always Feel Ready — and That's Okay**

There will be days when you don't feel capable.

Days when you don't feel confident.

Days when you question whether it's worth it.

Those days don't disqualify you.

They simply test whether your progress is built on:

- Emotion  
or
- Commitment

Feelings make promises.

Choices keep them.

# **Make One Clear Choice — Then Back It Up With Action**

You don't need a perfect plan.

You don't need a dramatic overhaul.

You need one honest decision, such as:

- “I’m going to show up to work every day.”
- “I’m going to move my body five minutes a day.”
- “I’m going to track my money instead of avoiding it.”
- “I’m going to stop quitting on myself.”

Then you back that decision with small, consistent action.

Progress isn't built on grand gestures.

It's built on kept promises — especially the quiet ones.

# Closing Thought

You don't need motivation to change your life.

You need to choose a direction —  
and stand by that choice  
even when motivation disappears.

Because feelings fade.

Character stays.



## **Author's Note**

*This book comes from lived experience*

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from falling down, standing back up,  
learning lessons the hard way,  
and realizing that no one builds your life  
for you.

*I've been on both sides of the fence —*

as an employee,  
as an employer,  
as someone starting over,  
and as someone trying to build something  
lasting.

*What I've learned is simple:*

Motivation fades.

Excuses stall progress.

Shortcuts rarely hold.

But steady work,  
honest effort,  
personal responsibility,  
and consistency  
still change lives.

You don't need perfection to move  
forward.

You don't need to have it all figured out.

You don't need permission to rebuild.

You need a willingness to show up.

To stay.

To work.

To own your future.

*My hope is that this book feels less like a lecture*

*and more like a steady voice in your corner —*

*reminding you that progress is possible if you're willing to earn it.*

*If you're reading this while rebuilding, keep going.*

**Your story isn't over.**

## AUTHOR BIO

Walt Adkins Jr. is a writer, builder, and comeback storyteller from rural West Virginia.

Through hard lessons, rebuilt businesses, personal setbacks, and second chances, Walt has learned that real change doesn't come from motivation — it comes from responsibility,



discipline, and showing up when it's hard.

He is the creator of the Crock Pots & Common Sense and Farm to Fit series, founder of Back Porch Press LLC, and the voice behind Walt's Journey — a growing movement centered on work ethic, faith, health, financial responsibility, and rebuilding life one steady step at a time.

When he isn't writing or creating, Walt can usually be found working outdoors, building practical systems, cooking simple food, or encouraging others who are fighting their way back.