



**9 MINUTES TO LEARN,  
A LIFETIME TO LIVE**

**PLAY  
YOUR  
BIGGER  
GAME**

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# INTRODUCTION

## Why Play Your Bigger Game?

**M**elissa O'Mara and Alice Coles have little in common at first glance. Melissa has a college degree and has spent most of her career in high-level management positions in Fortune 500 corporations. Alice Coles is a single mother who toiled as a crab picker, earning just \$5,000 a year while living in one of the most impoverished and neglected rural communities in the nation.

You may be surprised to learn, however, that both Melissa and Alice are skilled and avid players of The Bigger Game. Alice, in fact, may be the more celebrated bigger game player of the two women. Her incredible successes as a community activist and advocate for the rural poor have been highlighted on *60 Minutes* and other major media outlets.

Both women are major game changers in their respective areas of influence. Melissa has quietly led the green movement from within corporate America. Alice simply saved and rebuilt most of her once-squalid community in a relentless and still-ongoing campaign that has become a model and inspiration for grassroots activists around the world.

As the co-founder of The Bigger Game, I've worked with both of these phenomenal women, and I'm in awe of their determination, intelligence, and resourcefulness. I'll share the specifics of their bigger games and those of many others in this book. But first, I'd like to offer one thought for you to keep in mind as you read the pages that

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follow: this book is personal, and it's about *you* setting something great in motion.

Like Melissa and Alice, you may not know exactly what you are hungering for right now. Don't worry about that. Just go with the fact that in picking up this book, you've acknowledged that you are searching for something more.

Isaac Newton's first law of motion states, "An object at rest stays at rest, and an object in motion stays in motion." In the same way, we humans tend to keep doing what we're doing. Our natural tendency is to resist change. This results in a state known as *inertia*, which is the tendency to do nothing.

The Bigger Game is your antidote to inertia. It's meant to put your life in motion and to keep it in motion. One of the biggest promises of playing your own game is that you'll never feel "stuck" for long.

To be a player, you don't have to have your game all figured out. You don't even need a name for it. You just need to get rolling. Momentum will take care of the rest. The Bigger Game greases your wheels.

Once you begin playing your own bigger game, something organic happens. You give up the need to control and strategize everything. It's not that controlling and strategizing are bad and organic is good, but controlling and strategizing are tasks conducted from the left side of the brain (logic), and sometimes we need to lean a little more to the right side (creativity). The Bigger Game is similar to Mother Nature. Both are forces greater than any one of us. Our best bet is to adapt as we go, ride the wave, and follow the flow.

### ***IT'S ALL MADE UP***

The Bigger Game is a concept that will take you only nine minutes to understand and a lifetime to play. It was designed from the premise that life itself is one big game that's all made up. Your life is what you make it to be.

So, if life is a game and it's all made up, why not play a game of your own design—one that excites you, challenges you, and allows you to fully express your talents and creativity?

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By the way, there's nothing wrong with hungering for such a passionate existence. It's a natural expression of who we are. Since each of us is blessed with talents, we are naturally hungry to develop them and put them to use.

Too often we suppress that desire for full engagement and self-expression, because we think that's the grown-up thing to do. We consciously turn down our hunger dials, because we're afraid of expecting too much. We also think, *If I settle for less, I will then avoid being disappointed.*

The Bigger Game was created to counteract the self-limiting, fear-based approach to life. Michelangelo said, "The great danger for most of us lies not in setting our aim too high and falling short, but in setting our aim too low and hitting the mark."

The Bigger Game is not just about making a living; it's about creating an impact. Interestingly enough, I find that once players begin to make a positive impact, their incomes often rise, too.

Still, if you're interested simply in making a living and just surviving in life, I'm afraid this book and The Bigger Game are not for you. If you're interested in making your mark and thriving through the full expression of all of your gifts and blessings, please read on.

