

Inspirational People

As noted in *Motivating and Inspiring Students: Strategies to Awaken the Learner* (Marzano, Scott, Boogren, & Newcomb, 2017), inspiration occurs when an individual is reminded that one or more of his or her *ideals*—beliefs about how the world should be—are actually practiced in the real world. Here, we provide a compilation of brief personal histories of inspirational people that students can use to identify and analyze their ideals.

Jim Abbott

Jim Abbott showed talent as a pitcher upon entering Little League, throwing a no-hitter his first game. However, the people around him kept saying it'd only be a matter of time before his luck ran out. Abbott had been born without a right hand, so when he played, he had to pitch with his left hand, then quickly put on his glove to field the ball. Nonetheless, Abbott became a celebrated pitcher in American baseball history by proving himself as a talented (rather than lucky) player. While many thought he wouldn't be able to overcome his physical disadvantage, Abbott consistently played well throughout high school and college, constantly improving his performance on the field and competing just as well, and often better, than other players. In college, Abbott earned a position on Team USA, the U.S. amateur baseball team, and in 1988, he led his team to a gold medal and won the Sullivan Award, which is given to the nation's top amateur athlete. He eventually was recruited to the California Angels, but again, outsiders doubted whether he would be able to keep up professionally. However, Abbott cast away their doubts after he led his team to the most victories that a first-season pitcher had produced since 1924 (Gold Stars Speakers Bureau, 2012; Swaine, n.d.).

Madeleine Albright

When Madeleine Albright was a child, her family fled Czechoslovakia during the Nazi invasion and settled in the United States. Though she was raised as a Christian, it was only much later that Albright realized that her family had converted from Judaism to escape persecution, as three of her grandparents died in Nazi concentration camps during the Holocaust. In the United States and with a fresh start, her family established itself in Denver and created a life for Albright that provided her with the education necessary to succeed. Albright went on to earn a PhD and raise three children of her own. Then, after her husband left her, she chose to focus on her career and proved herself as a strong-willed and bright political strategist. She eventually became a key political advisor for the Democratic Party and was appointed as the U.S. representative to the United Nations in 1993, where she aggressively lobbied for the interests of the United States. Four years later, Bill Clinton appointed her to the position of secretary of state. In this role, she advocated for international democracy and served as an outspoken, deliberate, and tenacious leader. As the first woman to ever hold the position, she proved that women were just as competent politicians as men, and President Barack Obama eventually awarded her the Presidential Medal of Freedom to honor her contributions to her country (Albright, 2010; Phy-Olsen, n.d.).

Tyra Banks

Though regularly teased for being tall and gawky during her adolescence, Tyra Banks wanted to become a model. As she reached out to modeling agencies as a teen, she often faced discrimination because she was African American. Nonetheless, Banks did not give up on her dreams, and she eventually signed with the largest modeling agency in the world, Elite Model Management, which paid her to go to Paris to model after high school. In Paris, she was a breakout star on the runway and began to make a name for herself. While in Europe, she began to gain weight as she matured and, rather than starve herself to meet the stick-thin beauty standards expected of her, she returned to the United States. In the United States, models with curves were more accepted, her career took off, and she became the first African American woman to appear on the covers of *GQ* and *Sports Illustrated*. Though a highly successful model, Banks constantly searched for other ways to challenge herself and apply her many talents. She developed the hugely successful television show *America's Next Top Model*, which after twenty seasons maintained large audiences and high ratings. She also developed *The Tyra Banks Show*, for which she won two Emmys. Recently, she finished a degree through Harvard Business School and pledged her time to encouraging high self-esteem and positive body images in girls and women (Biography.com Editors, n.d.aa).

Halle Berry

Growing up as the child of an interracial couple, Halle Berry first experienced racial discrimination and bullying while attending an all-white school. However, she did not let the negativity around her affect her and instead used any unkind words to fuel her unwavering commitment to proving cynics wrong and becoming the best. Throughout school, she received high marks and threw herself into extracurricular activities, including serving as a newspaper editor, cheerleader, and class president. Around this time, she also won multiple beauty pageants, such as Miss Ohio USA and Miss Teen All-American, and placed second for Miss USA. Though she briefly attended college, she dropped out to move to New York City to pursue acting, another endeavor in which she would become known for her work ethic. Her acting career started off with small television appearances, but with hard work, she eventually was cast in a movie directed by Spike Lee. The role put her on the radar of critics and the public alike, and she established herself in the acting world. Over the following years, she won a Golden Globe and an Emmy award and secured a lead role in the hugely successful X-Men franchise. However, she truly made history when the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences awarded her an Oscar for her performance in *Monster's Ball*, making her the first African American woman to win the Best Actress Academy Award and ultimately paving the road for other young actresses of color (Biography.com Editors, n.d.h).

Emily Blunt

Emily Blunt, a popular movie star, did not always speak with the ease she now exhibits on-screen. By the age of seven, Blunt had developed a severe stutter, peaking in severity around the age of twelve or thirteen. Because of her stutter, she often avoided speaking and quickly grew frustrated by the ineffectiveness of the many speech therapies in which her parents enrolled her. Luckily, one of her teachers found an unorthodox solution to address her speech impediment. After realizing that Blunt did not stutter when she imitated the voices of others, the teacher suggested that Blunt try out for the school play, thinking that maybe taking on a different character

could help her overcome her difficulties with speech. The teacher's suggestion worked. In the end, acting served as a remedy for her once-crippling speech impairment and led Blunt to a career she would not have considered otherwise (Hajek, 2014).

Nellie Bly

Nellie Bly's journalism career began in 1885 after she wrote a rebuttal to an editorial piece arguing that women should only work in the home and focus on cleaning, cooking, and child-rearing. Offended, Bly wrote a scathing response that impressed the managing editor of the newspaper, leading him to offer her a position on his staff. Bly went on to become one of the most famous investigative journalists of her time. For her first piece, she infiltrated the ranks of a women's mental health hospital and uncovered its inhumane conditions; the piece led to substantial policy revisions regarding the treatment of those in asylums. In later pieces, she exposed corruption in factories in which women could not make living wages and interviewed famous women, using her platform to challenge society's treatment and expectations of women. Inspired by Jules Verne's novel *Around the World in Eighty Days*, she also set a world record by traveling around the world in seventy-two days, despite being an unchaperoned woman (Biography.com Editors, n.d.t; Gregory, 2014).

Norman Borlaug

In the 1960s, scientists predicted that more than a billion people around the world would starve within the following two decades due to famine. Before genetically modified crops were common, famine spread throughout India and Pakistan as well as other underdeveloped countries in Asia, Africa, and Central and South America. One man, Norman Borlaug, almost singlehandedly developed a solution to this very pressing humanitarian issue. Borlaug grew up on a farm in Iowa during the Great Depression. He often went hungry during his childhood, which, as an adult, helped him realize that access to food is critical to a stable civilization. With this epiphany, he went on to radically change the way the world grows its crops and is often called the "father of the Green Revolution." By spending years crossbreeding wheat to create high-yield, disease-resistant strains, Borlaug was able to hugely increase the yield of grain. These modified strains of wheat were sent to countries with starving populations, thus staving off widespread malnutrition and food shortages. He won a Nobel Peace Prize for his unorthodox agricultural experiments, despite the fact that throughout his life, skeptics criticized his efforts and argued that his developments would not be enough to feed the world's growing population (Easterbrook, 1997; Miller, 2012).

Warren Buffett

Warren Buffett is an American investor whose personal fortune has reached approximately \$62 billion. However, if one were to drive by his home in Omaha, Nebraska, one might think differently. He lives in a modest house he bought in 1958, prefers to eat a simple hamburger over an expensive multicourse meal, and avoids spending excess money on vacations, new technologies, or other things he deems nonessential. This resistance to unnecessary spending in his personal life has enabled an outrageously successful career in investment. His method of investment looks for the *intrinsic value* (how much he determines a company should be worth based on its product and management) of a company and its *market value* (how much it costs to buy shares of the

company). Buffett only buys companies whose intrinsic values are lower than their market values and ensures that the companies meet his own high standards by reviewing each potential acquisition before his international company buys it. During the technology boom of the 1990s, many criticized him for his resistance to investing in technology start-ups; however, when the boom came to an abrupt end, many of Buffett's critics went bankrupt, while he made huge profits off his tried-and-true method. Warren Buffett is clearly a man of conviction who closely follows the rules he makes for himself. Most recently, Buffett became known for his commitment to charity, as he plans to give away a majority of the \$62 billion he has amassed over his lifetime to causes he cares about before he dies (Smith, n.d., 2015).

Alberto Cairo

In 1990, Alberto Cairo was transferred by the Red Cross to a temporary post running an orthopedic rehabilitation program in war-torn Kabul, Afghanistan. Previously a lawyer, Cairo decided to switch careers midlife in order to find personal and professional satisfaction and retrained as a physiotherapist to help those in need. Though initially holding a temporary post, he has remained at the rehabilitation center for more than twenty-five years; once he arrived, he realized that he found his calling working with the amputees at the center. Amazingly, he has provided an estimated one hundred thousand Afghans with prostheses while maintaining strong community relationships and keeping costs low. When foreign prosthetics became too expensive, he started making his own locally by employing amputees helped by his center. Upon realizing the lack of services and resources for new amputees, he expanded the rehabilitation program to include therapy, job training, education, and loans. Most notably, Alberto Cairo's work stands apart because he believes that all patients who need help should receive it, and that rule guides his work—unlike other organizations, he has never discriminated against particular political or religious groups, regardless of who is in political power, and provides all his treatments free of charge (Burns, 2008; Cairo, 2011; Nordland, 2014).

