

CEDRIC DUMONT

DARE TO JUMP

EVERYTHING YOU WANT IS ON THE OTHER SIDE OF FEAR

« Cover: **Pyramids of Giza**

It took six years of negotiations with the Egyptian Government and Air Force to be granted permission for two flights above the pyramid complex. This was a world first and was achieved thanks to our strong team on site. Great teamwork made success possible.

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My very first base jump with my friend and mentor Thierry Van Roy. The jump took place in Saint Vith, from a bridge of 70 metres high along the highway – ideal for a first jump.

It was early morning. I stood 70 metres above the ground on a bridge in Saint Vith, Belgium.

There was not a breath of wind. The sky was grey. There was still some fog in the valley.

Next to me stood my good friend and mentor Thierry Van Roy, perfect company.

I was ready for it.

Ready for my very first base jump.

For over two years, I had prepared myself mentally for this moment. Ever since I started skydiving, I knew that base jumping would be the end goal.

I felt no special pressure to jump. I didn't have to do it and I had no expectations of what it would be like.

That morning in Saint Vith I just felt that jumping was possible.

I had packed my parachute myself just as Thierry had taught me.

Thierry is gone now. Barely five years later, Thierry would fall over an outcrop of rocks in the Swiss mountains.



But I wasn't thinking about the future, that morning on the bridge.

All that mattered to me was the moment itself.

70 metres was not so high and I had faith in myself and in Thierry.

The desire was bigger than the fear.

I was so focused, so completely absorbed by the process, that I didn't pay attention to the environment or to the landscape. I didn't notice the trees or hear the birds.

At a certain moment I let everything go.

I bent my knees slightly.

I pulled back my arms.

I jumped.

Less than half a minute later, I was on the ground. I was euphoric.

I had taken an unbelievably big step and had confirmed something.

The moment that I had thought about for so long had finally arrived and I knew: I can do this!

This photo was taken at a base jump from an antenna near Brussels, a spot where we went every weekend to jump. It was easily accessible and the perfect place for gaining experience. Today, there are cameras everywhere – times are changing ...

FOREWORD

I have a lot to share.

Sometimes it seems that I have so much to say that I can't decide where to start. But don't worry: I will get straight to the point, because my first priority is to be helpful.

I have always been fascinated by high performance. Why do some people take more risks and why are they better at dealing with uncertainty or fear? Many people freeze when the pressure becomes too great, or they panic and make the wrong decisions. But some people perform better under pressure. What makes us behave so differently?

I have read a lot of books about leadership and performance. I learned that most of them are quite similar and often so long-winded that their tips become lost. So most of the time they just sit on the shelf. That is unfortunate.

That will not happen with this book.

What I will tell you is not nuclear physics. My recommendations on how to improve your performance involve three basic principles. You may have already heard of or read about them. However, principles can be difficult to apply in real life.

'You know the path, but you're not walking it.'

We are going to do something about this. *Dare to Jump* is based on my experiences. It presents the best of the tips and techniques that I find most useful, the ones that I use every day. I have learned what works and what doesn't. This book will be like a pocket knife: helpful in many situations.

I've always wondered: how do you become the best version of yourself? Why is it that some people manage to follow their own path and, something extremely important, how do they achieve satisfaction and fulfilment?

There is a very strong link between performance and happiness. Happiness needs to lie at the centre of everything with our achievements orbiting it.

The opposite will not work. If you define yourself by only your performance, titles and achievements, at one point you will become unhappy.

When I take a good look at myself, I can see that everything starts in my head. This means that when I write about high performance, I have to write about thoughts and emotions. Our lives and specifically how we experience our lives, result from how we think, feel and respond to what happens to us. How do our thoughts and emotions determine the choices we make and the course of our lives? The question that fascinates me particularly is: how do we create the lives we dream of?

My point is this: since the way you think determines who you are and who you will become, increasing your awareness of your thoughts and emotions will increase your power to realise your potential. This is how to become the person you want to be, or the person you actually are. This is how you empower yourself.

Self-awareness is the starting point for establishing a positive relationship between performance and satisfaction. Many people perform because they have to, because they are afraid of losing their job, because they need money, or because they have been taught that they must do their best always and everywhere. For me, performing well relates to feeling that I am following my own path and making my dreams come true. It is an emerging process, and not a reaction. Self-awareness is key!

The question is:

Do you know yourself?

The even bigger question is:

Are you brave enough to be yourself?

Why are you performing?

Where do you get satisfaction?

What do you want to do with your life?

It's worth repeating that if you want to drive your performance in a positive way, you have to get to know yourself. You have to know your strengths and your weaknesses and where you want to go. This is *self-leadership*. You can't lead anyone else if you can't lead yourself. If you know yourself, you will be much stronger as a person and you will be able to tackle your fears.