The purpose of this book is to do the following:

- ✘ Reveal The Bigger Game player that you already are.
- ✘ Help you find The Bigger Game(s) that excites and challenges you to fully deploy all of your energy and gifts.
- ✘ Teach you to consciously design the person you are destined to become.
- ✘ Allow you to feed the hunger in your soul.
- ✘ Help you to make a major impact and to leave a lasting legacy.

You should play The Bigger Game if you:

- ✘ Want to have a more positive impact within your family, your work, your community, or your organization

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- ✘ Yearn for meaningful work that matters
- ✘ Long to be more innovative
- ✘ Seek to be more collaborative
- ✘ Hunger for a change but aren't sure what sort of change
- ✘ Are looking for more than an "okay" life or a business-as-usual existence
- ✘ Want to take responsibility and direct your destiny
- ✘ Aspire to make a difference or leave a legacy
- ✘ Are ready to become a leader
- ✘ Have had enough of sitting in the stands as an observer

### ***THIS IS NOT BUSINESS AS USUAL***

Just what is it that will make you, your group, your organization, or your community successful? Most experts agree that success comes to those individuals or groups whose hunger for something better attracts allies who share a compelling vision.

Unfortunately, those who deal with the day-to-day reality of demanding jobs and busy families tend to fall into the business-as-usual mode. We accept lower levels of accomplishment, unfulfilling careers, and even mediocre performance. We tend to do business as usual until the business goes bust.

I co-created The Bigger Game with the late Laura Whitworth, the co-founder of The Coaches Training Institute, where I've studied and taught. Our goal was to create a remedy for "business as usual." After Laura's death from cancer in 2007, I grieved for more than a year. But eventually, I was compelled to continue our work to honor her memory. Since then, I've traveled the world coaching and training tens of thousands of people across all walks of life, groups within the corporate world and nonprofit organizations, as well as individuals.

The Bigger Game uses a traditional game board that resembles the classic tic-tac-toe game as a playful method for helping individuals,

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leaders, teams, and organizations achieve great things, not out of obligation but because they're driven by a deep and meaningful, compelling purpose.

The Bigger Game offers an engaging and highly effective system for innovating and evolving as individuals, groups, or organizations. The method, when passionately applied, helps individuals and groups intentionally define what they want to accomplish and who they want to become within their families, communities, environments, or careers.

Those who play The Bigger Game say it helps them satiate their hunger for fulfillment while allowing them to serve a higher purpose and to find deeper meaning, rather than allowing circumstances to dictate their behaviors and the course of their lives.

We want our lives to have meaning. We don't want to settle for mere survival. So dare to be hungry.

Transform your life into a bold statement of purpose and empowerment. You don't want to have regrets when you look back upon it.

Apple CEO Steve Jobs addressed that hunger in his remarkable 2005 speech to new graduates at Stanford: "Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma—which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of others' opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary."

Once you decide to play The Bigger Game, the simple act of being in the flow of it designs who you want to become. You become immersed in the process before you have time to think or plan how to do it.

One of the underlying philosophies of The Bigger Game is that goals are overrated. Whether you're a student, a recent graduate, a professional in midcareer, an executive, an entrepreneur, or a seeker of greater meaning and fulfillment, the game provides the space where your creativity flows naturally and innovation is an authentic product of your engagement.

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A couple housekeeping points: For the sake of learning the model and understanding the methodology, I suggest reading this entire book first and then coming back to certain chapters for further reference as you create and play your bigger game. Feel free to keep a journal to capture your thoughts as you read and play.

You've probably already noticed that I capitalize The Bigger Game when referring to the concept, but not when referring to the bigger games of individuals or players in general. It's sort of like Major League Baseball and a baseball game, one is the overarching concept and brand while the other is an individual or team pursuit.

When you are fully engaged in your own bigger game, which will be something that truly matters, you discover that goals are met and problems solved as you play. Instead of holding meetings and worrying about how to accomplish a goal, you do it as part of the process. Your attention isn't focused on outcomes; it's focused on playing.