Jim Carrey

Jim Carrey, a famous comedian and actor, is known for his zany antics and animated facial expressions on-screen. From a young age, Carrey displayed comedic talent and a knack for academics. However, when his father lost his job, Carrey began working eight-hour job shifts in addition to going to school to support his family. Shortly afterward, he and his family had to move into a Volkswagen van parked on a relative's lawn while they struggled financially. To release stress, Carrey began performing at comedy clubs, though his debut performance was a complete flop. Not to be deterred, Carrey dropped out of high school to focus on comedy, eventually moving to Los Angeles, where he believed he could make it as an entertainer. Though it took time to establish himself, Carrey won notoriety after opening for the prolific comedian Rodney Dangerfield and began to tour as a professional comedian, eventually deciding to try his hand at acting as well. He picked up a series of smaller roles in films, leading to his big break in 1994 when he starred in *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective*, followed by the breakout hits *The Mask* and *Dumb and Dumber*. These three movies established Carrey in Hollywood, eventually opening the door to more serious roles in films like *The Truman Show* and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Lifetime, n.d.c; West, n.d.).

Majora Carter

Growing up, Majora Carter saw her neighborhood, the South Bronx in New York City, slowly deteriorate. Rates of poverty, poor health, pollution, and unemployment rose; people moved away to the suburbs; and a negative social stigma became associated with the area. She knew she needed to get an education and eventually left the South Bronx for college. However, upon returning from school, she recognized that rather than run from the problems associated with her neighborhood, she should try to fix them. She founded a nonprofit called Sustainable South Bronx and began lobbying for the interests of the disenfranchised. As executive director of Sustainable South Bronx, she won a \$1.25 million grant to create a park on the waterfront, the first of its kind in more than sixty years, and created programs to help the formerly incarcerated gain skills valuable to the environmental business sector. These accomplishments directly reflect her belief that rather than conforming to existing methods or accepting things as out of their control, individuals can create their own framework to spur change. For Carter, she found success in creating environmentally friendly solutions to revitalize struggling neighborhoods and was awarded a MacArthur Fellowship in 2005 for her innovative ideas (Carter, 2006; CNN, 2008).

Derrick Coleman

By the time that he exited elementary school, Derrick Coleman was essentially deaf. Hearing aids allowed him to hear, though students at his school bullied him for being different. He found an escape from their harsh words on the football field. Though some members of his family initially discouraged his playing, his father advocated for Coleman because on the field he could be just another normal player. Coleman excelled at the sport and found a community that accepted him as an equal rather than an outsider. He went on to UCLA for football, where he kept ahead of his studies and received awards recognizing his commitment to the team and athletic abilities. Although he wasn't drafted to the NFL upon his graduation in 2012, Coleman was briefly picked up by the Minnesota Vikings and later the Seattle Seahawks, though he wasn't given playing time. Even without professional success, Coleman worked tirelessly and kept training both physically and mentally. In 2013, in a game against the New Orleans Saints, Coleman scored a touchdown for the Seahawks after being subbed in and earned a spot for himself on the starting lineup. The Seahawks continued to bet on Coleman's skills, and Coleman became the first deaf player to make it to the Super Bowl, winning the Super Bowl XLVIII title with the team (Biography.com Editors, n.d.e).

Ellen DeGeneres

Ellen DeGeneres made rounds as a comedian on talk shows for years before starring in her own sitcom, *Ellen*. The show was well received for three years until, in 1997, DeGeneres chose to make her character acknowledge that she was a lesbian, reflecting DeGeneres's own sexual orientation. As this was the first instance of a lead character acknowledging his or her own homosexuality in television history, the public backlash was immediate. Sponsors withdrew their support of the show, and a television station in Alabama refused to play the episode. The ratings of the show fell, leading to the show being canceled, though gay-rights activists praised the show and the episode ultimately won an Emmy. With her career in ruins, DeGeneres struggled to find work and overcome financial difficulties for a number of years, at one point almost declaring bankruptcy. In a change of

fate, DeGeneres was offered a daytime talk show in 2003, *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*, which quickly became one of the highest rated daytime talk shows because of her funny, honest, and open temperament. She has continued to have fearless open dialogues about her sexual orientation despite losing her job for this same lifestyle previously. To this day, she remains an outspoken advocate for LGBT rights and has become one of the most visible LGBT people in the United States (Biography.com Editors, n.d.g; Creamer, 2012).

Walt Disney

Walt Disney created an icon known around the world with the production of Mickey Mouse, one of the most famous cartoon characters in history. Though today he is a household name, throughout his life, Disney struggled to find a path that would lead to success. Disney dropped out of art school in Chicago at the age of sixteen to join the army during World War I but was rejected from service because he was too young. He decided to volunteer for the Red Cross in Europe instead. When Disney returned, he found relative success creating cartoons of a character named Oswald the Lucky Rabbit, and he and a business partner created a movie production company to make other films about Oswald. However, his business partner stole the distribution rights to Oswald the Lucky Rabbit behind Disney's back and left the business. Without his main cartoon, Disney's business began to fail. However, not to be discouraged, he created a new character, Mickey Mouse, and with the incorporation of sound into film, Mickey Mouse became an instant success. Disney created a whole cast of new characters to feature as Mickey Mouse's friends, and he soon won an Oscar for his animation work. Once established in Hollywood, Disney went on to create many animated classics, including *Snow White*, *Pinocchio*, *Fantasia*, *Dumbo*, and *Bambi*, and eventually built the wildly popular theme parks Disneyland and Disney World (Biography.com Editors, n.d.bb).

Giles Duley

Giles Duley started his career as a fashion photographer, but after ten years in the industry, he decided to shift his focus to documenting humanitarian efforts. When Duley began working with charities, he realized that the stories of the disenfranchised were being ignored. His revelation led him to photograph and document the stories of those suffering from poverty, war, and disease around the world. In 2011, while on patrol with the U.S. Army in Afghanistan, Duley stepped on a land mine and lost both of his legs and an arm. Miraculously, Duley lived and, after months of therapy, was mobile again in a wheelchair. After retraining himself to take photographs with his prosthetic hand, he returned to photography despite the fact that it had previously threatened his life. Since his recovery, he has traveled to Afghanistan to expose the lack of treatment for Afghan amputees and covered the Paralympics to challenge how those with disabilities are perceived (Battersby, 2013; Duley, 2012; Kay, 2012).

Kevin Durant

While many may know Kevin Durant as a three-time NBA All-Star and a three-time NBA scoring champion, his first MVP acceptance award speech revealed a different side of the famous basketball player. In his heartfelt speech, Durant thanked his mother for encouraging him to follow his dreams and sacrificing for her family, even if it meant that she had to go hungry so that her children could eat. Unlike some professional athletes, who

become cocky as they become more successful, Durant has remembered his roots and made sure to acknowledge his family's hard times when given the opportunity. This humility, paired with his impressive work ethic and skill on the court, makes him not only a world-class athlete but also a sincere individual who has overcome difficult beginnings through hard work and love of family (Biography.com Editors, n.d.m; CNN, 2014).

James Durbin

James Durbin first came into the public eye as a popular contestant on the reality singing competition show *American Idol*. He pushed the boundaries of the competition from the very beginning, gravitating toward rock and metal songs over those of other musical genres that are traditionally better received by television audiences. Durbin also revealed early on in the competition that he has both Tourette syndrome and Asperger's syndrome. With this admission, some questioned whether he could be successful in the music industry, though he proved them wrong by becoming a breakout star on the show. Following his time on *American Idol*, Durbin released a successful album, toured nationally, and was nominated for various music awards. As a highly visible public figure and role model for fans with similar conditions, Durbin showed that individuals can achieve their goals if they keep working toward them, regardless of what others say or believe about their abilities (Barney, 2011; Grosso, 2011; Invisible Disabilities Association, 2011).

Amelia Earhart

When Amelia Earhart took her first plane ride, she knew she was going to dedicate her life to aviation. To finance this passion, she took on countless odd jobs and eventually earned enough money to purchase her own plane, "The Canary." Because she was a woman, many at the time doubted her ability to fly. As if to prove herself, she quickly set a world altitude record for female pilots and became the sixteenth woman to ever be issued a pilot's license. The success was short-lived, however, as her family's money ran out, and she was forced to give up both flying and her education because of financial strain. A few years later, she was asked to follow in the footsteps of Charles Lindbergh and become the first woman to fly across the Atlantic Ocean. She gladly accepted, though she was surprised when she found she was not allowed to pilot the plane because she was a woman. She later stated that she felt like "baggage" while the male pilots aboard navigated from Newfoundland to the United Kingdom. One benefit of this voyage was that it earned her notoriety, and she began to dedicate herself full-time to aviation. In the following years, she broke flying records and pushed the boundaries of aviation for both men and women, using her public stunts to combat gender stereotypes (Biography.com Editors, n.d.a).

Robert Fischell

When Robert Fischell stumbles upon a problem, his first instinct is to figure out a practical way to fix it. For instance, he invented the pop-up lawn sprinkler after tripping on a sprinkler on his way to work. Years after this first invention, he holds more than two hundred patents. They include incredibly important medical patents, such as the rechargeable pacemaker, the implantable insulin pump, a machine that stops epileptic seizures before they begin, and a device that warns users of impending heart attacks. These innovative medical inventions are just some of the fruits of Fischell's design process, which involves finding a problem and solving it in the most practical and intuitive way possible. Once inspired, Fischell works ceaselessly to design and refine suitable

solutions, and his drive for perfection and for practical answers has been attributed to saving more than a million lives. Fischell displays this drive for personal excellence in all facets of his life; for example, at eighty-five, Fischell worked ten to twelve hours a day, served on the board of thirteen organizations, responded to seventy emails per day, found time to spend with his wife daily, and played doubles tennis at least three times a week (Fischell, 2005; Friedman, 2014; Holzberg, 2013).

Harrison Ford

After Harrison Ford was given his first feature film role—he spoke a couple of lines as a bellhop in *Dead Heat on a Merry-Go-Round*—a Columbia Pictures studio executive called Ford into his office and told him that he did not have the presence to be a movie star. Ford ignored the executive's comments and kept trying to make it in the entertainment business. However, he wasn't able to support himself with his sparse roles, so he decided to become a carpenter on the side. Through woodworking, he met countless Hollywood insiders and eventually met George Lucas, the director of the original *Star Wars* films, who saw something in Ford and cast him in a lead role. Though he struggled for more than fifteen years to find consistent work as an actor, his roles in George Lucas's movies proved to be his big break. With his performances in the *Star Wars* films and the Indiana Jones series, he quickly became an international star and one of the most sought-after action heroes in Hollywood (Biography.com Editors, n.d.i; Lifetime, n.d.b).