This book will help you to overcome your fear and give you three *power skills* to help you become the best version of yourself. They are: a limitless mindset, a laser focus and the trust edge.

These are not imaginary skills. They are the real skills that I use in an environment where complacency and a lack of focus lead to death.

This book is not meant to encourage you to put yourself in danger. Instead, it shows you that taking calculated and educated risks is the only option if you want to grow as a person and as a leader. *To fly you have to dare to jump.*

1

FROM FEAR TO FLOW

'Fear is the mind-killer. Fear is the little-death
that brings total obliteration. I will face my fear.'

— Frank Herbert, *Dune* —

WHY I DO WHAT I DO

I was not particularly mentally strong when I was a child. I was very sensitive and I still am, although I have learned to keep this in check. Actually, these days I can come over as rather insensitive and behave like a huge control freak.

I was always very curious and inquisitive. I devoured books and had a library full of information about aeroplanes and dangerous animals. I was never interested in dogs. I would have rather had a poisonous black mamba or red-back spider.

My parents gave me every opportunity to try and do things without forcing me. If I really got hooked, I could continue with it. But what I had to do, was to show them that I was driven.

When I was three years old, I stood on skis for the first time. Skiing was my first sport. When I was four, I started skateboarding. My father had brought a skateboard from California and I immediately learned to slalom skate with it.

I was a rather good student, good enough that I could occasionally stay away from school for a few days to travel with my father on business trips, which is how I started playing golf at the age of nine. My father brought me with him to a business meeting at a Floridian resort where there was a golf club. The manager of the pro-shop gave me a club and a golf ball and said, "Here you are, go hit this around for a bit." I had never heard of golf, but I liked it. As a kid, I found it very challenging.

I played competitive golf until I was nineteen. At one point I realised that I was not good enough to be a professional golfer, to be playing on the tours. But I learned a lot from golf, like how to make good choices and sacrifices, cultivating discipline, focus and dedication.

As a teenager I became as disciplined as a professional golfer. While my friends were playing, I was training and hitting balls. My parents would say, "Go outside and play with your friends." I would reply "No, I have to wash my clubs before the tournament and get enough sleep." Even then I saw myself as a nomad. I didn't want to get stuck in or work in any one place. A desire for freedom appeared at a very young age. Joining in my father's business trips had exposed me to an appealing lifestyle revolving around golfing, skiing and surfing, being good at something and travelling a lot. I ended up with that lifestyle, but in a completely different industry.

"Someday I will fly," I said when I was seven years old. At school I told people that I was from another planet and would one day fly away from the playground. My teacher said, "Flying? People can't do that." That was a harsh statement, but she did not kill my dream. I thought: we'll see about that later. She did not realise that what she had said only encouraged me more.

It was clear to me from a young age that if I wanted to make my dreams come true and achieve something, I had to focus on them. Even then I refused to be held back by other people's rules, by obligations that you supposedly have to follow in order to live a good life but that actually lock you in chains.

Is studying and getting a diploma unimportant? No. Knowledge is power, but both are not everything. They provide no certainty of a job, a house, or a family, if that is what a person is looking for. I had two options: I could do what people expected of me or I could do what I really wanted to do.

You do not have to follow the set rules. Life can be different. Nevertheless, I entered university to study law. In parallel, I founded a company. After three years of study, I realised that I would not complete my degree. I did not see myself as a lawyer. Working in a law firm was not my dream. That was my starting point, the moment when it became clear that the choice was up to me. I was ready to live my own life, independent of my parents.

As a twenty-year-old I found a way to buy a Range Rover with a crazy idea. How did I do it? It was my father's idea. He suggested that I sell advertisements on my, not yet purchased, Range Rover. I thought it was impossible and yet I gave it a try. I picked up the phone and called around my network: "Hello, I have a fantastic offer for you." I asked for 50,000 Belgian francs or €1250 per advertisement.

One day I met with a Brussels caterer and spent sixty minutes trying to convince him to take up my offer only for him to conclude: "I am not interested in buying such a tiny advertisement." "Okay. Sorry," I said and got up to leave. He responded, "No, wait! How much for an advert on the roof of your car? Everyone who is on a floor above ground level will see your roof." I swallowed and said, "300,000 Belgian francs," which was about €7500, and the deal was done.

After landing fifteen customers, I was able to buy my car. The Range Rover dealer was very enthusiastic and my car appeared at all possible events. I ended up with an annual turnover of 4 million Belgian francs or about €100,000.

