

"If you need encouragement and ideas about how to succeed, I recommend this book."

TONY HSIEH, CEO of Zappos.com and bestselling author of *Delivering Happiness*

How to succeed when times are  
good, bad, or in between

# Up, Down, or Sideways



**MARK  
SANBORN**

author of the *New York Times* bestseller *The Fred Factor*

**UP, DOWN, OR SIDeways**



## **PRAISE FOR *UP, DOWN, OR SIDEWAYS***

“At Zappos, one of our core training courses is built around *The Fred Factor*, so I was excited about Mark Sanborn’s latest book. If you need encouragement and ideas about how to succeed during challenging times, I recommend reading *Up, Down, or Sideways*.”

**TONY HSIEH**, *CEO of Zappos.com and New York Times bestselling author of Delivering Happiness*

“We all experience turbulence in our personal lives and in business, just like an airplane. Every pilot has been Up, Down, or Sideways. Mark Sanborn offers you a flight plan to prepare for and thrive in turbulent times.”

**HOWARD PUTNAM**, *former CEO of Southwest Airlines and author of The Winds of Turbulence*

“You are holding a life-changing book—it packs a walloping prescriptive punch! Mark poignantly invites us to gain wisdom from the crucible of personal and professional setbacks and guides us to savor faith, family, and friends. Read it, and the people you care about at home and at work will benefit from your journey through Up, Down, or Sideways.”

**DR. JOSEPH MICHELLI**, *bestselling author of The Zappos Experience*

“Look for a better wave. . . . Mark’s book is filled with fresh and useful advice on reinvention and new ways to thrive.”

**SETH GODIN**, *author of Poke the Box*

“No matter what state you’re in—Up, Down, or Sideways—Mark Sanborn brings you back to the core principles that never change, no matter where you are. If you want to act on a ‘good should,’ then you *should* read this book.”

**DR. MARSHALL GOLDSMITH**, *million-selling author of the New York Times bestsellers Mojo and What Got You Here Won't Get You There*

“Mark is an extraordinary speaker and an outstanding leader who speaks with conviction and experience on success. The practical advice and pearls of wisdom throughout this book are worth studying, contemplating, and dissecting. Learn how to apply them in your business and in your life to create sustainable growth and prosperity in all you do.”

**DR. NIDO QUBEIN**, *chairman of Great Harvest Bread Company and president of High Point University*

“Mark Sanborn continues to amaze with his relevant, why-didn't-I-think-of-that lessons for success in work and life. His latest great book, *Up, Down, or Sideways*, will help you keep all life’s ups and downs in perspective—and you’ll love his concept of Sideways. Who needs to read this book right now? Everybody does!”

**KEN BLANCHARD**, *coauthor of The One Minute Manager and Lead with LUV*

“No matter where you are in life—Up, Down, or Sideways—there’s no question that reading and following Mark Sanborn’s advice will have a dramatic impact on your greater personal and professional success. I read a lot of books, and I enthusiastically recommend that you read this one.”

**DARREN HARDY**, *publisher of SUCCESS magazine and bestselling author of The Compound Effect*

“Mark Sanborn is refreshingly commonsensical and characteristically right on the money with *Up, Down, or Sideways*. Every book he’s written has influenced my thinking, but this one has inspired my *doing*. Each chapter prompted me to act differently, think differently, and see differently. Regardless of whether you are Up, Down, or Sideways, these timeless principles will propel you forward.”

**DR. WAYNE CORDEIRO**, *pastor of New Hope Christian Fellowship, Oahu, and bestselling author of The Divine Mentor*

# Up, Down,



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How to succeed when times are  
good, bad, or in between

# or Sideways



**MARK  
SANBORN**

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*To my father, Leslie Sanborn, who taught by example.*

*And to my sons, Hunter and Jackson.*

*I aspire always to do the same.*

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## INTRODUCTION

# THE GOOD SHOULD

THE CANADIAN PUNK band Simple Plan released a song a few years back titled “Shut Up!” The lyrics include “Don’t tell me what I should do / I don’t wanna waste my time,” and the chorus begins with “So shut up, shut up, shut up / Don’t wanna hear it.”

