

Level Up Your Life: How to Unlock Adventure and Happiness by Becoming the Hero of Your Own Story

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In 5 years, Steve Kamb has transformed himself from wanna-be daydreamer into a real-life superhero and actually turned his life into a gigantic video game: flying stunt planes in New Zealand, gambling in a tuxedo at the Casino de Monte-Carlo, and even finding Nemo on the Great Barrier Reef. To help him accomplish all of these goals, he built a system that allowed him to complete quests, take on boss battles, earn experience points, and literally level up his life.

If you have always dreamed of adventure and growth but can't seem to leave your hobbit-hole, Level Up Your Life is for you. Kamb will teach you exactly how to use your favorite video games, books, and movies as inspiration for adventure rather than an escape from the grind of everyday life. Hundreds of thousands of everyday Joes and Jills have joined Steve's Rebellion through his popular website, NerdFitness.com, and leveled up their lives—losing weight, getting stronger, and living better.

In Level Up Your Life, you'll meet more than a dozen of these members of The Rebellion: men and women, young and old, single and married, from all walks of life who have created superhero versions of themselves to live adventurously and happily. Within this guide, you'll follow in their footsteps and learn exactly how to:

- ❑ Create your own "Alter Ego" with real-life super powers
- ❑ Build your own Epic Quest List, broken into categories and difficulty levels
- ❑ Hack your productivity habits to start making progress
- ❑ Train your body for any adventure
- ❑ Build in rewards and accountability that will actually motivate you to succeed
- ❑ Travel the world freely (and cheaply)
- ❑ Recruit the right allies to your side and find powerful mentors for guidance

Adventure is out there, and the world needs more heroes. Will you heed the call? Steve Kamb is the force behind NerdFitness.com, which began as a simple blog that has since evolved into a worldwide community of nerds, average Joes, and desk jockeys helping each other make positive changes in their lives. He lives in New York City, and hopes to one day become Captain America.

IN A HOLE IN THE GROUND THERE LIVED A HOBBIT. NOT A NASTY, DIRTY, WET HOLE, FILLED WITH THE ENDS OF WORMS AND AN OOZY SMELL, NOR YET A DRY, BARE, SANDY HOLE WITH NOTHING IN IT TO SIT DOWN ON OR TO EAT: IT WAS A HOBBIT-HOLE, AND THAT MEANS COMFORT.

--J. R. R. TOLKIEN, THE HOBBIT

If you're wondering how I went from risk-averse nerd to globe-trotting Indiana Jones, it started in 2007 with a panic attack.

It happened while I was sitting on a plane flying home to San Diego, but it wasn't because I was afraid of flying. The issue was that I dreamed of traveling to far-off lands, doing exciting things, and living an epic life full of adventure, but my reality was drastically different

from the dreams taking place in my head. After spending all day at a job I was ill-suited for, I would spend every night and weekend hiding behind my computer screen, emptying hour after hour into video games in order to escape an existence that could best be described as dull and directionless. I ate the same foods, did the same boring things, and put off any adventure and growth of any kind until things in my life were "less busy." I felt like I was having a midlife crisis at the age of 23. As Ben Franklin said, "Some people die at 25 and aren't buried until 75." I felt like he was speaking to me.

I wanted more out of life, but had no idea how to make it happen. I continued to escape into video games, books, and movies to live life through the eyes of characters whose lives seemed (and were) more exciting than mine. I zoned out every night in front of a screen, got drunk on the weekends to forget the previous week, and dreaded Sunday nights because I knew I'd have to wake up early the next morning and go back to a reality that I despised. I thought back to my youth and tried to figure out where things went wrong.

I had a very normal childhood. Well, if you can call growing up in a town called Sandwich "normal." To answer your first two questions, yes, our police cars say "Sandwich Police" on them, and no, our high school mascot is not a sandwich. As a young child, I had an overly active imagination, and split my free time equally between playing games like The Legend of Zelda and exploring my backyard as if I was Link, the tunic-wearing hero of that game. I honestly felt like I grew up alongside Link, watching him jump from a 2D sprite in A Link to the Past to a fully realized 3D badass in The Ocarina of Time, widely considered the greatest games of all time.

