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*Dedicated to those incredible teachers, parents, students, counselors, and college admission professionals who contributed greatly to the content of this important book.*

*Section*

01

**What Good Can Come Of This?  
What Bad Can Come Of This?  
(It's All About Choices)**

# Chapter 1

## Decisions, Decisions and More Decisions

Welcome to high school. The next four years of your life are absolutely going to be a blast. You are going to make new friends. You are going to learn new things. And you just might set yourself up for an incredible life of success and happiness.

However, for most freshman students, the only future they think about is next week's quiz, tonight's homework, or Friday's football game. But thriving freshman are different. They are in fact, thinking about their futures. They are thinking about next year's classes. They are already thinking about the college application process and they are thinking about the kind of life they wish to live when all this school stuff is over.

By way of introduction, my name is Chadney Hill. My brother Joshua and I wrote this book to give students like you (frankly, students like us) a better understanding of the importance of the freshman year. I started on this book when I was just a junior in High School and Joshua was just a measly seventh grader. Our goal is to change the common narrative that the first year of high school is really not that important. Some of our classmates have even said that college admission officers don't even look at the freshman year. It simply isn't true.

*“Lots of colleges, particularly private schools, will look at the freshman year. And since your academic performance as a freshman influences what classes you'll be able to take as a sophomore, it matters for pretty much every college. So don't panic if you have a stumble here or there while learning the ropes of high school. But don't blow off your freshman year, either.”*

*Kevin McMullin founder and head of counseling at Collegewise*

We aren't trying to stress you out, but we are trying to give you a sense of the urgency and competitiveness that exists this year whether you know it or not. The fact is, that thriving students build tremendous momentum in their freshman years. We have studied, researched and interviewed dozens and dozens of high performing high school students and the reality is that you

can look at their achievements and performance during their freshman year and predict with great certainty their future high school success. We don't have to tell you (but we will) that the formula for high school success is pretty simple and you can see it in these high performing students; they get excellent grades, they turn their assignments in on time, they don't miss classes, they make friends, and they get involved.

Make no mistake about it, success in high school is deliberate. It takes effort, strategy, and execution. Most importantly, it requires the right attitude. One of the most common things we heard in our interviews from students is that there is a perception that some kids (the academic super stars) are just naturally smart. But when you really look at the academic super stars what you discover is that those kids work their butts off to get those top grades. Our conclusion is that those kids aren't naturally smarter. In fact, during the learning process, they receive the same information at the same time as other students. If they have a gift, it's a gift of focus. We believe that a student's focus is largely determined by the student's attitude about studying. The students we talked to have a very mature understanding of why education and good grades is important to their future success. They have already set their mind on going to college and perhaps most importantly, they know that they are in a competition for the relatively small number of spots available at their dream college.

You have to have an attitude that is centered on winning. Winning needs to be defined academically and socially. It will be based upon your goals, hopes, and dreams. But the practical aspect of having a winning attitude means you are prepared (intellectually, physically, emotionally...etc.) to sacrifice to win. So if you need to get a 4.2 GPA to get into your dream college or to secure that scholarship, then you must develop the discipline to do the extra work. Too many students, especially freshman students, get so caught up in the incredible social opportunities surrounding high school that they fail to achieve their academic goals which ultimately could result in them not achieving their life dreams.

As you begin your freshman journey it is essential that you stay focused on the outcome you are hoping to achieve these next four years. Specifically, you want to position yourself to excel in life. We take the perspective that every student reading this book has a similar dream of wanting to live an extraordinary life filled with success and happiness. If you recognize that the first post-high school step to this new life of incredible possibilities begins with college then you are already

thinking correctly. Now you need to begin to develop the mindset that there is no question that you will be going to college. Therefore, every decision you make from here on out will be measured against the impact that decision will have against your college goal.

## **THRIVING FRESHMAN TIP #1**

*Measure Every Decision To Spend Out-Of-Class Time On Social Activities Against The Question, “Will This Activity Prevent Me From Delivering A Stellar Performance On My Academic Assignments Today Or This Week?”*

If the answer is either maybe or yes, then you need... you *must* muster up the self-discipline to either skip the activity or reschedule the activity. This is likely going to require you to develop a new skill, a skill that most people don't have... self-discipline. Think about all the people in the world that start diets and then quit within a few days or weeks. How about all the people who join gyms only to stop going before their first month's membership is even billed. For these people, the idea of going to the gym is more painful than the morning glance in the mirror... where they see their less-than-ideal body. But people who do stick to diets or fitness plans are people with discipline. So how do you develop self-discipline? Well, there is a whole body of research on this subject, but it basically boils down to one thing. People activate changes in their lives when the pain of doing the same thing becomes greater than the pain of pursuing the change. So, if you are the kind of student who thinks studying is more painful (emotionally) than hanging out with friends or video games then you need to flip the pain switch.

You have to make your personal pain of under-performing in school higher than the pain of missing out on this week's party.

“The student's friends may pressure them to not study and instead come hang out with them and have fun, but that is the student's decision to make. At some point in their high school careers, every student must decide what their priorities will generally be. Will they prioritize their social life over their classes, or will it be the reverse? Whatever they decide, each student has control over their own

actions and decisions. Students should never let someone else take the reins for them just because they consider the other person to be a friend.”

(Marissa Nardella, high school student)

For this to happen, you have to get educated. You have to develop a solid understanding of why performing well in school is so critical to your future success. This book will help you obtain that knowledge.

But you already know this, right? Your common sense tells you that the higher you perform academically the greater the chances of getting into a dream college. Your instincts tell you that the better the college the better the future opportunities. Everybody understands this... right? So then why do so many kids allow themselves to struggle and under-perform? We think the answer is pretty simple... they are busy, blind and distracted.

Busy students may not have the time management skills to perform at a high level. Blind students (basically, every freshman who does not yet know or who has not yet become acclimated to high school standards) struggle to perform because they just don't have the information necessary to succeed. Distracted kids lack the discipline to focus on performing well.

The good news is, all of these things are easily managed and this book is going to give you the information and strategies to perform.

Everything in this book is based on first-hand experiences. The advice we offer comes from more than 100 sources, including high school counselors, college admission officers, students, teachers, and parents. There are a ton of kids out there who will do well without this information. However, kids who just do well don't go to awesome colleges. The world is way too competitive for students who achieve “typical” or “average” results. To thrive in life you must thrive in high school. We want you to thrive. By the way, thriving doesn't mean sitting in your room all day studying so you can get an A on that next test. Yes, you need the A's, but colleges look at much more than grades today. They want to see students who are well-balanced in life. Kids who perform well academically, but kids who have a great high school story to tell. So build some memories and enjoy these next four years.