Not exactly a feel-good song for the ages, is it?

Unfortunately, it’s easy to take that attitude when other people give us advice, even if most mature adults would never express the sentiment so bluntly. There are times when we all resist the advice that others offer us because

it can feel controlling, and after all, we want to make our own decisions. We don't like other people telling us what we should do.

In resisting the “shoulds” in life, however, we often throw the baby out with the bathwater. While some advice can be critical or controlling, other advice is helpful and needed. I call the latter the “good shoulds.”

My mother, and I suspect yours as well, would say things to me like “You should brush your teeth.” “You should look both ways before you cross the street.” “You should be kind to others.” As we grow older, our parents, teachers, coaches, employers, pastors, friends, and mentors bring increasingly complex and specific advice to our burning ears.

Fortunately, informed and concerned people in our lives still give us things we *should* do—things that have stood the test of time and have proven to be true and valuable. Just because we're adults doesn't mean we learn only from our experiences and not from the mistakes and successes of others. Why learn only from your own blunders if you can take a cue from someone else's and avoid a few missteps? Why not learn from the lessons and experiences of others?

This book is unapologetically a discussion about things

you should do—indeed, things all of us should do. I read books for insights, and I write books to share good ideas that I believe will help others. But these “shoulds” are borne of concern and my own life lessons and missteps, not out of a desire to control or manipulate. It’s up to you to decide what to do with them.

Our doctors, accountants, attorneys, spouses, friends, coworkers, pastors, investment counselors—they all weigh in on what we should do. And when we have good advice available to us, we should take it. Wise people seek out and act on “good shoulds.”

The mind-sets and methods in this book are based on principles, and principles don’t change. They are true across time, culture, and context. What changes is the application. The principles of communication, for instance, haven’t changed throughout history. Communication happens when you express a message in a way that people know and understand what you mean and can act on it. The applications—from longhand letters to faxes to e-mail to Facebook—have changed dramatically as cultures and technologies have advanced. But the core principles of communication haven’t changed.

The core principles that drive success haven't changed either. Some of the applications have shifted, but the principles remain the same. They are good advice. You should use them, and so should I. And we should all share them with others. (With all due respect to the band Simple Plan.)

—*Mark Sanborn*

## **SECTION 1: SEE**

*It sounds simple, doesn't it? From infancy we are able to see the world around us. But seeing isn't just about looking at the world around you; it's about attaching meaning to what you see. One person might see a daunting wave; a surfer sees an opportunity. One person might see an obstacle; a successful person sees a starting block. Are you willing to open your eyes?*

*“The value of experience is not  
in seeing much,  
but in seeing wisely.”*

—WILLIAM OSLER, CANADIAN PHYSICIAN

CHAPTER 1

# THE SURFER'S SITUATION



*Interact with the waves of change to create  
the outcome you desire.*

THE TRIPLE WHAMMY hit me three years ago. For one thing, speaking engagements—my primary source of income—had dropped by about 20 percent. For another, my financial investments tanked. And last but certainly not least in the Sanborn Triad of Trials, doctors diagnosed me with prostate cancer.

Strike one. Strike two. Strike three. Right?

Well, not quite. It certainly wasn't a home-run year, but then again, I know people who have faced much worse.

Besides, it was only half an inning in the long game of life. And to my surprise, that year of setbacks ended up leading me to a huge positive: fresh insights.

Like most insights, mine had been developing in the crucible of time—not just days, but months or even years before. I have no idea how long they had been percolating in my heart and mind. But I do know they came together with great clarity while I lay in bed for eight days that December convalescing from prostate surgery.