Viktor Frankl

From an early age, Viktor Frankl was interested in psychology. By the age of nineteen, he had his first paper published; a few years later, he had graduated from the University of Vienna with a degree in neurology and psychiatry and began developing logotherapy, his own interpretation of human psychology that focuses on man's desire to find meaning in life. Shortly after Frankl established his own private practice, Hitler invaded Austria, but instead of escaping to the United States, he chose to continue to care for his patients. In 1942, the Nazis captured Frankl and sent him to a concentration camp. Though he survived, he lost many of his family members, including his wife, to the Holocaust. After Frankl regained his freedom, he wrote his renowned book *Man's Search for Meaning*, which used his experiences in the concentration camps to explore how people can find positive meaning in the face of extreme suffering and how this search for meaning defines every person's life (Famous Authors, n.d.b; Frankl, 1972).

Morgan Freeman

Morgan Freeman was raised in a poor family from the southern United States during a time when African Americans struggled for the same rights as others. Though he excelled at acting from a young age, Freeman aspired to be a fighter pilot and decided to enter the U.S. Air Force rather than accept a drama scholarship after his high school graduation. Though he believed he'd be given a chance to pursue his dream of becoming a pilot, the air force was not what he imagined; he spent his time on the ground as a mechanic. After recognizing the air force would not allow him to achieve his dreams, he moved to New York City, where he spent close to a decade pursuing an acting career without success. He caught a break in 1967 with a part in a Broadway production. This part allowed him to survive as an actor, but he still struggled to make it big. It took another twenty years

of trying before Freeman became a recognized actor in Hollywood. Today, Freeman is a household name and has been honored repeatedly for his continued contributions to the field of acting. However, Freeman never forgot his love of flying, and he recently earned his pilot's license (Biography.com Editors, n.d.r).

Roland Fryer

By the time Roland Fryer was thirty, he was already a tenured professor at Harvard and the youngest African American to achieve this honor. However, his path to success was not an easy one. Fryer grew up in a poor neighborhood, but with the encouragement of his grandmother, he found an escape by earning a basketball scholarship to the University of Texas at Arlington. In college, Fryer thrived both academically and athletically, though he eventually focused his energy on economics instead of basketball, as he felt this would create more opportunities in the long run. Dedicated to his education, Fryer excelled throughout graduate school, earning his PhD and an opportunity to teach at Harvard. When he recounted his life story to others, listeners would often marvel that he “beat the odds”; this expression frustrated him because he felt it was unfair that the odds were different for children depending on where they grew up. Rather than passively accepting these offhand comments, Fryer embarked on a new project to change the odds for children from backgrounds like his own. He researched the racial achievement gap and published a flurry of papers on the subject. This research culminated in the creation of the world-famous Education Innovation Laboratory at Harvard, which specializes in research and development in the field of education (Cathy, 2012; Dubner, 2005; Rhee, 2009).

Armando Galarraga and Jim Joyce

It was the ninth inning of a baseball game that would go down in history. Armando Galarraga had one out standing between him and a perfect game. Sitting at two outs, Galarraga needed to retire the batter at home plate to join the ranks of the twenty other pitchers in the history of Major League Baseball who had had perfect games. However, something went wrong. Jim Joyce, an umpire with a good reputation for his fair calls, announced the hitter as safe after he hit Galarraga's pitch and, despite the batter clearly being out, ruined his chance of a perfect game. The public outrage against Joyce was immediate. However, while many athletes in his circumstances might have gotten angry, Galarraga remained quiet and composed. After the game, Joyce asked to see a replay, at which point he recognized his error and publicly stated that he was in the wrong and had made a horrible mistake. After this admission, Galarraga still displayed great sportsmanship, responding later that nobody is perfect and that it was water under the bridge. Though Joyce was offered opportunities not to umpire Galarraga's games because of the anger directed toward him by fans, Joyce declined, noting that he could not shy away from his obligations. Meeting in person soon after the next game, Joyce tearfully apologized to Galarraga, who shook his hand and comforted the umpire. Both men have been lauded publicly for their handling of the incident: Galarraga for his sportsmanship and understanding and Joyce for his ability to publicly admit his mistakes and seek forgiveness (Verducci, 2010).

Bill Gates

From a young age, Bill Gates was technologically skilled. At the age of fifteen, he and a high school friend received twenty thousand dollars for a computer program they wrote that surveyed traffic in the Seattle area.

He attended Harvard after high school briefly, ultimately dropping out to create and run the software firm Microsoft, which grossed more than \$2 million in its first year. It was in these beginning years at Microsoft that Gates showcased his commitment to excellence. He personally reviewed every line of code the company produced and edited each product as needed. His own high personal standards drove the company forward and facilitated its ability to become one of the largest and most successful technology companies in the world. After many years of running Microsoft, Gates left his full-time position at the company to pursue philanthropic ventures through his and his wife's organization, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Focusing on using *catalytic philanthropy*—investments that find areas without innovation with the possibility of massive returns—to address global issues of education, health, poverty, and agriculture, Gates applied the same standards of personal excellence and visionary leadership that helped Microsoft succeed to his nonprofit. Gates, following the billionaire Warren Buffett's lead, also promised to donate at least half his wealth of almost \$80 billion to charitable pursuits (Biography.com Editors, n.d.b; Gates, 2013).

Theodor Geisel

Dr. Seuss was a world-renowned children's book author known for his fantastic illustrations and storylines. However, few are familiar with Theodor Geisel, the man behind Dr. Seuss, and his struggles to break into children's literature. Geisel's first manuscript, *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street*, was rejected twenty-seven times before finally being accepted for publication in 1937. These rejections did not ever deter Geisel, however. He kept sending his manuscript out, never letting the doubts of others affect his belief that his book was good and deserved to be published. His relentlessness eventually paid off when the book was published and became a commercial success. He went on to write and illustrate forty-four children's books, including *Green Eggs and Ham*, *The Cat in the Hat*, and *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*—all of which are considered classics of children's literature. Perhaps most exceptionally, Geisel never compromised on his vision and persevered to achieve it. His surrealist style of illustration and writing has become a hallmark of his books, despite publishers initially criticizing or rejecting the style for not fitting into existing ideals of what children's literature should look like (Biography.com Editors, n.d.f; Chase, n.d.; Springfield Museums, n.d.).

Evelyn Glennie

Evelyn Glennie began to lose her hearing around the age of eight. By the time she was twelve, she was considered severely hearing impaired. Around this time, she became infatuated with drumming. While she previously had perfect pitch and displayed a natural affinity for the piano and clarinet, after her significant hearing loss, she found that percussion felt right to her, as she could feel the sound's reverberations through her body. This marked the beginning of a prolific career as a percussionist. Rather than thinking of her deafness as a setback, Glennie developed an incredible work ethic because of it, noting that it kept her from being distracted and improved her dedication as a student. However, deafness did become a setback in the sense that she could not play in an orchestra. Rather than give up drumming, she reconsidered her goals and set out to become a professional percussion soloist. She quickly rose through the ranks of solo percussionists and became the first percussionist to perform solo at a venue. However, Glennie's most exceptional quality may be her desire to expand her abilities and experience by seeking out new challenges. She has collected more than a thousand percussion instruments and has mastered essentially every common percussion instrument. More so than any

other solo performer of any instrument, she aggressively commissions pieces for percussion instruments in an attempt to change their rarity. She is also involved in more than forty organizations for the deaf, has written a best-selling autobiography, and tours extensively, playing more than a hundred concerts a year (Billboard, n.d.; Glennie, 2003; Rovi Staff, n.d.).

Wayne Gretzky

Wayne Gretzky is largely considered to be ice hockey's greatest player ever. He started ice skating at the age of two and playing hockey with boys much older than him at the age of six. After training fervently throughout his adolescence, Gretzky eventually signed on with the Edmonton Oilers. During his time in the NHL, he became the all-time leader in both goals and assists and won eighteen all-star games, ten league-scoring titles, and nine MVP awards. However, he did not achieve these accomplishments without dedication and hard work. He not only trained and practiced relentlessly but also aggressively studied the game. Allegedly, he would watch televised hockey games with a blank piece of paper in front of him and trace onto the paper the movement of the puck, later using these tracings to determine where the puck spent the most time during any given game. This analytic understanding of hockey translated to an almost eerie ability to anticipate the puck's movements. This intense drive, paired with his natural talent and technical skill, allowed Gretzky to become a key figure in the history of ice hockey, and the NHL later honored him by inducting him into their hall of fame (Biography.com Editors, n.d.cc; Head, 2009).

Stephen Hawking

When Stephen Hawking was young, he wasn't a particularly strong or ambitious student. It was only after Hawking was diagnosed with ALS, a progressively debilitating disease that shuts down nerves that control the body, that he discovered his passion for physics and for life. Hawking's diagnosis predicted he only had two and a half years to live, but instead of resigning himself to this fate, he dedicated himself to his studies and wrote a groundbreaking thesis for his PhD that went on to change the way scientists understood black hole physics and thermodynamics. By the time he completed his thesis, two and a half years had come and gone, and Hawking was still alive. In fact, the disease slowed significantly during this time, though he would eventually become restricted to a wheelchair and need a special machine to speak. Perhaps most famously, in 1988, Hawking wrote the best-selling book *A Brief History of Time*, which made cosmology (the science of the origin of the universe) accessible to the public. In the years following its release, Hawking has continued to innovate in the field of science, most recently trying to design a headband that can "read thoughts," writing a book that attempts to synthesize conceptions of God with the big bang theory, and preparing to become a passenger on the first commercial flight into space (Biography.com Editors, n.d.x).

