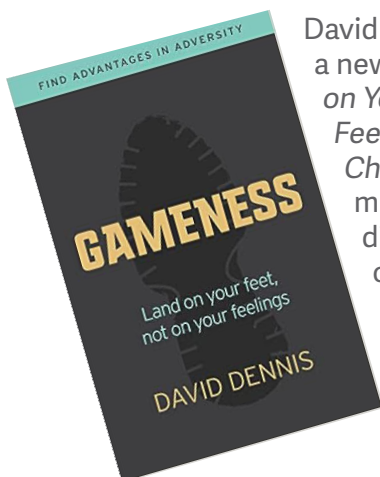


# gameness:

## LAND ON YOUR FEET, NOT ON YOUR FEELINGS



Interviewed by Dina Jones, MA



David Dennis recently wrote a new book, *Gameness: Land on Your Feet, Not on Your Feelings*. He sits down with *Christian Coaching Today* magazine for a deeper discussion about taking ownership in life, how to successfully pivot from adversity, and the importance of living for purpose — not just emotion.

### What inspired you to write *Gameness*?

*"You are in danger of living a life so comfortable and soft that you will die without ever realizing your true potential."*  
— David Goggins<sup>1</sup>

I was inspired to write *Gameness* for my children, or any other reader, so they may be spared from the danger of living a life so comfortable and soft that they will die without ever realizing their true potential. I missed my dad all my life, and I wished I could have had a conversation with him. His life advice, lessons, and wisdom were absent in my development, and I felt it deeply. I knew I wanted a different outcome for my five kids, so I long ago decided to write down the lessons I wish I could have heard from my dad.

It struck me later that many others did not have anyone speaking these truths to them either. I hope this message sits within that gap.

I did not want to simply leave a diary of reflections behind for my kids. I wanted to leave a record of what I had come to believe through my life experiences and observations to be the most important attributes or mindsets they would need to possess to live their lives to their fullest potential. Those attributes, or mindsets, are the four defining attributes of gameness. Equipping them with the tools needed to live their lives to their fullest potential was important to me because the happiest, most fulfilled, most effectual, especially enjoyable, and often the most prosperous people I have ever met were all people who sought to live their lives to their fullest potential — and they all possessed gameness.

In addition to my children, another motivator was something I internalized in my ten years of private practice counseling and 30 years of leading human services programs across the country. As a Licensed Professional Counselor, Marriage and Family Therapist, and CEO, I have witnessed countless lives stuck and unhappy over the years. I observed a tremendous proclivity in our society (which only grows, by the way) to focus on the pain of our past — our trauma, our wounds, our failures — more than the possibilities of our futures. I saw far too many people who saw themselves and life as problems to be solved versus potentials to be realized.

Life can be uncertain, unfair, and frequently unpleasant. Moreover, it is up to us to decide if we will become victims of those circumstances or thrive despite them. Our society is experiencing a pandemic of pity, which is not the good kind borne of empathy for one another. The pity I am seeing is the worst kind of self-pity. We are losing too many "potentials" and missing too many "possibilities" to a virus of victimhood.

Soren Kierkegaard taught us, "Life can only be understood backward, but it must be lived forwards." It inspires me to imagine each of us genuinely committed to a "live forward" philosophy: we all seek to live our lives to our fullest potential, regardless of our current or past circumstances.

### **Can you explain the concept of gameness and how it relates to personal and business development?**

*"We are not here to survive this; we are here to take charge of this." – Navy Seals<sup>3</sup>*

In the first book of the Old Testament, after God created the universe and man and woman, he did not say, "Hey, Adam and Eve, good luck; hope everything goes OK for you out there!" There was nothing passive about his first command. He did not address them as spectators or "would-be" survivors. He said, "Subdue the earth and take dominion of every living thing." This directive is to "take charge of this. It is not, "I hope you survive this." His instruction to the first humans was to steward what they had been entrusted with, make the most of it, and give it their best shot.

