

SECOND EDITION,
UPDATED AND EXPANDED
Foreword by Marshall Goldsmith



Stepping Up

How Taking
Responsibility
Changes
Everything

JOHN IZZO Ph.D.

Bestselling author of *The Five Secrets You Must Discover Before You Die*

More Praise for *Stepping Up*, Second Edition

“Stepping Up is not a lecture but an inspiration! It is that rare book that will help your personal life, help you in your career, improve your business, and help change the world. This empowering book shows how, by taking responsibility for the major areas of our lives—family, work, community—we release tremendous energy and creativity to work for positive change.”

—Duane Elgin, author of *Voluntary Simplicity* and *The Living Universe*

“This book compels us all to step up and draw on our courage to help realize positive change—either within our immediate circle of influence or in a wide-reaching manner. Once again, Dr. Izzo’s research, unparalleled storytelling, and actionable advice present a gift that can significantly enrich our personal and professional lives.”

—Josh Blair, Executive Vice President, Human Resources, TELUS

*“The fastest ticket to success in career and life is to do something worth doing! That won’t happen if you play it safe, point fingers at others, or act like a victim. As a senior HR executive, I have always found that you have to take a stand to make a difference. *Stepping Up* is filled with stories of people who stepped up, spoke up, took initiative, and made their companies (and the world) better. If you want to get ahead in your career, then read this book and follow its advice.”*

—Brigid Pelino, Senior Vice President, Human Resources, Economical Insurance

“Stepping Up is an insightful and timely read. John Izzo has delicately woven inspirational stories with practical examples of how any leader who chooses to step up and make a difference can truly make the world a better place.”

—Ferio Pugliese, Senior Vice President, Government Relations, Air Canada

“Stepping Up is an empowering, immensely freeing book based on an exquisitely simple concept. Izzo combines evidence-based insights with action-provoking stories of hope, reminding us of the game-changing power that quietly lies within reach of every person.”

—Susan Biali, MD, author of *Live a Life You Love*

“John Izzo’s *Stepping Up* is a remarkable book. It shows how each of us can do what needs doing, no matter how big and intractable the problem. Reading it is sure to propel anyone into meaningful action.”

—**Mark Levy, founder of Levy Innovation and author of *Accidental Genius***

“John Izzo has ‘stepped up’ in writing this book to engage all of us in making the world a better place. It begins with a very simple premise: we must each take responsibility for the fixing. Izzo understands the concept of scale and shows us, through stories, the many levels of influence each one of us has access to. Doing our part, at whatever level we can, makes the world a better place even as it makes us feel empowered and enriched. This is a guidebook for making a difference written by a wonderful guide.”

—**Joel Barker, futurist, filmmaker, and author**

“*Stepping Up* makes a timely and important contribution to leadership thinking and practice. Dr. Izzo shows how all of us are capable of stepping up and making a difference in our work and personal lives. This book is a must-read for all managers and supervisors.”

—**Bob Peter, Former President and CEO, LCBO**

Stepping Up



Other books by this author


Awakening Corporate Soul (with Eric Klein)

Second Innocence

The Five Secrets You Must Discover Before You Die

The Five Thieves of Happiness

The Purpose Revolution (with Jeff Vanderwielen)



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Second Edition

JOHN IZZO, PhD



BK[®]

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Stepping Up

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To my mother—Irene Parisi Izzo.

*In your own quiet way you stepped up
for what was right and I continue to live in
the light of your moon even in your absence.*

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Foreword

John Izzo's *Stepping Up* is one of those books with a strong message that can benefit everyone who is open to it. John's message, "Stepping up is seeing a need and deciding YOU are the right person to do something about it," hits home at a time when the world needs people to do just that—step UP!

I work with organizations every day, and what I find is that very often there isn't a lot of stepping up during or after a crisis. There is a lot of finger-pointing, blaming others, and passing the buck. It's the CEO's fault; it's a team member's fault; it's the boss's fault. After a crisis at home, the same rule applies. Blame it on the spouse, the dog, the kids, the sprinklers. Very few people point the finger of responsibility at themselves. People are more inclined to pass the buck than they are to take responsibility.