Harry Houdini

Harry Houdini always wanted to be a magician, though he was not particularly good at performing the usual magic tricks. Instead, Houdini found himself excelling at feats of escape; his most popular routines involved him escaping handcuffs, straitjackets, and prison cells for audiences. As time passed, he upped his tricks' stakes and technical difficulty, eventually graduating to stunts in which he escaped crates, coffins, and—his most

famous act—a locked glass box filled with water. However, Houdini did not limit his interests to perfecting these tricks. As a man with many passions, Houdini found time to pursue his other interests, which included aviation, film, and debunking psychics and the occult. In the same way that he perfected his escape techniques, he pursued these occupations with intensity and drive. As such, he became the first person to fly a plane over Australia, produced his own documentaries and feature films, and exposed several well-known psychics at the time as frauds (Biography.com Editors, n.d.).

Jennifer Hudson

After being eliminated from the reality singing competition *American Idol* in 2004, Jennifer Hudson fell out of the spotlight. However, a few years later in 2006, Hudson earned a Golden Globe and an Oscar for her performance in the film *Dreamgirls*. From then on, it seemed like the only direction for the budding starlet was up, and in 2008, she received a Grammy for her debut R & B album. Later that same year, her world came crashing down when her mother, brother, and nephew were murdered by her brother-in-law. Hudson retreated from the public eye to mourn privately and to take time to be with family and friends. However, she decided not to let the tragedy hold her back from her dreams, and after her grieving period, she made her public debut singing the American national anthem at the Super Bowl in 2009. She also established a charity to honor her lost family members in her nephew's name and then returned to her career. Since then, she has fearlessly taken on a variety of ambitious projects, including writing books, performing on critically acclaimed albums and soundtracks, starting her own clothing line, and acting in both television shows and movies (Biography.com Editors, n.d.k; McGuire, n.d.).

Angelina Jolie

Angelina Jolie has been a famous actress since the 1990s. However, it was her role in *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* that drastically changed the direction of her life. Upon seeing the devastating effects of war on people in Cambodia while shooting the film there, Jolie reached out to the United Nations and asked how she could help. Since then, Jolie has worked with the United Nations as a Goodwill Ambassador and visited more than thirty countries, including highly dangerous and war-torn areas. Though she continues to act, she and her husband, Brad Pitt, are sure to allocate both time and money to humanitarian efforts. Jolie and Pitt have created several nonprofits that serve a range of needs, including environmental conservation in Cambodia, the education of children affected by natural disasters, and the provision of legal counsel to immigrant children. The couple gives millions of dollars to charity each year and often advocates for important international causes, most recently collaborating with government officials to fight against the use of rape as a weapon of war. Jolie also won praise for the multiple op-ed pieces she wrote for the *New York Times* detailing her decision to have a double mastectomy and her ovaries and fallopian tubes removed as preventative measures against breast and ovarian cancer. Despite the fact that these procedures are rarely talked about openly, she made a choice to publicly discuss her decision as a way to inspire other women to prioritize their own health (Jolie-Pitt, 2015; Ramsdale, 2013).

Quincy Jones

Quincy Jones has amassed an unheard-of seventy-six Grammy nominations (with twenty-six wins under his belt), seven Oscar nominations, one Emmy award, and countless other awards over his lifetime. These accomplishments are undeniably a product of Jones's insatiable desire to expand his skills and push both his own and society's limits. Jones loved the trumpet from a young age, eventually forgoing college at a prestigious musical school to tour in a band. When touring, he made the right connections and began arranging pieces for famous musicians during the 1950s, including his childhood friend Ray Charles. Constantly switching between touring, composing, and studying music, Jones became a prominent musician, eventually compiling his own eighteen-piece band. The band, unlike his previous endeavors, was not successful and ended up almost bankrupting him. However, the head of a record label offered him a second chance by giving him a loan and making him the label's musical director. Jones worked his way up from there to vice president of the company, becoming the first African American man to hold such a title. Around this time, he also became the first African American man to compose a score for a film, of which to date he has composed thirty-three. Despite this professional success, Jones always strived to expand and apply his talents further. He composed theme music for television shows, became an important supporter of the civil rights movement, cofounded the Institute for Black American Music (IBAM), produced television specials featuring famous musicians, recorded and produced countless famous albums, and even dabbled in the production of movies. He recently wrote two autobiographies and put out a new album at the age of seventy-five, confirming that his work ethic has not faded over time (Academy of Achievement, 2015b; Bill Boggs TV, 2013).

Michael Jordan

Michael Jordan's father recognized that his son was incredibly competitive from a young age, though his father acknowledged "the person [his son] tries to outdo most of the time is himself." This internal struggle not only helped Jordan become the most decorated basketball player of all time but also inspired him to seek challenges in unlikely places. He was wildly successful playing college basketball at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and eventually was asked to play on the U.S. Olympic team, where he won his first gold medal. Jordan left college his junior year to play in the NBA with the Chicago Bulls—though he returned to school a few years later to get a bachelor's degree in geography—and was an instant success. Around this time, he also picked up his first endorsements, including a lucrative deal with Nike. Sadly, in 1992, his father was shot in a robbery, and Jordan retired from basketball, deciding to take time to grieve and consider his options. Searching for a new outlet to test his abilities, Jordan decided to pursue a career in baseball. However, after a few years of playing Minor League Baseball, he returned to the basketball court and helped the Bulls win another championship. During this year, Jordan took on yet another challenge, acting, with the 1996 movie *Space Jam*. He continued to play basketball successfully on various teams until 2003, when he retired from the game for good (Biography.com Editors, n.d.q).

Legson Kayira

In 1958, Legson Kayira began a thousand-mile journey on foot from his home in Africa with the dream of pursuing an education in the United States. Kayira was born into extreme poverty in Nyasaland, a British

state in southeast Africa, which had only produced twenty-two college graduates out of its population of three million. Upon high school graduation, he told his family he was going to walk to America and left home, not knowing how truly arduous the journey would be. After his fifteen-month journey, Kayira arrived in Kampala, Uganda, where he wrote to the dean of Skagit Valley College, who offered him a scholarship to attend the college after hearing his story. Upon going to the United States, he became a minor celebrity as his story drew intense media coverage, and he used the media attention to help other students from Africa study in the United States. A few years after his graduation in 1964, Kayira wrote his first book, an autobiography about his journey to America, *I Will Try*. Later, he went on to become a professor of political science at Cambridge University in England, proving that when an individual sets his or her mind to something, he or she can accomplish it with enough perseverance (Ross, 2012).

Rosie King

Rosie King was diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome at the age of nine. Her diagnosis and her nonverbal autistic siblings sparked in her a desire to make the world a better place for those on the autism spectrum. Thus, King set out on a journey to challenge popular opinions concerning autism and to more accurately show the world what it can be like to be autistic. Despite her young age, King started promoting autism awareness through television appearances and a documentary, *My Autism and Me*, for which she won an Emmy. In a TED talk she gave at the age of sixteen, she eloquently spoke about her own diagnosis and reframed autism as a positive condition that allows her to think outside the box. She continues to advocate for autism awareness and for the improvement of the quality of education for those with special needs (Atlantic Speaker Bureau, n.d.; King, 2014).

Daniel Kish

Daniel Kish went blind when he was just over a year old. In this situation, other parents might have reacted by becoming worried and overprotective of their children, but Kish's mother didn't want to restrict her son's freedom and allowed him to come and go as he pleased, like any other boy his age. Soon, Kish began to develop a system of clicking to navigate the world around him, much like the sounds bats use to echolocate. The clicking system let him "see" without the use of his eyes, and Kish was able to navigate through spaces just as any other seeing individual might. In 2000, Kish created a nonprofit organization called World Access for the Blind, which trains other blind people to use echolocation as a means to gain independence. The work can be difficult, as he often meets resistance from blind individuals or their loved ones who worry about the dangers of the program's learning curve. However, Kish believes that the hard work is worth it, and he pushes his clients to face their fears and take risks, hoping that through his education, they'll gain independence for themselves and not let society's expectations dictate how they should live their lives (Finkel, 2012; May, 2015).

Jeremy Lin

Raised in California by Taiwanese parents, Jeremy Lin fared well academically growing up, though his true passion was the game of basketball. He committed his extra time to playing and was disciplined about practice, which eventually led him to a very successful high school basketball career. Despite his success on the court,

college coaches doubted his skills and his stature, and he was not offered a scholarship. He went on to attend Harvard, where he became an integral member of their basketball team. When the NBA draft rolled around after his college graduation, again, Lin was not picked up by any team. Following this snub, he briefly signed with both the Golden State Warriors and the Houston Rockets, though he was eventually cut from both. Many suggest Lin was discounted by recruiters because there were no other Asian men successfully competing in the NBA at the time or previously. As such, he had to carve his own path to the NBA. After finally being picked up by the New York Knicks, Lin ultimately overturned the stereotype that Asians can't play basketball. During his time with the team, he quickly became a breakout star, and Knicks fans coined *Linsanity* as a term to represent Lin's talents on the court (JockBio.com, n.d.a; Viera, 2012).

Demi Lovato

Hollywood is known for its abundance of celebrities struggling with addiction, mental health problems, and eating disorders. Like many superstars, Demi Lovato, the singer and actress, struggled with these issues. However, the way Lovato addressed these sensitive topics and her own health problems is outside the Hollywood norm. What makes Lovato so exceptional is twofold. First, she recognized that she had a problem and took active steps to avoid continuing down a destructive path. She became sober, entered herself into rehabilitation facilities, and elected to live in sober houses to avoid falling back into unhealthy habits. Second, she used her fame to act as an advocate for those who also struggle with eating disorders, self-harm, bullying, bipolar disorder, and substance abuse. By openly talking about her own struggles and encouraging others to seek help and make healthy changes, she not only took control of her own life but also sought to improve the lives of those who look up to her (Biography.com Editors, n.d.d; Lovato, 2011, 2013).