I think that I was a good salesman and entrepreneur. I would not become a lawyer and the Range Rover project was a success, but my dream was to become a pilot. Flying and an adventurous life was becoming my top focus.

I travelled to the United States. I have been a fan of that country since I first travelled there with my father on his business trips. California in particular appealed to me. It's the mecca of technological innovation and of action sports culture. You can surf, skate, skydive, climb, cycle, you name it and I like the energetic, creative mentality of the US, particularly California.

I ended up in Oceanside in southern California, a small surf city on the Pacific Ocean, and headed for a local airport. There was a pilot school to the left of the runway. Clean-cut people walked around, wearing crisp shirts and smart suits. On the other side of the runway was a skydive centre. The people there had tattoos and punk hairstyles. Two worlds came together at that airport, just like they came together in me, because I was into flying and adventurous activities. I stood on the runway asking myself if I would become a pilot or skydiver. Should I turn left or right?

Pilots must adhere to a long list of rules. This leaves a very small margin in which to taste freedom. Skydiving had a much stronger association with freedom for me. It was more exciting than sitting in a machine, following procedures and filling in papers. I tried to imagine my life as a pilot with a major airline. Did I see myself doing that? No.

I turned right and headed for the skydiving school. Its environment appealed to me the most. Alternative, exclusive and very minimalist. With skydiving there is not much hassle: you pull a small parachute pack around your shoulders and you are gone. I liked its simplicity and the ability to move quickly.

Skydiving was for me a summary of everything I wanted: flying, minimalism and risk taking. It was gliding on air, like a surfboard glides on water. It combined freedom and travel with the discipline and focus that I had learned from golf and, like surfing and skateboarding, it was an outdoor activity. I continued to develop new businesses but skydiving became my focus.

After my success with the Range Rover, I founded an agency that organised events. I made a good living from it and, more importantly, the business allowed me to travel and to skydive five months a year. I worked in Belgium and travelled to California and Florida every winter to jump. For me, that balance has always been crucial. I ran the agency for seven years and then sold it for a good price. I was financially comfortable and could invest in new projects.

Many people adjust their consumption patterns to their income level but I never spend much money on luxuries. I try to save because I believe that my success might not continue, that it is just too good to last. The idea that my current business could be my last golden egg is in the back of my mind. Yet, uncertainty in business makes business exciting for me. I wonder what the next year will bring. Maybe I am simply lucky, but my success is also a result of good timing. I meet the right people at the right time.

I am more of an entrepreneur than a top athlete, although I never plan to set up a large company. My definition of being an entrepreneur means that I can organise my job around my life, not the other way around.

I prefer to call myself an adventurepreneur. I lead an exciting life full of adventure. Freedom remains my guideline and yet I am building something. I have never had a wage or a boss because I have created all my jobs myself. I am good at creating jobs that can be perfectly combined with my passions.

And base jumping is my passion, far more than a hobby. In the beginning I did not earn any money from it. That was never my intent. But becoming a base jumper and earning money from my passion for sport was yet to come.

“Don't do it,” said a bearded man. “It's too dangerous.”

I was in a skydiving club in Florida and had just told the bearded man that I wanted to get into base jumping. His answer made my urge to try it even greater. I knew that base jumping was what I had to do.

When I was six years old, I went with my father on a business trip to New York City. He had an appointment at the Windows on the World restaurant, on the top floor of the north tower of the World Trade Center. The restaurant had a ties-only dress code. My father did not wear ties so he had to wear one from the restaurant. But what I remember best were the floor to ceiling windows that gave the restaurant its name. I remember thinking, “Could I fly away from here?” Not could I jump, but could I fly? I think it was the emptiness that attracted me. When I saw images of base jumpers, years later, I knew that I had found it. Base jumping was flying like a bird. It was the ultimate freedom.

Base jumping requires even more engagement than skydiving. When you jump from an aeroplane you carry a main parachute and a reserve. The lower heights of base jumps mean that you only have time to open one parachute so a backup makes no sense. Also, base jumping is often illegal.

On the other hand, although base jumping is higher risk than skydiving, the procedure and equipment requirements and the overall hassles of base jumping are less than for skydiving. You don't need a plane, you don't have to set up a major logistics operation. You just need yourself, a high object and a parachute. Minimum input leads to maximum output. The return from base jumping in terms of emotions and satisfaction is exponentially greater than from skydiving. Nothing has brought me closer to my dream of flying and feeling alive than base jumping.



People sometimes ask me: “Why do you do that?” Yes, why do I jump from buildings? That is like asking a climber why he is venturing up Mount Everest, knowing that one in ten climbers does not return alive. My answer is, “To get to know myself. To go to the deepest parts of myself and to push my limits. To know how far I can go as a human being.”