The fact is, though, passing the buck doesn't build your character or give you the opportunity to learn from your mistakes. In a nutshell, it doesn't make you rich. This behavioral flaw is as significant a negative attribute as the positive qualities of brainpower, courage, and resourcefulness. A leader who cannot shoulder the blame is not someone people will follow or trust. They will, however, question the leader's character, dependability, and loyalty, and they will hold back their loyalty from him or her.

You know people who accept responsibility—aren't they great to be around? These people do things like help more and judge less. They try to get people to focus on a future they can

influence, not a past they cannot change. They help others take responsibility for their own behavior. They reflect on past events and ask, “What can we learn from that?” They don’t, and they encourage others not to, speak when angry or out of control. And they think before they speak, asking themselves, “Will this comment help?”

In this book you will read about many people and groups who do all of these things, how they navigate taking responsibility and grow a culture where this is the norm. You can also learn to be more like them if you’re not already. *Stepping Up* is a wonderful testament to those individuals and teams who do step up! I encourage you to read it and enjoy it—and if you change a little bit because of it, that is OK too.

Life is good.

Marshall Goldsmith

Executive coach and author
of the *New York Times* bestsellers
MOJO and *What Got You Here*
Won't Get You There

Preface to the Second Edition

It has been almost a decade now since I first wrote *Stepping Up*. The idea was simple, but I hoped profound, that taking responsibility changes EVERYTHING! Over this past decade I have given over five hundred keynote speeches on *Stepping Up*, and my team has conducted several thousand workshops challenging people to step up to see the power of personal responsibility in life and work.

Although I have authored or coauthored a total of eight books, this is the first time I made the choice to write a second edition of a book. So I thought it would be valuable to tell you why I made that choice as well as the changes I chose to make.

It seems to me that there are only two reasons to publish a new edition of a book. First, because the book and its ideas are having a real impact on readers and those exposed to the ideas and new examples can extend the life of that impact. Second, because the author has something new to add that was not available when the book was written. These were the two reasons I took the time to create this second edition.

The book and the ideas presented in it have proven to be of great value to both individuals and the organizations that have adopted its principles. Hundreds of organizations are now using the ideas from the book, and some of them, like Qantas Airlines, have put thousands of people through training experiences to shift them to stepping up to 100 percent

responsibility. I have witnessed personally the profound shift that occurs when people choose to see themselves as agents of change and when organizations create a climate for stepping up.

While there are many examples that come to mind, let me illustrate two—one personal and one organizational. About two years after the book was published, I was doing a series of leadership speaking events for Northrop Grumman, the aerospace company. Leaders were given copies of the book to read ahead of our sessions. At one of the sessions a woman in her forties told me that she had to apologize for not reading the book. Her sixteen-year-old son had seen the book lying around and started reading it. She went on to tell me he loved it so much he had refused to surrender it until he was finished. She then said, “I’ve seen a huge positive shift in him over the last few weeks.”

The second story is what happened when we put almost twenty thousand team members at Qantas Airlines through a program on stepping up over a several-year period. Over that period, we got to witness a shift in the culture of an entire organization toward focusing on what each person can do to make things better. People went from pointing the finger out at others to looking in the mirror. The then CEO of the domestic airline division, Lyell Strambi, said “For the first time, when we went through a crisis it felt like we were on the same side.”

This mirrors the hundreds of companies around the world that are using the 100/0 Principle that is featured in the book. Most months I get emails from companies all over the world that have adopted this simple idea with profound impact.

My first motivation for a new edition was to update the book with new examples of people who stepped up and to

update those from the first edition. I hope this will bring a fresh coat of paint to what have turned out to be enduring ideas.

The second reason to do a new edition is because there is something new to be said. Since the time I wrote the book a decade ago, my colleagues and I have had the opportunity to learn a great deal of what it means to step up. People often ask us, How do I know when I am stepping up?

So one of the big additions is a new chapter titled “Stepping Up or Stepping Back—How to Know the Difference.” Since the first edition we have identified five behavioral markers to know when we are stepping up. This new chapter makes clear what it means to step up and what it means to step back. It helps each of us decide, moment to moment, what it means to be in a place of 100 percent responsibility.

I have also added two self-assessments. The first helps us assess whether we are in a place of self-responsibility personally, and the second helps leaders assess whether we are creating a culture conducive to responsibility in our organization or team. Both of these tools have proven to be valuable to our clients.