Nelson Mandela

Nelson Mandela was born into the Thembu tribe in South Africa and was the first member of his family to receive a formal education. Mandela excelled in school and went on to get a law degree from a school in Johannesburg. Once a lawyer, Mandela became active in the civil rights movement combatting apartheid, the formal system of segregation in South Africa established in 1948. He joined the African National Congress (ANC), a political party against apartheid and, with his good friend Oliver Tambo, opened South Africa's first black law firm, where they counseled victims of discrimination for very little or for free. Mandela and other activists were arrested and persecuted during their fight for equality, but Mandela never wavered in his passion for fighting for justice and equality for all. Perhaps most famously, he was jailed for twenty-seven years for his work and was subjected to inhumane conditions. During these years, Mandela became an internationally known name and drew attention to the injustices of apartheid. Though the residing government offered to compromise with Mandela and to let him go in exchange for a political endorsement of their party, Mandela rejected these deals, preferring to stay in jail rather than compromise his beliefs. He was eventually released by President F. W. de Klerk in 1990 after the president revoked the apartheid legislation and allowed the previously banned ANC party to be reinstated. Both de Klerk and Mandela won Nobel Peace Prizes for their work on desegregating the country, and during the next election, Mandela ran as a member of the ANC and was elected the first black president of South Africa (History.com Staff, 2009).

Joan Mazak

While raising money for a liver transplant for her daughter, Jennifer, Joan Mazak asked her daughter what she could do to brighten her day. Jennifer replied that she would like to be visited by the local radio station's mascot, a man in a chicken costume. The "chicken man" visited on a hot day in August, though two weeks later, Jennifer tragically passed away. Mazak had already raised fifty thousand dollars for her daughter's liver transplant and decided to put it to good use. Remembering what a difference the surprise visit from the chicken man had done for her own daughter's morale, Mazak formed the Make-A-Wish Foundation of Colorado, which grants the wishes of terminally ill children. The organization has remained in Mazak's control for the last twenty-five years, which can be attributed to Mazak's own personal belief in the organization's mission. Since its founding, the Colorado branch has granted an average of 250 wishes a year, and no qualified child has ever been denied a wish (Cohen, 2012; Harden, 2008).

Stella McCartney

Stella McCartney is a lauded fashion designer whose name is recognized worldwide. Though some initially attributed her rise to fame to her father, Paul McCartney, a former member of the Beatles, she proved herself by creating designs that truly appealed to women of all ages. Remarkably, she established herself in the fashion industry while adhering to her own personal principles as a strict vegetarian. McCartney does not allow for the use of animal products or animal testing in her lines, which severely limits the materials she can use. As such, in a rather cutthroat industry, McCartney has prioritized her own personal standards and makes the sacrifices necessary to uphold her moral principles. Instead of being held back by these self-imposed restrictions, however, she has worked around them by seeking out scientific innovations and becoming a pioneer for vegan synthetic materials, demanding that manufacturers create high-quality, eco-friendly, and animal-friendly materials that she can use in her designs (Biography.com Editors, n.d.w; Leive, 2014).

George McLaurin

Most people are familiar with the 1896 ruling of *Plessy v. Ferguson* that enabled segregation with the phrase "separate but equal." However, fewer know the name George McLaurin, the man who sparked the Supreme Court case in 1950 that challenged the *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling and opened the door for desegregation of the United States. At the age of sixty-one, George McLaurin, a professor at an all-African American university, decided to pursue his doctorate in school administration. However, the University of Oklahoma rejected his application because of his race; McLaurin, rather than giving up, challenged this decision, with the court eventually ruling that he must be admitted to the school. Once admitted, McLaurin continued to be segregated from other students and was forced to sit in isolated areas attached to his classrooms, the cafeteria, and the gym. Again, McLaurin challenged the school, positing that the education he was receiving was not equal to that of his white peers. The case made it to the Supreme Court, where, in 1950, the justices ruled that students of all races must be treated equally. Without McLaurin's willingness to challenge social norms and fight against injustice repeatedly, this landmark case would have never set the grounds for *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, which ultimately desegregated schools in the United States at all levels of instruction (Reese, n.d.; University of Oklahoma Graduate College, n.d.).

John Muir

John Muir began his lifelong journey into environmental activism after a factory accident left him temporarily blind. After the scare and upon regaining his vision, Muir realized the beauty and importance of nature and prioritized it in his life by setting out on a journey to explore the varying landscapes within the United States. During his travels, Muir began writing about and drawing what he saw and experienced, which gained him notoriety and a large readership. During this time, he also recognized that nature needed someone on its side to fight for it. He eventually founded the Sierra Club, a conservation organization that seeks to ensure that the natural environment is preserved. Famously, he took President Roosevelt camping in 1903, which many argue shaped Roosevelt's view on national parks and the importance of conservation. As such, without the personal vision of John Muir, the beauty of the national parks in Yosemite, the Grand Canyon, the Sequoia Region, and other areas of the United States might not exist today (Biography.com Editors, n.d.).

Aimee Mullins

Shortly after Aimee Mullins was born, doctors diagnosed her with a rare genetic disorder that caused her to be born without shin bones; they had to amputate her lower legs. Though doctors warned she might never walk, with the use of prosthetic legs, Mullins learned not only to walk but also to run. She competed on Georgetown University's track team, becoming the first amputee to compete at the NCAA level for track and in the 1996 Paralympics, setting world records in three categories. She became internationally known after breaking these records, and the extensive press coverage brought her the attention of insiders from the fashion industry. Three years later, she walked the runway for the fashion brand Alexander McQueen and was signed as the face of a marketing campaign by L'Oreal. After establishing herself as both an athlete and a model, Mullins identified her next challenge to tackle: inspiring others with her story. She is a highly successful inspirational speaker and uses her fame to bring attention to issues regarding ableism, most recently arguing against the term *disabled* because of its negative connotations (Mullins, 2009; Rosenbaum & Zak, 2012).

Steve Nash

Growing up, Steve Nash was athletically gifted and quickly realized he wanted to be a professional basketball player after joining a basketball league in the eighth grade. Because he was from Canada, a country not known for its basketball players, many people doubted his ability to achieve this dream, especially when Nash displayed more natural talent on the soccer field than the basketball court. Undeterred by skeptics, he forwent his potential career in soccer to dedicate himself to basketball, amazing his coaches with both his drive and his athleticism. Unfortunately, despite recommendations from his coaches, universities in the United States did not recognize or appreciate his abilities. Only one coach from a small school in Santa Clara offered Nash a scholarship, though he was clear that he would only sign him if Nash promised to work toward being a better defender (as Nash was significantly better offensively). Once in college, Nash thrived and practiced basketball relentlessly, which eventually improved both his offensive and defensive skills. He inspired the team with his unwavering commitment to self-improvement, and he led his fifteenth-seeded team to beat the second-seeded team. This upset placed Nash on the radar of talent scouts, and after college, Nash joined the NBA, going on to win eight NBA All-Star titles and the NBA MVP award twice (JockBio.com, n.d.b).

Nicholas Negroponte

Thirty years ago, the predictions of Nicholas Negroponte about future technology were dismissed by other computer scientists as impossible. Now, many of his initial ideas have been developed and become standard technologies in the modern world, such as touchscreen interfaces, GPS navigation for cars, and Google Street View. Throughout his career, Negroponte has demonstrated that even the most incredible innovations are possible with the right mindset. Negroponte first created a name for himself as the founder of the Architecture Machine Group and the famous Media Lab at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, which are innovative research and development groups that seek to re-examine boundaries between computing and design. Following a vision of the future in which every child in the world has access to essential technology, he then created One Laptop per Child (OLPC). This organization creates laptops for children in developing countries for around a hundred dollars and provides its products around the globe for free or at a low cost. Once OLPC was established, Negroponte shifted his focus to another problem he felt was crucial to address. He realized that a billion people in remote areas still lacked access to the Internet, and he began exploring the possibility of installing Internet satellites in space. As for his recent prediction about the future of technology, Negroponte says this: “My prediction is that we are going to ingest information. You’re going to swallow a pill and know English. You’re going to swallow a pill and know Shakespeare.” Considering his history with anticipating technological trends, maybe it’s not as farfetched as it sounds (Montini, 2014; National Speakers Bureau, n.d.; Negroponte, 2008).

Diana Nyad

When Diana Nyad was a young woman, she dreamed of swimming the one-hundred-mile stretch of water between Florida and Cuba. However, after she failed to complete the swim in the 1970s, she put her dream on hold. Years passed, Nyad’s mother died, and Nyad turned sixty. Suddenly, her past desire resurfaced in her mind, and she set out to become the first long-distance swimmer to make the swim without a protective cage. However, after four failed attempts, members of her training team expressed their doubts, citing that she was too old or that it was impossible. Despite their doubts, Nyad kept trying and finally succeeded at the age of sixty-four, overcoming jellyfish stings, dangerous levels of salt intake, fatigue, and incredibly rough and brutally cold water to achieve the objective she had set for herself thirty-five years previously (Nyad, 2013; Sloane, Hanna, & Ford, 2013).

Michelle Obama

While her husband (President Barack Obama) often steals the spotlight, Michelle Obama, the first African American First Lady of the United States, certainly serves as an inspiration to women around the globe. Unlike the wives of heads of state in some other countries, she is viewed as a partner to her husband, rather than an ornament. She holds a law degree from Harvard University and previously worked at a prestigious law firm before dedicating her life to public service. In the White House, she stays busy, recently creating a widespread campaign to advocate for healthy lifestyle choices among children. As an African American woman with two daughters, she has also shown people internationally that having a dark skin tone and being a woman are not setbacks or limitations. Rather, she serves as a professional and personal role model to those who are not used

to seeing women of color in positions of power, and she takes on this role with self-awareness, eloquence, grace, and warmth (Blake, 2009; Sayles, 2012).

Larry Page

To some, Larry Page might be considered somewhat of an oddball. He is generally quiet, and when he is engaged in conversation, he offers ideas that seem unlikely if not impossible to implement. However, this eccentricity and limitless imagination have come to define the projects associated with his company, Google, and allowed for its continued success as a multibillion-dollar corporation. As an innovator, Page dreams up ideas that he hopes will change the world and runs with them, even when the ideas seem too huge to be possible. Part of his success in making these ideas viable and lucrative is attributed to his similarly strong commitment to efficiency. He is constantly looking for ways to streamline any system that needs improvement so it is user-friendly and fast. For example, when he didn't believe in customer support, feeling it was unproductive to answer users' questions one at a time, he set up an online forum for customers to connect with one another for answers. Although sometimes Page's ideas do fail and he has to backtrack to undo them, more often than not, each mistake helps Page and the company grow, and the successes have kept Google on the front end of innovation for years (Levy, 2011; Page, 2014).

