

## **GROWTH ENGINES**

### Chapter One

“Hello, my name...”

Before we begin this journey together, I wanted to let you know how grateful I am that you would consider adding this book to your already long reading list. If you're like me, you have a stack of unread books beside your bed. Thank you for adding one more. I can't express to you how much it means. I hope, very deeply, that this book will ignite a more profound passion for you personally and professionally. My prayer would be that you become the best version of what God has called you to be.

I'd love nothing more than to be seated in front of you, over a cup of coffee, at your local coffee shop. My preference would be to sit and listen to you unpack your leadership journey. I'd want to know all about the role you're currently playing in that church, non-profit, or small business. Additionally, I'd ask if you're married. Do you have any kids? If so, how many? At some point, we'd both get out our phones to show pictures. I know for sure that I'd show you some pictures of my grand babies.

Perhaps that may happen at some point. For now, please allow me to introduce myself.

Hello, my name is Blake Stanley. I'm married to an incredible lady named Janna. We got married at the very young age of 19. Twenty-five years later, we have four incredible children. Kaitlyn is our oldest. She's blessed us with those two grand babies that you just read about. We found out 7 months into our marriage that we were pregnant, and 9 months later, at the age of 20, we were parents. Tyson, my now 18-year-old college student, came 7 years later. Blakelyn was up next. She's now 14 and just started her freshman year of high school. Mason is the most intense football-loving 9-year-old you'd ever meet. They are all incredible in different ways.

Some of you may know me personally (Hey, Mom. She may be the only one reading this book), while others may be meeting me for the first time through this book. In many ways, my story is similar to LeBron James. Well, there are a few exceptions, like the millions of dollars, the height, and the NBA career. I don't have any of those accolades. I'm referring to a statement he made post-championship with the Miami Heat that went viral on social media. LeBron said: “I shouldn't even be here. I'm just a kid from Akron, Ohio.”

Oh man, when he said this, I felt it in my bones.,

The one thing that LeBron and I have in common is, like him, I'm overwhelmed with gratitude because, after all, I'm just a kid from Theodore, Alabama. Obviously, he was referring to his illustrious NBA career as the 2nd best basketball player of all time. (I believe we all know who is #1.) I'm referring to roughly 24 years of vocational ministry through the local church, as a pastor, ministry consultant, and coach to small business owners.

I barely left the state of Alabama when I was a kid. I didn't board a plane until I was in my twenty. Now, here I sit - writing this chapter - with my sons sitting beside me on a plane headed to Las Vegas. I will connect with a church planter to develop a strategic plan for his launch. They are just coming along for the ride.

How in the world did this happen?!?

I wasn't born with a silver spoon in mouth. I certainly was born with any unfair advantages. Growing up, I had a severe speech impediment that still rears its ugly head on occasions as an adult. For the longest time, I had what they called a lazy left eye, which was corrected by surgery before I started school. That, my friend, was a couple of rough cards to be dealt as a child.

You couldn't understand a word I was saying because I stuttered. To make matters worse, my eye was staring in a completely different direction than the other. What a tough combo. All that was a recipe for being bullied and made fun of, primarily by siblings, but it's all good; I learned to dish it out as much as I took it.

*(Side note: That's what siblings do. I believe it's in the unofficial siblings' handbook. No ill will towards them at all.)*

For a large portion of my childhood, I felt so dumb. Frankly, I thought everyone else thought I was dumb. I remember being terrified to speak in the first few years of elementary school. God forbid if the teacher called on me to read. I couldn't read aloud like all the other kids. It was so embarrassing and only led to me being placed in a slow learners class even though I was a very proficient reader. They thought otherwise.

It has always felt like me against the world.

Here's where I'm at today, as a 45-year-old, leader. I have learned to love everything that has happened to me. This may sound weird, but what you just read, and countless other traumatic childhood events weren't actually setbacks. They were set-ups in disguise towards success. I'm deeply grateful for it all.

Why?

Because that environment is responsible for my formation. Here's what I know now that I didn't know then. God, in His sovereignty, allowed me to go through everything for a greater purpose. I don't blame God for what I went through. No, I thank God for what I've been through. It has equipped me with an insatiable drive, an intense passion, a powerful sense of empathy, a work ethic like you wouldn't believe, and its transformed me into a problem-solving machine. I get overwhelmed with emotion. I cry often in front of my wife and team. It's not because I'm sad or broken. I'm just grateful. I can't say anything, to God, other than - "Thank You."

I don't have any tattoos. My wife won't let me get one, but if I were to get a tat it would be a bible verse that sums up everything you've read to this point. The Apostle Paul, a leader in the first century, wrote:

***Phillipians 2:13: For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.***

I'm not a victim. I haven't succeeded, in spite of, my circumstances. I'm successful because of my circumstances. God has used everything, in my life. It has transformed me into the best version of what He's created me to be. He deserves all of the credit. It is God working in me, giving me the desire and the power to do what pleases him.

That's a very small snapshot of the man behind 'GrowthEngines'. Once again, I'm honored that you would read this book. I truly believe that what you're about to read can help your church, non-profit, or small business develop a plan to grow. There are three groupings of people reading this books

**GROUP #1:** You are just starting your leadership journey. You're brand new! You are about to launch or you've just launched. GrowthEngines is perfect for you! This book will get you established.

**GROUP #2:** You have been at this for a substantial amount of time. It's not going well. I've been there. I understand your pain. GrowthEngines is perfect for you! This book is a comprehensive guide to help overhaul you personally and organizationally.

**GROUP #3:** You're moderately or wildly successful! It's going really well. GrowthEngines is perfect for you! This book will help optimize you both personally and organizationally. Perhaps it will highlight a few areas that are in need of improvement. In fact, I know that it will.

So, let's get started. Welcome to a partnership. I can't wait to see what happens next!