I wouldn't know until the end of those eight days that the surgery had stopped the spread of the cancer, so contemplative thoughts about life's uncertainties filled my

*Faith, family, and friends aren't the desserts that follow the big meal of success; these are success.*

downtime. I read books, newspapers, and magazines until my vision blurred, and then I turned to the television. The programming, like the reading material, greeted me with reports of the global economic meltdown and

worsening recession—as if I needed reminders that my business and investments were down.

Things were tough globally, too. It didn't seem to matter

much where you lived on the planet—everyone was affected by the financial crisis.

I pulled out of the stock market just about the time it hit the bottom and started back up. Many experts, including the really smart one who advised me at the time, felt the market would retest the bottom, providing a soon-to-come perfect opportunity to get back in. It didn't.

My business portfolio wasn't doing much better. As an author and professional speaker, I earn a large part of my income from speaking at meetings. Several high-profile corporations were getting hammered in the media (and even by Congress) for excessive spending on their events, so the meetings industry—that is, the opportunity to practice my livelihood—was nearly as depressed as the stock market.

I've had downturns in business. I've had downturns in finances. And I've had downturns in health. But until that year, I had never felt the distress of all three at the same time.

As odd as it might sound, however, nothing going on at that time—nothing I was reading or watching, nothing that had happened in my personal life, and nothing the doctors

might tell me in the forthcoming days—could shake my feeling that I was still blessed.

Why?

Well, for starters, as simple as it sounds, I was overwhelmed by reminders of the importance of faith, family, and friends. These aren't the desserts that follow the big meal of success; these *are* success, at least as I have come to define it.

I don't know of a universally shared definition of success, but I do know it's always about more than material wealth. I've had the opportunity to develop a diverse range of friendships—from salt-of-the-earth people of simple means to millionaires and billionaires. I can count on one hand those who define success singularly or even primarily as “net worth.” When pressed for more than a superficial answer, most people I've asked define success as the quality of their lives. That includes things like health, meaningful work, relationships, service, leisure, learning, and faith. These things all blend together to create that thing we call success.

The other reason I still felt a sense of prosperity was that I knew my challenges, as tough as they seemed, were met

head-on by strategies I'd practiced throughout my adult life. In other words, while my lot in life wasn't as good as it had been, there were several identifiable reasons why it wasn't as bad as it could have been. I realized that almost everything knocking me down at the time came from forces outside my control, but there were several things I had been doing for years that mitigated the negative effects.

My bookings for meetings were down, but not nearly as much as they were for other speakers—I knew of some whose bookings were off 70 percent. I believe years of hard work developing a reputation for delivering value (in every sense of the word) provided the sure footing that kept me from sliding any further backward.

And while my investments had taken a significant hit, I was nowhere near the poorhouse. I grew up on a farm in Ohio, and my father's frugality bordered on obsessive. His father had lived through the Great Depression, and my dad

*If you want to succeed when times are Up, Down, or Sideways, you have to learn how to identify and interact with forces bigger than yourself.*

drilled into me the most important and perhaps least complex financial planning tool there is: spend less than you make. So while I'd seen a dramatic drop in the value of my investments, I still had reserves.

Lying in bed in the days following my surgery, my physical prognosis still hung in the balance. But I knew I had done several things to speed my recovery. As an overweight kid who didn't like getting picked on, I had turned to exercise. I had worked out my entire adult life, and while I never reached competitive levels in athletics, I did develop an active lifestyle. I'm sure that aided my recovery. Eight days after my surgery, I was back on my exercise bike (with my surgeon's blessing).

No matter who you are, at some point circumstances will come that are outside your control. But there are things you can do to help you succeed even in challenging times. These, in fact, are the things you and I should do whether times are Up, Down, or Sideways. And that's what this book is about: how to maximize the upsides, mitigate the downsides, and succeed as much as you can all the time.

## CATCHING THE WAVE

In business, we're told to be proactive. But let's be clear: proactivity has its limits. Proactivity is about what we choose to do but not always about what we control. And much of what we deal with in life falls outside of our control.