Suraya Pakzad

Every day that Suraya Pakzad leaves her house, it may be her last. In 1988, Pakzad began using privately donated books to teach girls and young women in Afghanistan how to read, even though the existing Taliban rule banned women from receiving education. During this time, she also founded a group called Voice of Women, which sheltered abused Afghan women and provided them with job training, legal advice, and counseling. As time passed, her work became more well-known, which made her a target for assassination, like countless other women in positions of power in the country. After the Taliban fell, Voice of Women was able to work for women's rights more openly, but many in Afghanistan remained opposed to the organization's mission and continued to threaten Pakzad with acts of violence. Despite these threats, she continues to hold workshops throughout Afghanistan and received the 2008 International Women of Courage Award for her efforts (Clinton Global Initiative, 2010; Hosseini, 2009).

Les Paul

Unlike Mozart, who exhibited a prodigious ability with music from an early age, Les Paul had a slightly more tenuous journey into the music industry. Though he started playing instruments at a young age, his initial teachers were less than impressed with his musical abilities, with one teacher even telling his mother, "Your boy, Lester, will never learn music." However, these negative comments did not dissuade the young boy, and he eventually learned the harmonica, guitar, and banjo by himself. Eventually, Paul moved to New York City to pursue his dream of becoming a musician. While in the city and playing with his band, the Les Paul Trio, he realized that he could modify the sound of a guitar if the body of the guitar was solid rather than hollow. Building upon that realization, Paul experimented with designs for a solid-bodied guitar, eventually designing the famous Les Paul guitar. The guitar company Gibson picked up his design for manufacturing, and Paul's solid-bodied guitar

became a monumental success, known to this day as a high-quality instrument. While he became famous for the popularity of his guitar, which soon became a standard for rock musicians, he never lost sight of his musical aspirations and also enjoyed a long and successful musical career, for which he won two Grammys. However, his contributions would never have come to pass had he listened to the initial less-than-positive remarks about his playing as a child (Biography.com Editors, n.d.o).

Fredy Peccerelli

In Guatemala, *desaparecidos* is the name for the forty thousand men, women, and children who went missing during the Guatemalan Civil War and were presumably murdered, like two hundred thousand other civilians, by the country's government. During the Guatemalan Civil War, even the slightest connection to left-leaning political parties could have led to assassination, which is why Fredy Peccerelli and his family fled Guatemala after Peccerelli's father began receiving death threats. The family relocated to New York City, and growing up, Peccerelli never had to think about the atrocities occurring in his home country. However, after becoming a forensic anthropologist years later, he decided to return to Guatemala to investigate the deaths of thousands of Guatemalan citizens—many of them buried in unmarked mass graves—by studying their remains. When Peccerelli looked at a skeleton, his purpose was twofold: (1) to identify how the victim was killed and (2) to identify the person and notify the family. As such, Peccerelli helped thousands of families gain closure by returning the bodies of their loved ones to them. The work was very grueling and not without danger. Because the research he did often led to the convictions of war criminals, he received numerous death threats. Despite the danger, to this day, he remains dedicated to bringing justice and closure to victims' families (Dreifus, 2004; Peccerelli, 2014).

Pelé

Pelé is a soccer player heralded by many as the greatest soccer player in the history of the game. However, before he became the internationally known figure he is today, he grew up in the slums of Brazil, where he first learned to play soccer with balled-up rags on the streets. When Pelé joined a soccer team as a teenager, the coach recognized his potential despite his lack of formal experience playing soccer. His coach pushed him to join a professional team, and at the age of sixteen, Pelé scored his first goal in a professional match, and he went on to dominate the league in terms of points scored during his first season. Following his first season, the Brazilian national team recruited him to play in the 1958 World Cup, where he led the Brazilian team to victory as the predominant scorer. Pelé received international attention and became a global household name over the following decades. At one point, the Nigerian Civil War came to a halt for a two-day period so both sides could watch Pelé play in an exhibition game. Though he is now retired from soccer, Pelé never forgot his roots or his incredible journey from poverty to stardom, and he has received various awards for his humanitarian work combatting poverty with UNICEF and for his environmental advocacy (Biography.com Editors, n.d.v).

Tyler Perry

During his childhood, Tyler Perry and his three siblings suffered from abuse by their father. Perry dropped out of school and attempted suicide as a means to escape his home life, though luckily, he was not successful.

He eventually found solace in writing after seeing an episode of Oprah Winfrey's talk show that focused on how adversity can lead to personal breakthrough. Inspired, he wrote, starred in, directed, and produced a play called *I Know I've Been Changed*, which flopped in multiple cities. However, Perry truly believed his play could be successful and remained committed to producing his show, even when it led to periods of financial struggle and near homelessness. Six years after its first production, Perry produced the show in Atlanta, but this time, the play was well received by both critics and audiences, eventually selling out the entire theater. Its success caught the eye of executives in Hollywood, and they offered him writing and directing opportunities, which eventually allowed him to create the media empire he runs today. Since his big break, he has written, produced, directed, and acted in many movies that have grossed millions of dollars at the box office (Biography.com Editors, n.d.z).

Ramona Pierson

At the age of twenty-two, Ramona Pierson was a successful coder and analyst for the U.S. Marines. One day when she was taking her daily run with her dog, Pierson was hit by a drunk driver. After the accident, she fell into an eighteen-month coma. Upon waking, she weighed around sixty-five pounds and couldn't speak, eat, see, or walk. She had to undergo fifty more surgeries, which essentially rebuilt her body, and was eventually released to a senior citizens' home. The senior citizens in the facility took Pierson in, raised money for her to go to the Braille Institute and get a guide dog, and retaught her basic functions, like speaking, writing, eating independently, and walking across the street. After ten years and more surgeries, Pierson regained her vision. As she relearned to navigate the world with sight, Pierson refused to feel sorry for herself and instead took steps to further her career. As a marine, she had learned to code programs during her service. She used her expertise as a coder to create an education technology start-up, which she sold for \$10 million from a hospital bed after yet another surgery. After this first big sale, Pierson continued to develop and invest in start-up technologies, finding a place for herself among the Silicon Valley elite (Bort, 2013; Pierson, 2011).

Amy Purdy

When Amy Purdy was nineteen, she lost both of her legs to a bacterial infection, meningococcal meningitis. Before she contracted the infection, Purdy had been an avid snowboarder, and she didn't want the loss of her legs to prevent her from enjoying the sport. However, at the time, there were no prosthetics on the market that met her needs. Rather than giving up on her dream to snowboard, Purdy designed her own snowboard-friendly prosthetic legs to use while riding. After their development and production, it took extensive practice for her to become accustomed to her new legs. However, she remained dedicated to her training and went on to win a number of world championships for snowboarding, including a bronze medal in the 2014 Paralympics. Additionally, she cofounded Adaptive Action Sports in 2005, a nonprofit organization that introduces action sports to people with disabilities (Purdy, 2011; Team USA, n.d.).

Jacob Rainey

Jacob Rainey was an up-and-coming quarterback for a high school in Virginia when a regular scrimmage dislocated his leg. An artery in his leg was severed from the tackle, and after attempting to save the leg, doctors had to amputate it to save Rainey's life. The amputation left him heartbroken, and his dreams of becoming

a football star were crushed. However, Rainey's story spread fast, and college football and NFL coaches and players reached out to give him encouraging words. Feeling inspired, Rainey sought out a prosthetic leg that could handle the stresses of playing football. Though it took many tries, he eventually found one that could withstand the physicality of the game. Over the course of a few months, he practiced with his new leg and returned to the field as the starting quarterback and team captain of his high school team. He then attended the University of Virginia, where he became recognized as one of the most dedicated members of the school's football team. Although he was a student coach rather than a player, he kept himself in shape, memorized the team's plays, and became an asset to both players and coaches, often arriving before and staying later than any other student athletes (Giannotto, 2014; Yuan, 2012).

Keanu Reeves

Keanu Reeves is not the typical Hollywood star. In particular, Reeves is willing to make sacrifices that others would not to ensure a film's success. For example, for his work on the *Matrix* films, he was given a hefty bonus of \$80 million. Reeves, however, felt that he was undeserving of the sum, as he believed the costume and special effects designers were truly responsible for the films' commercial and critical success. Instead of keeping the money, he divided his bonus among the two teams. Similarly, he has previously opted to cut his own salary by millions of dollars so that enough money was in a film's budget to hire other actors and actresses. This willingness to sacrifice for the good of the projects he believes in applies not just to money but also to his time. Reeves, a hero of action movies, has stated that he has signed on to commercial blockbusters that he didn't care for to ensure his own smaller projects made it into production (ABC News, n.d.).

J. K. Rowling

J. K. Rowling is known internationally as the writer of the Harry Potter book series. Even at the conception of her storyline, Rowling struggled immensely to get the now-famous books written and published. The idea for the series first came to her during a train ride, but she didn't have a pen with which to write it down. Instead, she repeated the concept over and over in her head until she reached her destination. She developed that initial idea for years, writing and rewriting the story until she was happy with her manuscript. Once the draft was completed, she sent it out, and it was rejected by publishers eight times before being accepted for publication. During her attempts to get the books written and published, Rowling was also struggling with depression and poverty; despite this, she never abandoned the idea. Her persistence and belief in herself and her books clearly paid off, as it ultimately led to the publication of her beloved seven-book series that has sold more than four hundred million books internationally (Famous Authors, n.d.a; Rowling, 2008).

Helena Rubinstein

In 1915, Helena Rubinstein, a Jewish American emigrant from Poland, opened her first beauty salon in New York City. The opening of her cosmetics store happened to coincide with the beginning of the cosmetics boom—a reaction to the budding film industry—and her first store thrived. Because Rubinstein was able to identify problems for women and find new ways to solve them, she drove innovation in the cosmetics industry. In particular, her foresight led to the creation of unique and highly practical products, such as waterproof

mascara and the first iteration of self-tanner. She also felt that women needed to create their own public social spaces, and her beauty salons served as social hubs, cosmetics workshops, and cultural centers where women could gather. Rubinstein reimagined the beauty industry, and her ideas shape cosmetics even today. This is certainly an incredible feat, though it is more unbelievable to consider that Rubinstein was a highly successful entrepreneur in a time when men traditionally dominated business. Always subversive, Rubinstein spent much of her career proving women can be just as successful as men and working against anti-Semitism (Klein, 2014; Murphy, 2014).