Gameness is an approach or philosophy of life or business that is much like the Navy Seal mantra, that is, the mission-centered mindset of any Seal when they are dropped into any hostile environment. How a Seal acts in combat is not governed by their enemy, environment, circumstances, or feelings but by their purpose in being there.

**Gameness is a "take dominion" philosophy of life and business that is guided by four core attributes:**

- 1 Never-quit mindset**
- 2 Resoluteness to purpose**
- 3 Fighting spirit**
- 4 Act beyond feelings**

Any life or business that operates otherwise will fail to accomplish its true potential or go out of business.

Gameness is a "take dominion" philosophy of life and business that is guided by four core attributes:

1. **Never-quit mindset.** We see detours to our dreams, not dead ends, when a path ends. It is about upgrading our perspective to "see things better," even when we cannot "see better things" yet!
2. **Resoluteness to purpose.** Our efforts are guided by our life purpose or clearly defined mission, vision, and values. Whether it be our personal lives or business, this requires knowing and being resolutely committed to our "why" and the values that determine our "why."
3. **Fighting spirit.** We tackle our problems instead of dodging them. This approach to life and work trains us to see problems as something that "grows power in us" versus "having power over us." Living and doing business with a fighting spirit means we acknowledge, even expect, each day to present us with adversity that will demand something from us. Our responses can be one of three: surrender to our problems, try to survive them, or subdue them. Gameness is more than resilience; it is thriving or becoming better because of problems we encounter as we determine to become wiser, stronger, or more resourceful due to lessons learned during adversity versus becoming victims.
4. **Act beyond feelings.** This means mastering your performance and mastering your feelings. It is living and working while being governed by our purpose and goals, not our feelings or circumstances. It is learning that there are no free endorphins. Seldom does anyone "feel" like going to the gym to work out, but everyone feels good after working out. Success in life or business is only possible with discipline. Success feels great; discipline does not usually feel great. However, to quote Jocko Willink, "Discipline is freedom!"<sup>4</sup> This is about fostering a mindset of acting ourselves to new ways of feeling versus foolishly attempting to feel ourselves to new ways of acting.





### How can readers apply the principles of gameness to their own lives and their jobs?

*"The difference between a successful person and others is not a lack of knowledge, but rather a lack of will."* – Vince Lombardi<sup>5</sup>

The question to be asked is not "How can readers apply the principles of gameness to their own lives and their jobs?" but rather, "How can readers apply *themselves* to the principles of gameness in their own lives and their jobs?"

It is impossible to adequately answer this question for each individual who might read this book because each person will probably be drawn to different principles laid out in the book, depending on where each reader is in their life journey. However, it is important to stress that I see gameness more as practices versus principles. Gameness is an action mindset versus a knowledge mindset.

I learned years ago to hire character and teach skills. The attributes of gameness are attributes of character that can only be acquired through disciplined action and strenuous work. As William James said, "The strenuous life tastes better."<sup>6</sup>

Our society has focused too long on resumes and not enough on resolve. College degrees, technical competency, product knowledge, ability to leverage technology, networking skills, and a number of "social media followers" will never be enough to accomplish our true potential in life or business.

Suppose someone is savvy enough to land on a formula for business growth that is enough to accomplish monetary success through the right entrepreneurial idea, business acquisition, creative product innovation, marketing/branding strategy, and political favor. Still, in every life and business, the rain will fall. Adversity will test every life and every business. When it does, no amount of financial wealth, MBA, CEO network, intelligence, entrepreneurial skill, or political favor will be enough to weather those storms successfully.

You may be fortunate (depending on how you define fortunate) to be born into wealth and privilege or an inheritance from a relative or friend, or perhaps by winning the lottery. History has demonstrated since the beginning of time that economic power, status, and privilege can fill a person's bank account and ego while still leaving them bankrupt in their soul.

### What practical tips or exercises can readers use to develop gameness individually and within teams?

*"Life is not primarily a quest for pleasure, as Freud believes, or a quest for power, as Alfred Adler taught, but a quest for meaning."* – Harold Kushner<sup>7</sup>

While reading my book is certainly not the only way to develop gameness in one's life or team, I believe it could be a great starting place to introduce the attributes of gameness and a way to begin practicing and promoting gameness in your own life or your team.