To prove it, pick up a copy of the *Wall Street Journal* or your local newspaper and count the number of articles you controlled or influenced. Every day the count is the same for me: zero. Even if you are mentioned in the newspaper, you probably had little control over the article. The best you might hope for is that they spelled your name correctly. So while you can be proactive on a personal level about doing things, there are forces bigger than you that you cannot control or influence.

On the other hand, we also know that being reactive in business is the kiss of death. If you spend your life reacting to what happens, you'll end up, as my mother warned me, a day late and a dollar short.

So we find ourselves in a psychological dilemma: if

being reactive is the kiss of death and being proactive beyond a personal level is a myth, what's left?

The answer: *be interactive*.

Think of a surfer. Only the Creator can make and control a wave. But a good surfer finds and interacts with the waves to create the outcome he or she desires. Don't miss that first part: good surfers *look for good waves*. They are proactive on a personal level. They don't just say, "There's the ocean—let's surf!" They watch the weather, scout the shoreline, check with friends, and do whatever they can to find the best waves.

If you want to succeed when times are Up, Down, or Sideways, you have to learn how to identify and interact with forces bigger than yourself—the economy, your upbringing, government regulations, natural disasters, and on and on the waves roll.

We don't control those forces any more than surfers control the waves. I didn't trigger the mortgage meltdown. I didn't cause corporations to back off on the number of speakers they hired. I didn't do anything to get cancer. Yet I was impacted by all those things and challenged by how I would respond to them. My opportunities for success

depended in part on how well I interacted with them to create the outcomes I desired—just as great surfers do when they look for the best waves.

Again, there are no guarantees. No matter how good you are, sometimes a big wave slams you under the soup. Even the best surfers wipe out. Other times, no matter how much you want to surf, the waves aren't big enough. You can either paddle around or find something else to do.

Growing up north of Youngstown, Ohio, I remember listening to some guys in their twenties who had been laid off from the local steel mill. Television reporters asked them, "What are you going to do?" The typical answer went something like this: "My daddy was a steelworker, and my granddaddy was a steelworker. There's nothing else I can do." I remember, even at my young age, thinking, *Are you kidding me?*

My father was a farmer, and my grandfather was a farmer. Did that mean all I could be was a farmer? Of course not. In fact, the family farm wasn't something that interested my brother or me, so it was easy enough for us to chase our own dreams. But too many people spend their lives floating around in ankle-buster waves. When things

are Sideways—when you aren’t riding the big wave or getting slammed—maybe you need to go to the shore and seek another activity. You still can create desired outcomes, even if it’s not from riding big waves.

That’s the Surfer’s Situation. If the waves are moderate and commensurate with your skills, you’ll do fine. If they are too big, they will wipe you out. If they are too small, you won’t be able to ride them. Like a surfer, you have to figure out how to interact with forces bigger than yourself to create the outcomes you desire—the outcomes you define as success. I believe this book can help you do that.

## **THE YOU ECONOMY**

So, where are you as you read this book?

I don’t mean physically, as in “I’m sitting on a plane” or “I’m outside on my deck.” I mean, where are you in life?

Up? Down? Sideways?

Are things great? Did you just get the new job, the big raise, the big bonus, the marriage to the love of your life? Are you in the best shape of your life—physically, emotionally, financially, and spiritually? Are your children all

Eagle Scouts and National Merit Scholars who never get in trouble?

Or are things a mess? Did you just lose your job, discover someone close to you is dying, or find out your spouse left you for someone else? Are your children battling addictions, hanging out with the wrong crowd, and pushing you to your emotional limits? Are you shackled by debt?

Or is your situation in between? Maybe you're doing okay as you progress through life, having little expectation for anything better and no real threat. Do you feel, as Pink Floyd sang, "comfortably numb"?

I can't predict what will happen with the economy, and even if I could, it wouldn't tell me where you are now. We tend to think the economy affects everyone equally, but it doesn't. The economy might be screaming Up like never before, and you still might be unemployed or struggling to make ends meet. The economy might be Down or Sideways, yet you might be doing quite well.