When you discover your bigger game, you find yourself compelled from the inside out. If you spend your life doing what you're naturally drawn and driven to do, then the rewards are there for you every day, not just at the end of the day. You see, it's not all about winning the game; it's about the playing.

No one has to tell you when to show up for work or what to do at work. Your work lives inside you as your purpose. It's personal, and, as a result, your energy level soars. You find yourself performing at unprecedented levels: doing more, achieving more, creating fresh opportunities, and feeling more fulfilled.

To play, you must be willing to examine whether you are truly fulfilled in your current game. In my workshops, I often encounter panicked participants who say, "But I have to make my division's numbers next quarter. I don't have time for a bigger game."

There's no play in that mentality. There's very little room for introspection and self-assessment in goal obsession. If you have no interest in leaving your comfort zone, even if you're not all that comfortable, then this game is not for you.

The Bigger Game is designed to create a paradigm and perspective shift for an individual, a team, or an organization. Yet, when the game is played passionately, those shifts occur naturally and in the



flow of full engagement. This shift is not forced. You can't force a true paradigm and perspective shift. Yet, the recession and global financial crisis that began in 2006 had many companies in panic mode, demanding, "We need innovation now!"

As you might imagine, that sort of stressful environment is not conducive to innovation and creativity. The Bigger Game gives birth to innovation naturally, because it's a form of play in which the focus isn't on outcomes or problem solving. Instead, solutions and innovations result from the process of creating a new way of living and working.

### ***A GAME FOR ALL***

Melissa O'Mara is just one example of individuals whom I've supported and coached to find their bigger games over the last 15 years. Many of them work within major corporations. Others are big thinkers and entrepreneurs in the public sector, nonprofits, religious organizations, and every field imaginable. Their shared compelling purpose is to be fully engaged and fulfilled in work that also makes a difference in their communities and in the world around them. You can never be too small or too big to play The Bigger Game, which is an expression of your self in the world that, in some way, makes a positive difference. The word *bigger* is not related to size and volume but, rather, applies to stepping up to create something so compelling and with such passion that your engagement in life will expand exponentially. If we're not evolving, we're devolving. Playing a Bigger Game will guarantee evolution and, in some cases, even revolution.

I introduced Melissa to The Bigger Game in a corporate workshop, and over a period of a few years, she participated in several more of my presentations. Once Melissa zeroed in on her own bigger game, she proved to be an avid player. She'd spent 16 years in sales and management at IBM. Smart and dynamic, Melissa thrived, but when she paused long enough to notice it, she frequently felt a hunger for something more.

She had navigated her career in a way that enabled her to continuously learn, and yet, she'd reached a point where she yearned for

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work that had a greater impact, something that resonated beyond the corporate environment.

Like thousands of others hungering for greater meaning in their careers and lives, Melissa found what she was looking for by playing The Bigger Game. “The Bigger Game gave me a context for how I could leverage the corporate platform to do important and fulfilling work in the larger world,” said Melissa, whose story I’ll explore in greater depth later in the book.

When you do express yourself through good work, the world responds by sending abundance and blessings your way. It’s not about doing and getting; it’s about expressing and receiving. Playing The Bigger Game takes you out of surviving mode and puts you in thriving mode. Like Melissa O’Mara, your bigger game will transform you from a worker to a player—on a scale greater than any you’ve ever imagined!

Once you decide to play The Bigger Game—even if you don’t yet know what your game is or how to create it—the simple act of being in the flow of it designs the person you want to become, and that takes you where you want to go. You become immersed in the process before you have time to think or plan how to do it.

When you’re fully engaged in your own bigger game, the *how* becomes irrelevant. Your attention isn’t focused on outcomes, because you’re so engaged in the process. Your goals are met and problems are solved in the flow of playing the game.

Are you ready to live fully by expressing *your* bigger game?

If so, let your game begin!

