

“It’s not easy. It’s not perfect either. But then again, nothing worthwhile ever is.”

story by CHIP GAINES

Maybe it sounds morbid, but I’ve always been fascinated by obituaries. A whole life summed up in a couple of paragraphs. The thing is, there’s no way to capture everything about a person. So you only get the stuff that simply can’t be left out. What and who they lived for. I like to think that, if you were to put a piece of paper in front of me today, I could write out the few lines that will tell the story of my life. Even if just to challenge myself to say, *You watch. I may get a lot wrong, but I’m going to get the most important things right.*

When I look out across the whole landscape of my little corner of the world, there are plenty of places where I fall short. I’m known to be easily distracted, for one thing. In general, me and time have this way of losing track of one another. And sometimes, I can let some of the commitments I’ve made slip through my hands.

But there are other commitments—the big ones—that I hold on to with everything I’ve got. Honoring Jo, being a good dad, my faith, trying to do what’s right even when it’s not easy, building something that helps other people. Those are commitments I’ve made that I won’t compromise. My nonnegotiables. No matter how much the details and circumstances of my life may change, and no matter what storms come my way, you watch: I’m going to get those right.

Want to know the truth? It’s not easy. It’s not perfect either. But then again, nothing worthwhile ever is.

In the middle of the grind we can become distracted by all the noise.. by status, by what kind of car we’re driving or getting our kids onto the right sports teams or who said what. These are all small things, but it’s death by a thousand paper cuts to your sense of purpose. It’s different for everyone, and we’re all susceptible to losing sight of what matters most. Especially in a world that’s constantly fighting for our attention. That’s the real battle, the one that goes on inside of our hearts every single day.

When I start to feel the pressure of a world that is trying to sway or dictate my behavior to make one of my nonnegotiables negotiable, I go back to the list of things in my life that are an unwavering part of who I am. It took me a while, but do this enough times and you start to realize the importance of safeguarding what matters to you most.

’Cause I’ve seen the way it plays out. People who are willing to negotiate everything can end up standing for nothing. People who hold fast to their nonnegotiables, on the other hand, erase the space between who they are and who they want to be. And when it comes to their obituaries, there’s no question about what it will say.

NAME YOUR NONNEGOTIABLES:

Two columns of horizontal lines for writing nonnegotiables.

(AND THEN GIVE YOURSELF GRACE WHEN OTHER COMMITMENTS HAVE TO TAKE A BACK SEAT.)