As an economist by training, I have learned that most people are far more interested in their personal economy—the "You Economy"—than the economy at large. The

economy is impersonal. *Your* economy is personal. As the saying goes, a recession is when your neighbor loses his or her job; a depression is when *you* lose your job.

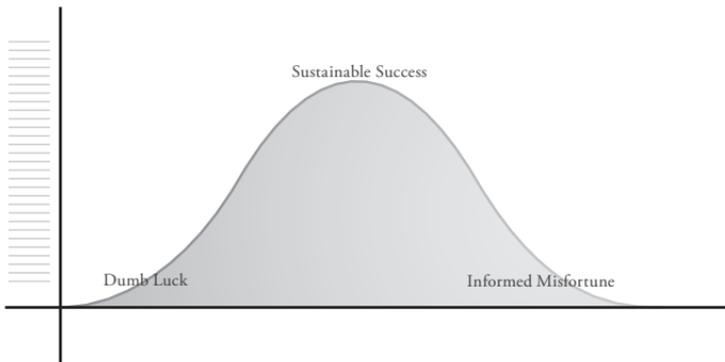
The thing about the You Economy is that it comes with no guarantees. You can do everything right, and something may still go wrong. You can do some things wrong and survive anyway—perhaps even come out ahead. Great parents sometimes end up with rotten kids. High-achieving adults sometimes rise out of rotten homes.

There are no guarantees. But some things are predictable. They don't guarantee success, but they do increase the odds. They are a form of insurance because they provide the best path toward success in life.

You can plot this reality on a graph and see a bell curve. On the one end, you have dumb luck—those times when you do the wrong thing and it still works out. On the other end, you have informed misfortune—those times when you do everything correctly and things still fail. Those come out as relatively flat lines. They happen often enough to make the grid, but not enough to raise it significantly. In the middle, however, is sustainable success. These are the

results you get by doing the things that work—the methods and mind-sets addressed in these pages.

You and I can't explain away informed misfortune. It's a mysterious reality, but a reality nonetheless. And we can't explain dumb luck. Denying its existence won't make it less real. But those two realities don't have to shape your approach to life. You can (and should) focus on the things you have some control over—the things that mitigate the downsides, increase the upsides, and allow you to succeed.



## THE PRESENTOLOGIST

The late Sir John Marks Templeton was only a few years out of college when war began in Europe in 1939. The young

investor from the back hills of Tennessee used borrowed money to buy one hundred shares each of 104 companies that were selling for one dollar per share or less. Thirty-four of those companies were bankrupt. But only four ended up worthless, and the shrewd but risky move launched Templeton's career. Some economic historians now consider him "the Father of the Mutual Fund."

Of course, he might have bet wrong. When it comes to picking stocks or predicting the course of the economy, the experts don't have a great track record. It has been joked that economists predict nine out of every four recessions. And it's not hard to find stories about animals that randomly pick stocks that outperform those selected by the best and the brightest financial analysts.

In *Future Babble: Why Expert Predictions Are Next to Worthless, and You Can Do Better*, Dan Gardner takes a look at an exhaustive research study done in the 1980s by Philip Tetlock. The research, he writes, shows that "experts' predictions were no more accurate than random guesses."

The point is, predicting the future is easy, but predicting it correctly is very hard. I can predict where the economy is going, but I can't know if I'm correct until we get there.

That's why I recommend against chasing success as a futurist. Instead, approach it as a "presentologist."

Rather than focusing on what might happen, focus on what you can do now to ensure you'll be successful regardless of what happens. Rather than trying to predict the future, prepare for it. Rather than anticipating what the world will *throw your way*, adopt and live out the timeless principles that will serve you, *come what may*.

There are things you can do some of the time to aid your efforts for success. And there are things you should do most of the time. And then there are a few things you should do all the time, regardless of circumstances. These are things that set you on a course toward sustainable success—whether times are Up, Down, or Sideways.