And then came my four years at Sandwich High School: as a sophomore I stood a towering 5'1", on year #3 of braces, and I somehow managed to get the acne that comes with puberty without the accompanying growth spurt. Finally, my exceptionally tall father's genetics kicked in, and I grew to 5'11" by the time I finished my junior year. The braces came off and two rounds of Accutane treatments helped clear up my skin. I even tried out for the varsity basketball team, as my brother was captain and I prided myself on trying really hard. Unfortunately, all the effort in the world couldn't mask the fact that I wasn't very good, and I got cut. Thus, the only two sports I ended up playing in high school were those generally recommended for geriatrics: golf and tennis. It was right around this time, too, that I managed to fall in love and spend all of my free time hopelessly addicted. Her name?

EverQuest.

For the unfamiliar, EverQuest is an immensely popular online multiplayer video game like World of Warcraft in which a world of wizards, warriors, and dragons reside. If you grew up playing Dungeons & Dragons, think of this like its video game equivalent without a dungeon master. I didn't have my driver's license or a girlfriend, so my weekends and summer nights were spent exploring in a different way. Rather than actively exploring my backyard or new parts of town, I explored the game world of Norrath as Morphos Novastorm, an Erudite Wizard. No longer did I need to use my imagination to fill in the gaps, because Norrath had it all: massively high peaks, deep dark oceans full of secrets,

deserted islands, haunted houses, caves, castles, and everything in between.

What had begun as a fun way to blow off some steam after school or work quickly became an addiction. I specifically remember a few nights after marathon gaming sessions in which I would quietly try to sneak up to bed so as to not wake my parents, only to bump into my dad who was getting ready for work. Sorry, Dad. There were quite a few days during the summer in which I stayed up all night trying to complete a particularly challenging quest, only to realize it was already time to go work a 12-hour shift at my summer day job, stocking shelves in busy supermarkets for Coca-Cola. It paid great, but boy was I miserable.

Although I dedicated a lot of my time to gaming after school and on weekends, I made sure to keep a strong focus on my academics, too. Having an older brother who graduated second in his class paved a nice path for me to put all sorts of unnecessary pressure on myself to follow in his footsteps. I joined every club I could, served on student council, got the best grades I could, and managed to graduate second in my small class as well. Eventually, I chose to attend Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. I didn't know much about the school other than the fact that it had a great reputation and nicer weather than the Northeast, so when they offered me a decent academic scholarship I decided to visit the campus and instantly fell in love with it.

My four years of college progressed rather quickly. I wasn't sure what I wanted to be when I grew up--and I still don't know--so I bounced between majors before finally settling on economics. I loved college. Not because I could party all the time--I actually didn't start drinking until my senior year. I loved college because I had freedom and a computer with max specifications that could run the best games at the highest resolution. My roommates and I pooled our money together to buy a big TV and every available game system, and we spent hours upon hours playing Super Smash Bros., Halo, Mario Kart, Resident Evil, and every role-playing game (RPG) we could find. It was in the fall of my junior year that EverQuest 2 was released, and my love affair with online video games began anew. In between classes, after class, before going out on weekends (or instead of going out on weekends), and instead of writing papers, my time went into leveling up my character in the newly designed Norrath.

As graduation neared and I still had zero plans for my future, my brother Jack contacted me from a frozen Chicago to tell me he wanted me to move with him to San Diego, California. Because I had no other plans, I quickly consented, and after graduating I moved out West and took the highest paying job I could find in an industry that would have me: construction equipment rental and sales. I figured, "How hard could it be? I like talking to people, and both of my parents are in sales!"

We lived 20 yards from the beach, I surfed when I could, I had a company car, a steady salary, and a job that kept me busy, and I was miserable. Every morning hit me like a sack of hammers, and I quickly counted down the minutes until my shift ended and I could go home. I certainly don't mean to knock the construction industry or sales, it's just that it only took me a few days to realize that I was simply mismatched and terrible at it. Fortunately, I

had a wallet full of money and a computer that could run EverQuest 2. So afternoons were spent playing video games, weekends were spent getting drunk at bars or drinking and playing EverQuest, and Sundays were reserved for walking along the beach, fighting back tears, wondering what's wrong, and asking myself, "Am I really supposed to be this unhappy for the next forty years?"