Elyn Saks

Elyn Saks's first symptoms of schizophrenia surfaced when she was sixteen: an unexplainable desire to walk home in the middle of the school day turned into a terrifying journey during which the houses along the way yelled at her. After experiencing a full schizophrenic break a few years later, Saks experimented with different medications and therapies, eventually finding a balance that allowed her to have a fully normal life. She became a professor at the Gould School of Law at the University of Southern California; published a memoir, *The Center Cannot Hold: My Journey Through Madness*; and won a MacArthur Fellowship. With these accolades, it is hard to believe that doctors had previously questioned whether she would even be able to handle a part-time job as a cashier. Instead, Saks has carved out an incredibly successful life for herself and refused to be held back by her diagnosis or the beliefs of her doctors. Though she proved her doctors wrong and leads a normal life, she still regularly experiences a negative stigma associated with her condition. As such, she works to destigmatize mental illness by demonstrating that those with schizophrenia can be perfectly normal, contributing members of society and fights for the legal rights of those living with mental illness (Dvorsky, 2013; Saks, 2012, 2013).

Benny Se Teo

Because of a heroin addiction, Benny Se Teo spent much of his youth incarcerated or in rehabilitation centers. After being released from prison and having a near-death experience that led him to become sober, he was ready to start a new life. Unfortunately, no one would hire him because of his criminal record, and over a period of ten years, he struggled to find consistent work. He eventually secured a month-long apprenticeship at a restaurant that specifically offered positions to youths with disadvantaged backgrounds. Inspired by both the culinary and management lessons he learned during the internship, he returned to his home country of Singapore and created his own restaurant, Eighteen Chefs. Se Teo never forgot how difficult his journey to find a career was as an ex-convict, and he decided to use his restaurant to help others struggling after being released from prison by actively employing ex-offenders and giving them a second chance and a sense of purpose. The restaurant has become incredibly profitable, and Se Teo plans to develop it as a chain without compromising his vision of creating a space where the previously incarcerated can reintegrate into society and build their self-esteem (Chi, 2014).

Mary Kate Smith

Mary Kate Smith was the homecoming queen at her high school as well as a star soccer player. Recently, she added another accomplishment to the list: kicker for her high school's all-boy football team. When Smith's conditioning coach for soccer asked her to consider playing for the football team, she hesitated—she initially

dismissed the idea because the team only consisted of male players and because of her own existing time restraints related to soccer and academics. However, after being asked to join the football team by its coach, she accepted and dedicated herself to the team, training just as hard as her teammates and making all but one field goal during the season. Though initially there were concerns regarding whether she would be accepted by the team and the town because of her gender, her community rallied around her and viewed her as an inspiration for young women to take on new challenges, regardless of whether they fall within the norms of society (Serico, 2014).

Brenda Song

At an early age, Brenda Song was cast in two short films, which sparked an interest in acting that would shape the direction of her life. Her mother also enrolled her and her brothers in tae kwon do classes, though she was the only one of her siblings to stick with it, eventually earning a black belt. This self-discipline and desire to be the best served her well. When Disney was casting for a movie about martial arts, the executives of the film planned to cast a male lead and offered Song a smaller role. However, once seeing her prowess with tae kwon do and her seasoned acting abilities, the scriptwriter revised the script to feature her as the protagonist. This role opened the door to a fruitful acting career, though Song still managed to prioritize her education and her relationship with her family. While attending UC Berkeley, she made it a point to stay close with her family. Significantly, Song is one of the most visible Asian American actresses in Hollywood and realized quickly that being Asian American often limits the roles for which she is cast. Rather than being held back or giving up on her dreams of being an actress, Song has proved through hard work and natural talent that she is a versatile actress not defined by her race (Wu, n.d.).

Steven Spielberg

It is hard to imagine that Steven Spielberg, now a greatly admired and successful director, was rejected from his top-choice film schools upon high school graduation. After that blow, Spielberg realized he'd have to take a different path to become a Hollywood director. He attended California State University and landed an internship at Universal Studios. At his internship, his unwavering enthusiasm for film made quite an impression, and someone gave him a backstage pass to observe shooting on the studio lot. While backstage, Spielberg made a point to befriend the security guards, who allowed him to come and go as he pleased. He went back every day, absorbing all that he could about movie production. He began to direct his own low-budget movies and, after producers showed interest in his work, he dropped out of college to pursue filmmaking full-time. In the first two decades of his career, Spielberg directed hit movies such as the Indiana Jones series, *E.T.*, *Jaws*, *The Color Purple*, and *Jurassic Park*. He eventually won his first Academy Award for Best Director with *Schindler's List*, a movie about a German man helping Jews flee the Holocaust. Since then, Spielberg has continued to direct and produce some of the most successful movies; however, who knows whether this would have been possible without his unorthodox path to success and his unrelenting drive to chase his dreams (Biography.com Editors, n.d.y; Drullinger, 2011).

Bill Stone

Bill Stone's passion often puts his life at risk. As a caver who explores uncharted caverns on Earth, he has regularly lost colleagues on his missions but has remained undeterred in his desire to go where no person has gone before. He is not just a man of adventure, however. He is also a pragmatic innovator, identifying issues that hold back his exploration and personally designing the necessary technology. For example, because most of the caves he navigates are underwater, he created a machine called a *rebreather* that recycles exhaled oxygen to allow divers to spend longer amounts of time submerged. While this was certainly a breakthrough, he has even loftier goals for himself and has begun to focus his energy on exploring the final frontier: space. Commissioned by NASA, Stone, with his company, Stone Aerospace, plans to create robots that can swim and break ice in the oceans of Europa, one of Jupiter's moons. Modeled on the swimming robot he built to collect rock samples from the Earth's deepest sinkholes, Stone's robots will hopefully have the chance to search for life outside of Earth. He is also in the development phase of producing affordable fuel on the moon, which would allow for more economically feasible space missions. Though many have scoffed at this idea, he argues that imagination and dedication are all that's necessary for the accomplishment of any task (*The Economist*, 2014; Stone, 2007).

Aung San Suu Kyi

Aung San Suu Kyi became the face of the opposition against the junta, a military-run dictatorship, controlling Myanmar (Burma) in 1988 and won a Nobel Peace Prize in 1991 for her efforts to bring democracy to her home country. The daughter of a famous rebel leader who was assassinated when she was two, Suu Kyi was sent to Oxford as a young woman. There, she met her husband, with whom she had two sons. After she found that her mother (who was still residing in Myanmar) had fallen ill, she returned to her home country, only to be asked to become the face of the opposition against the military dictatorship. Though she believed that the position would be temporary, the controlling party became afraid of her growing political clout and placed Suu Kyi under house arrest multiple times. During these times of imprisonment, she studied peaceful civil rights leaders, learned to meditate, and played the piano. However, her husband and sons still lived in England. Though her husband and sons were allowed to visit a few times over the course of her imprisonment, Suu Kyi could not leave the country; she feared she would not be allowed to re-enter, and she and her party would lose the progress made toward a democratic Myanmar. This dedication ultimately cost her a final visit with her husband, who was dying of cancer in Britain. The military junta denied more than thirty of his applications for visas into Myanmar, stating that if Suu Kyi wanted to see her husband, she would have to go to Oxford. Her husband refused to let her even consider leaving the country, and he died before Suu Kyi could say good-bye. These brutal sacrifices, however, did help change the political landscape of the country. In 2010, she was finally released from house arrest; in 2012, the government took steps toward democracy by allowing free elections in parliament, in which Suu Kyi was elected as a parliament member; and in 2016, the newly elected president of Burma named Suu Kyi his state counselor (BBC News, 2015; BurmaCB, 2013; Frayn, 2011).

Jill Bolte Taylor

At the age of forty-eight, Jill Bolte Taylor suffered a stroke. Through that tragic situation, Taylor realized that as a neuroanatomist, she could use her unfortunate circumstances to study firsthand what happens to the brain

when it hemorrhages. During the stroke and the subsequent ten-year recovery period, she connected what she experienced within her body to research about strokes, gaining valuable insight into both the physiological and emotional experiences of being a stroke patient. This period of recovery culminated in the publication of her book, *My Stroke of Insight*, which became wildly popular because of her integration of scientific research with personal experience, and her studies based on her experiences revolutionized research in her field (Clark, 2008; Taylor, 2008).

Mother Teresa

Mother Teresa was a Catholic nun and is often acknowledged as one of the greatest humanitarians of the twentieth century. After growing up with a mother who encouraged giving to those in need, Mother Teresa recognized her calling to become a nun and eventually moved to Calcutta, India, to teach geography and history to girls from poor families. However, after nearly twenty years of teaching, Mother Teresa felt a calling to work with those living in the Calcutta slums, so she left her position at the school and established a congregation in the high-poverty area. Over time, she also established a school, a hospice, an orphanage, a nursing home, and various specialized health clinics to serve the poor. Word of her work spread quickly, and the Missionaries of Charity (the charity organization she founded) grew in volunteers and donations as her name gained international recognition. The rapid expansion of her organization allowed her to begin providing aid internationally. She worked with children caught in religious conflicts, regardless of their religion, and with individuals infected with HIV during a time when many feared the disease. Her tireless work earned her many accolades, including a Nobel Peace Prize in 1979, and she was lauded for her commitment to others and to her faith. Six years after her death in 1997, her private letters were published; they revealed that she had struggled with her faith, the thing that drove her into humanitarian work, during the fifty years before her death. However, even during those dark times, Mother Teresa's compassion never wavered, and she remained committed to her mission of helping others, despite struggling with a very real crisis of self (Biography.com Editors, n.d.s).