Finally, I am even more convinced now than I was in 2010 about the crying need for personal responsibility in society and the power of it in our personal lives. In my talks and workshops around the globe, I often ask people this binary question: “Over the last decade, do you think we have become more of a society of ‘innies’ and personal responsibility or a society of ‘outies’ where we mostly blame others and the outside world for our circumstances?” I ask for a show of hands. Across the many countries and types of audiences I speak to, about 90 percent of hands vote for a shift away from personal responsibility. The need for this book and its core ideas is

greater than ever. Now more than ever, we need to take 100 percent responsibility to solve the challenges of our time and pursue the opportunities in our own lives.

Preface to the First Edition

This book is for people who want to make a bigger difference in their community, organization, or the world. It is for anyone who wants a better marriage or to improve career prospects. It is a book for all leaders or business owners who would like to help their people act more like owners. It is a book for anyone who believes in, or wants to believe in, the power of individuals to create change.

I began writing this book when I was ten years old. At the time, my television set was filled with images of people stepping up. All over the world, people were taking great personal risks to make the world a better place: African Americans withstood fire hoses in the streets of the South, peace activists sounded a warning call about the nuclear arms race, dissidents spoke out in totalitarian regimes, and women asserted their rights as equal citizens. I decided I wanted to become a journalist so I could tell the stories of those who made things better.

In my smaller personal world I listened with rapt attention to the sermons of the Reverend Robert Kelly at Calvary Presbyterian Church in New York City, challenging each of us to do what we could to combat racism and the ills of our day.

“The world is waiting for us to step up,” he admonished us. He noted that the need lay not just in the large issues of the day but in the “smaller world in which we live every day, where we can make a large difference in the lives of others.”

The stories of those who step up and make things better have always fascinated me. As human beings, we learn through stories, and it has been that way for thousands of years. We remember the stories long after we forget the lectures, which is why my life has been devoted to telling stories. In my books on corporate culture I tell the stories of great companies and leaders who inspired passion at work. In my book and television series *The Five Secrets You Must Discover Before You Die* I tell the stories of two hundred fifty people from age 60 to 106 who had been identified as having found true happiness. Through their stories I hoped to show the path to lasting fulfillment.

After I finished that book, which became a bestseller and was translated into over a dozen languages, it seemed to me that another story had yet to be told. Why do some people step up and make a bigger difference than others? What role does taking personal responsibility play in creating happiness and creating change? How can the stories of those who step up inform each of us about solving the great issues of our day, whether the issue is making better families, stopping bullying, making our marriages better, improving a company, or tackling the many societal issues we face?

It occurred to me that each case comes down to responsibility. The definition for stepping up in this book is simple: *Stepping up is seeing a need and deciding you are the right person to do something about it.* It is about doing what you can in your sphere of influence to create change, not looking to anyone else. The responsibility I speak of is not a wagging finger telling you to step up, but an empowering message of what happens when we stop worrying about what anyone else is doing and choose to do what we can do. Whether trying to change our family, our company, or the world, we are powerful only when we focus on what *we* can do.

Because I believe we learn best through stories, my research for this book involved finding stories of people who had stepped up and created change. I did not want to tell stories we have all heard before nor find famous people to hear their tales. Instead, I set out to find stories that few of us know about that illustrate the incredible power to create change when we decide to act in our sphere of influence. I tried to find people whose stories of taking action were broad and instructive, rather than seek a scientific random sample of people who had stepped up. The stories range from a homeless man who started a recycling revolution and a shopkeeper in Italy who stood up to the Mafia to a group of nurses and housekeepers who helped transform the image of their hospital and a woman who turned a dying business into a profit center. Some were trying to save the world, some were trying to grow or improve their business, others just wanted to have a positive influence on the people around them, and some wanted better relationships.

The book has two main thrusts: the value of taking responsibility and how to step up. The first three chapters make the case for why taking responsibility matters. My intention is not to lecture you but to show how our lives, careers, relationships, organizations, and communities will be radically better if we start looking to ourselves to change things and stop looking to (or pointing at) someone else. The principle is simple but profound. When we decide to do what we can, where we are, instead of looking for others to do it, we feel more powerful and accomplish more. What's more, beyond our personal world most of the great problems of our day can be solved only by each of us deciding to take action in our sphere of power.

The second thrust of the book identifies the keys to stepping up and having more influence. Through the inspiring stories of individuals who stepped up to make things better,