In the book, at the close of each chapter, you will find five or six practical questions for readers to do personal reflection, think through scenarios for application, and guide group discussion if your team is reading the book together.

Being an example of living the practices of gameness is the most essential step to take. Once these attributes permeate your thinking, mindset, and approach to life, they will yield fruits in your life and business that will be noticed by others, including your family, friends, and team members.

While reading and answering the questions individually or as a team, it would be a good idea to begin journaling insights and opportunities where you or your team can advance a gameness mindset into your life and your business culture.

Each unique person and team will formulate practical steps for developing gameness in the most important and relevant ways to their unique needs and goals and their current circumstances.

### Who would benefit most from reading your book?

Anyone ready to start landing on their feet and not on their feelings by learning to find the advantages in their adversity will benefit from *Gameness*.

This book is for anyone tired of allowing circumstances outside of their control, painful memories or mistakes, current problems, or self-sabotaging feelings to rob them of their potential, dreams, and happiness.

*Gameness* is for anyone needing and ready to learn the power of living their life or leading their business with a never quit mindset, a resoluteness to purpose, a fighting spirit, and the will required to act beyond your feelings.

L.J. Suenens once said, "Happy are those who dream dreams and are willing to pay the price of making them come true."<sup>8</sup> The dreaming dreams half of this formula for happiness is the easy part. Paying the price to make them come true is the half that robs too many people of their dreams and happiness. Without gameness, no one can pay the price to make a dream come true.

Beware, though: If you like "playing the victim" and making excuses about your life or business, this book will make you very uncomfortable!

### You discuss reporting to your purpose rather than your emotion. Can you share some thoughts on that?

*"Having a bad boss isn't your fault. Staying with one is."* – Nora Denzel<sup>9</sup>

Feelings (emotions) are bad bosses. They are invaluable and wonderful servants, but they are horrible masters. Feelings are fickle and can change with your mood, the weather, how others treat you, life circumstances, problems, past mistakes or poor choices, and regrets. Purpose is a great boss because it provides meaning, clarity of focus, direction, passion, resolve, and momentum for life.

In her journal, Hellen Keller wrote, "Many persons have a wrong idea of what constitutes true happiness. It is not attained through self-gratification but through fidelity to a worthy purpose."<sup>10</sup> Fidelity to a worthy purpose requires the fourth attribute of gameness discussed in my book: *The Will Required to Act Beyond Feelings*.

**Purpose is a great boss because it provides meaning, clarity of focus, direction, passion, resolve, and momentum for life.**

## What is the biggest takeaway you hope readers will get from your book?

This year in America, there will be approximately:

- 1.7M suicide attempts<sup>11</sup>
- 217,000 children entering the foster care system<sup>12</sup>
- 10M adult arrests<sup>13</sup>
- 700,000 teen arrests<sup>14</sup>
- 700,000 marriages end in divorce<sup>15</sup>
- And the #1 cause of death will be heart disease, linked to obesity and inactivity<sup>16</sup>

My first hope for readers of my book is that anyone currently on a path to becoming one of these tragic statistics would find the hope, insights, and encouragement to begin a life of gameness, where they discover their purpose and the happiness that can only be known by those willing to pay the price to make their dreams come true and live their lives to their fullest potential.

Another big takeaway I hope readers will get can be summed up well in this passage from Steven Pressfield's book, *The War of Art*:

"In the end, the question can only be answered by action. Do it or don't do it. It may help to think of it this way. If you were meant to cure cancer or write a symphony or crack cold fusion and you do not do it, you not only hurt yourself but even destroy yourself. You hurt your children. You hurt me. You hurt the planet.

You shame the angels who watch over you, and you spite the Almighty, who created you and only you with your unique gifts, for the sole purpose of nudging the human race one millimeter farther along its path back to God.

Your work is not a selfish act or bid for attention on your part. It is a gift to the world and every being in it. Don't cheat us of your contribution. Give us what you've got.

So, what have you got to give?"<sup>17</sup> ✨



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## Endnotes

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