Charlize Theron

Charlize Theron had a troubling childhood. Her father was a physically abusive alcoholic and regularly threatened Theron and her mother. At the age of fifteen, Theron watched her mother shoot her father in self-defense during one of his rages. Despite this tragic beginning, she found success in her late teens when she won international modeling contests. After several years as a model, she decided to pursue a career in dancing, one of her first passions. She moved to New York City from South Africa, but her dancing career was halted when she suffered career-ending injuries. Theron then refocused her energies on acting and moved to Los Angeles in 1994, where she was quickly cast in small roles in feature films. In the following ten years, Theron's fame in Hollywood grew as she became recognized critically for her acting abilities, which culminated in an Oscar win for her performance in the film *Monster*. In addition to her work as an A-list actress, Theron dedicates her time to social activism. In 2008, she became an advocate for peace for the United Nations, as well as an advocate for the Global Fund and PETA (Biography.com Editors, n.d.c; Lifetime, n.d.a).

Charity Tillemann-Dick

As an opera singer, Charity Tillemann-Dick relies on her lungs to create the music she sings for a living. However, when doctors diagnosed her with idiopathic pulmonary hypertension, a condition that caused her heart to expand to three times its normal size, she was told that singing could aggravate her condition and eventually kill her. In response to her diagnosis, she drastically changed aspects of her lifestyle—she stopped eating salt, became a vegan, moved from her home in Colorado to a lower-altitude city, and had a chest tube installed to pump medications through her body—so she could keep singing. Over time, her career accelerated, but her condition continued to deteriorate. Finally, doctors informed her she had no other choice but to get a lung transplant, which she worried would ruin her career as a soprano. During the thirteen-hour surgery, her heart stopped beating twice, and after the procedure’s completion, she was put into a medically induced coma for more than a month. Upon waking, she was overjoyed to find that she still had her voice. She did not have long to enjoy the success of the surgery, however, as her body began to reject her new lungs. Over the six-month waiting period for a new transplant match, Tillemann-Dick’s health deteriorated rapidly, and she was put on life support. Fortunately, her second lung transplant went incredibly well; Tillemann-Dick has recovered physically and sings opera professionally again (Fard, 2013; Tillemann-Dick, 2010).

Neil deGrasse Tyson

Often, when people imagine a stereotypical scientist, a specific image comes to mind: a white man in a white lab coat who might wear glasses or even have crazy hair. Neil deGrasse Tyson, now one of the most famous scientists alive, does not fit this stereotypical image. Known for his ability to simplify complex scientific concepts, the astrophysicist currently serves as the director of the Hayden Planetarium and is a research associate with the American Museum of Natural History’s department of astrophysics. He previously served on both President George W. Bush’s Commission on the Future of the U.S. Aerospace Industry and the President’s Commission on Implementation of United States Space Exploration Policy and received the Distinguished Public Service Medal from NASA, their highest award for civilians. His accolades are many, but it was not easy for Tyson, an African American man, to combat the image of the “stereotypical scientist” to get to where he is today. Many initially doubted his abilities; he has stated that it was “outside of the paradigms of expectation of the people in power” for an African American boy to become an astrophysicist, and he often walked “a path of most resistance through the forces of society.” However, Tyson let his passion drive him, rising through the scientific ranks and challenging the incorrect societal assumptions that African American men and women do not have a role in science (Famous Scientists, n.d.; Svokos, 2014).

Dr. Govindappa Venkataswamy

Dr. Venkataswamy (Dr. V) became a successful eye surgeon after rheumatoid arthritis forced him to leave the Indian Army Medical Corps. When he reached retirement age, Venkataswamy wanted to use his skills as a surgeon to give back to his community. After seeing many cases during his career in which preventative measures could have stopped blindness, he mortgaged his house and established Aravind Eye Hospital with the goal of bringing an end to needless blindness in India. In the first year, Dr. V performed close to five thousand surgeries, many of which were free or at a very low cost. However, the cost of lenses kept Dr. V and his staff

from reaching more patients. To address this issue, he created his own lens factory that used a technological innovation to reduce the cost of expensive replacement lenses from \$150 to \$10. Since its inception, his hospital has grown into several locations, and Venkataswamy is credited with revolutionizing affordable eye care (Keepitsimpleforme, 2012; PBS News Hour, 2011).

Martin Villeneuve

Martin Villeneuve wanted to make a science fiction movie ever since he was a child. When he was in his twenties, Villeneuve created a graphic novel, *Mars et Avril*, and one of his good friends encouraged him to develop his book into a film. Villeneuve took on the task, though he had to think outside the box to produce the movie with only a little more than a \$2 million budget (a budget that is 10 percent of what most sci-fi filmmakers work with). He realized early on that because he was lacking funding, he would have to make up for it with time; the movie ended up taking more than seven years to make from start to finish. Villeneuve dealt with the problems he encountered while making the film by finding creative, low-cost solutions. For example, when he wanted a specific Canadian movie star who only had a few days to work on the film, he transformed that actor's character into a hologram so that the limited time could be used to shoot just the actor's head from different angles. To reduce costs, Villeneuve worked out a deal with the CEO of Cirque du Soleil, who financed the production of futuristic props for the movie with the understanding that after the film, they could be used in circus performances. He also got famous visual effects and comic book artists on board by asking them to collaborate with him and giving them creative leeway. The compromising and dedication paid off. With his flexibility and ingenuity, not to mention the time he dedicated to the project, Villeneuve was able to turn his dream into a reality, and *Mars et Avril* was released in 2012 (May, 2013; Villeneuve, 2013).

Kurt Warner

Kurt Warner excelled at football in high school, winning state and MVP honors, and later playing football for the University of Northern Iowa. However, despite his success in high school, Warner spent most of his college football career on the bench. By his senior year, he earned a starting position on the team, but no NFL teams drafted him after his graduation in 1994. Rather than give up his dream to play professionally, he took a job as a nighttime grocery clerk that paid \$5.50 an hour so that he could work out and stay in shape for football during the day. He began playing for smaller leagues, which is where his playing caught the attention of the St. Louis Rams, who placed him on their backup team. After their starting quarterback suffered an injury during a preseason game, Warner was chosen to start as the Rams' quarterback, which kicked off his acclaimed football career. Warner then amazed fans and analysts alike by leading the Rams to a Super Bowl win that same season, despite being a virtually unknown name (Biography.com Editors, n.d.n; Los Angeles Rams, 2014).

Ai Weiwei

Many might think that Ai Weiwei would have learned a lesson about speaking out, after growing up with his father, a famous poet and artist who was exiled to a remote area of China for speaking out against the Chinese government. However, rather than shying away from criticizing the government, Weiwei has instead become known for his vocal condemnations and internationally acclaimed art that challenges the actions of the Chinese

government. Weiwei first rose to prominence as a political activist after the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, when he decided to investigate the deaths of thousands of children whose schools had collapsed on top of them while the buildings surrounding them remained standing. He sought explanations for the destruction, and when the government did not give what he felt were adequate answers, Weiwei spoke out vocally and with his artwork. His investigation was documented in the film *Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry* and developed into a series of art projects that were shown around the globe. However, this made him a threat to the Chinese government, and he was targeted and threatened for his work. In 2009, men claiming to be the Chinese police attacked him, and in 2011, the government banned him from leaving the country. Despite the looming danger, Ai Weiwei continues to make art that critiques political and social issues and pushes for increased freedoms in China, even if it means risking his own life (Art21, n.d.; Wines, 2009).

Oprah Winfrey

Oprah Winfrey is regularly recognized as the “queen of all media,” and she did not earn this title passively. Though born into poverty, Winfrey set a goal to be on television and pursued it relentlessly. After starting small and working her way up, she eventually created *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, which became the highest rated television talk show of all time. However, she did not settle there. She received an Academy Award nomination for her acting in *The Color Purple*, started her own production company, began producing highly successful television shows and movies, and eventually created her own television network and magazine. The success of her many endeavors led her to become the first African American female billionaire in the world, and she has been identified by some sources as the most influential woman in the world. Winfrey is also considered to be one of the most significant African American philanthropists in American history and was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Barack Obama (Academy of Achievement, 2015a; Biography.com Editors, n.d.u).

Malala Yousafzai

Malala Yousafzai was born in 1997 in Pakistan. When she was a young girl, the Taliban took control of Pakistan and began limiting girls’ access to education. Around the age of ten, Yousafzai began speaking out by giving speeches condemning the Taliban’s actions and blogging for the BBC under a pseudonym. This activism made her a target of the regime, and on October 12, 2012, a gunman shot Yousafzai in the head on her way home from school. Luckily, the assassination attempt was not fatal, and she suffered no permanent brain damage. If anything, the attack catapulted Yousafzai into the international spotlight, and the world rallied around the fourteen-year-old girl. Despite the Taliban’s ongoing death threats, she has continued to advocate for girls’ rights, speaking in front of the United Nations at the age of sixteen and writing a book about her experiences, *I Am Malala*. In 2014, she became the youngest recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize at the age of seventeen (Biography.com Editors, n.d.p; Yousafzai, 2014).

Maysoon Zayid

As a comedian, Maysoon Zayid often opens her stand-up routine with this bit: “If there was an Oppression Olympics, I would win the gold medal. I’m Palestinian, Muslim, I’m female, I’m disabled, and I live in New Jersey. If you don’t feel better about yourself, maybe you should.” This self-aware joke highlights the difficulties

Zayid has faced both as a female comedian and as a member of society who is regularly discriminated against. As a woman of color with cerebral palsy, many people often questioned whether she could make it in the entertainment world. However, her parents always encouraged her to believe in her own abilities, and Zayid attacked every challenge with positivity, humor, and determination. Though doctors proclaimed Zayid would never walk after her diagnosis, she does. Though naysayers told her she would never become a successful comedian or actress, she became a popular correspondent on *Countdown With Keith Olbermann*. After being told she could never make it as a touring comedian, she became the first female comedian to ever perform in Palestine and Jordan. Zayid challenges those who discourage her, and with her determination, more often than not, proves them wrong. Now that she's successfully broken into the entertainment business, Zayid uses her stand-up to challenge the stereotypes associated with her disability, gender, and ethnicity (Shabi, 2009; Zayid, 2013).

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