*‘If you don’t confront your fears,
you will never get to know your deepest self.’*

Remember the movie *Point Break*, with Patrick Swayze and Keanu Reeves? Swayze’s character, Bodhi, is the leader of a group of Californian surfers and bankrobbers. If they are not on the water or waving guns around, they go skydiving. One of Bodhi’s lines is: *‘If you want the ultimate rush, you’ve got to be willing to pay the ultimate price.’* That goes for me too, when I base jump. I experience the ultimate rush and at the same time I accept that I can die. To feel freedom, you have to accept uncertainty. Freedom lies in being bold.

Patrick de Gayardon died on 13 April 1998. Patrick was one of the pioneers of the wingsuit, a suit that lets you fly through the air. It was a wingsuit crash that killed him.

A year later I crawled into a wingsuit myself.

Patrick inspired me. I had met him and had seen pictures of him, and I knew: the wingsuit would be my next thing. His death didn’t change that.

I built my first wingsuit with a friend. We were among the first people to make them. A lot of progress has been made since then. Our suit was a prototype, but I am still here. My aim was not to perform spectacular stunts. My greatest dream remained the same as always: to fly like a bird.

Many base jumpers had accidents in that period because people made wrong decisions or misjudged situations and hit the cliff or the tower from which they jumped. A wingsuit allows you to fly away from the cliff and open your parachute when you are far enough from it.

My first and only jump off a cliff in Belgium. This is “Le rocher de Freyr”, a well-known place for climbers. With a launch point only 55 metres above ground this is not a high jump, but the surroundings are so breathtaking that it is definitely worth it. This jump was also a first in Belgium.



Skysurfing was my first real competitive discipline in the late 1990s. I came from a surf-and-skate environment, so I wanted to fly with some kind of snowboard on my feet.

After a while I started to find it boring. That is why we invented proximity flying. We stayed as close as possible to a rock, we skimmed past it. Only a few other people tried it, precisely because it was so dangerous. But it made my dream come true: I flew like a bird.

“What are you up to these days?” asked the marketing manager of Red Bull. “I’ve seen your name pop up in the news from time to time.” I was at a party in Brussels. It was early 2000, one year after my events agency was sold to a large group. I replied that I flew to every corner of the world to jump as a wingsuit pilot, skysurfer or base jumper.

The man nodded and said that Red Bull was looking for extreme sports athletes to sponsor and invited me to visit Red Bull’s Austrian headquarters. I agreed. The trip to Austria was a fantastic experience. I met for one week with the Red Bull people to find out if I matched the brand. Red Bull athletes don’t only have to be very good at their sport, they also have to have the right personality and be creative. We clicked.

Becoming a Red Bull athlete was a fresh start and the timing was perfect. For the next ten years I did nothing but travel and jump. One day Christopher Reindl, a senior Red Bull Media executive, asked me if I would give a talk to Red Bull Basement University members about dealing with fear. This was a surprise. "Sure, no problem," I replied and thought, "Speak? Me? To a group of people? Impossible!"

Another speaking invitation arrived at the same time from Vincent Herbert, the former CEO of Le Pain Quotidien. He asked me to speak at the headquarters of his bakery chain. He had conquered the world from Brussels and had just moved his headquarters to New York. Despite all my expectations, people responded very enthusiastically to my talks. Red Bull even encouraged me to do more of them. This is how I became a speaker for corporate organisations and the like and began mentoring athletes and business people to perform at their peak level. I had finally found the perfect combination of my sport, my history and who I was as a person and began to travel the world telling my story and inspiring people.

Although my life and career have been full of variety and change, my ideas and values have been consistent. Public speaking is also a form of minimalism, I need no more than the ideas in my head to spread the word with a strong purpose.

What is important to me is that my story and perspectives can help other people who want to change their lives but do not know where to start. I want to give people wings, so they can fly too. I did not plan all of this. I just believe that it's up to me to write my life story.

Mentoring elite athletes and entrepreneurs has given my life a new dimension and I can do it without compromising my freedom. It has taught me a lot. One of the people I mentor is Sergio Herman, one of the greatest chefs in the world. It is amazing how that man inspires me with his passion, creativity and dedication.

When I started mentoring people in leadership positions, I also began a one-year study of high performance psychology. I wanted to frame why some people performed well but others reached much, much higher levels of performance. As ever, this topic remained a fascination. I explained earlier that I was not mentally strong as a child. It was through sport that I became mentally strong. My studies allowed me to explain in concrete terms how I was able to go the extra mile, how I could perform better under pressure and how to better deal with emotions like fear or stress.



Willy Boeykens