Even though I wasn't great at my job, I tried to tough things out and did so for over a year, hoping things would improve. Spoiler alert: they didn't. In fact, things got worse! My boss had GPS devices installed on our sales trucks, and I vividly remember one morning getting a phone call from the boss man at 7:05 a.m. "Steve," he said. "I can see that your truck is still parked in front of your house. Why haven't you left yet? Your day should start at seven a.m." Not to be outsmarted, I simply drove from job site to job site, quickly made my sales pitches and usually got rejected, and then sat in my truck and read Harry Potter novels for 20 minutes before repeating the process until my work day was over. As an overachiever in high school, I couldn't help but think about how far I had fallen in just a few short years. Honestly, I'm thankful I was so miserable and mismatched with that job, as a somewhat happier existence might not have spurred me to action!

Now, it was right around this time that I had the aforementioned panic attack on the airplane and decided some adventure was in order. I had just spent an amazing weekend back in Nashville with all of my college friends for a reunion, and, for the first time in over a year, I was truly happy.

I walked off that plane a different man and decided I needed to make a change. I reached out to the friends I had just visited, who informed me they were in search of a third roommate for their new apartment in Atlanta. I woke up the next morning, marched into my brother's room, and let him know I had to move to Atlanta as quickly as possible. Fortunately he was incredibly supportive and helped me begin my job search; my boss was less enthusiastic about the idea.

While checking Craigslist, I stumbled across a posting online for a job that required "creativity, a love of music, and willingness to travel." Even though it was a subentry level position, it was with a company named Sixthman that gave me a warm fuzzy feeling. Sixthman produces floating music festivals by chartering cruise ships and filling them up with music acts of various genres.

During the interview process, I was asked which movie had inspired me the most. Having just gone through a perfectly mundane and boring existence out in California, I went on and on about the movie *The Shawshank Redemption*, in which an inmate refuses to let his prison walls beat him down or change him. As luck would have it, *Shawshank* also happened to be the favorite movie of the owner of the company, and I was brought on as a marketing assistant.

Although I earned less than half of what I'd been making out in San Diego, I absolutely loved the job: I worked with people I admired, I made an immediate impact, and my day-to-day office life always built up to an amazing event with incredible musicians. On one cruise,

the company tasked me to write about my experiences onboard: my first creative writing assignment. After sharing my work with the company, I was soon put in charge of the company blog, and I fell in love with using written words to share stories and inspire people to live a life of fun.

Now, although I enjoyed my time on these cruises and in the office, whenever it was possible I still poured dozens of hours into EverQuest 2. Deep down, I knew something was still missing. I no longer dreaded Mondays, and I had plenty of things in my life to look forward to, but something inside me told me my future still lay elsewhere. A year prior I had purchased the domain NerdFitness.com, a half-baked idea I had to help nerds like myself not make all of the mistakes I had made in the gym trying to get healthy. I enjoyed exercising, but increasingly saw my fitness and my dreams of building a company get put on the back burner as more and more time was required of my wizard, Morphos Novastorm.

And then fate intervened again. While on a taxing dungeon raid in EverQuest, the fan in the computer I had built burned out, and many of the internal components fried. It was then that I made a commitment to myself: because I lacked the money to fix or replace the computer, I wouldn't allow myself to play EverQuest again until I had actually done something with Nerd Fitness. I spent the next 18 months leading a double life; during the day I was the marketing guy for Sixthman, while at night I worked on Nerd Fitness--writing articles, connecting with readers, and helping others make better food and exercise decisions. I didn't get much sleep, but I spent most of my days smiling, happy, and freaking wired: I had finally found my path. True growth and adventure had thus far eluded me, but it was getting closer by the day. And that's when my life started to get interesting.

After those 18 months working on Nerd Fitness on nights and weekends, it became clear to me that my destiny and future lay with the website and community I was building. So I made the brutally difficult decision to walk away from a great job and devote myself full-time to helping people live healthier lives. Fortunately, my boss understood completely and asked how he could support my dream. To this day Andy and I remain great friends, and I count him as a trusted advisor. I picked up odd jobs here and there to make ends meet while Nerd Fitness grew--including pushing around heavy concert gear, working beer stands at festivals, painting soundstage floors late into the night--and put a focus on the true life I wanted to build for myself.

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