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**ARNOLD
SCHWARZENEGGER**

BE USEFUL

SEVEN TOOLS FOR LIFE

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INTRODUCTION

A few months after I left the governor's office in 2011, my world came crashing down around me.

It's not like things had been going so great in the years before that. After winning a landslide reelection with 57 percent of the vote in 2006, then passing environmental policies that inspired the world and making the biggest infrastructure investment in California history—one that will serve California's drivers, students, and farmers long after I'm gone—my final two and a half years in the Capitol, which I spent in the thick of the global financial crisis, felt like being stuck in a clothes dryer with a load of bricks. It was nothing but beating after beating from every direction.

In 2008, when the crash hit, it was as if one day people were starting to lose their homes, and the next day we were in the biggest recession since the Great Depression, all because a bunch of greedy bankers brought the world's financial system to its knees. One day California was celebrating a record budget windfall that allowed me to set up rainy-day funds. The next day the fact that California's budget was too tied to Wall Street left us with a \$20 billion shortfall and dragged us nearly into insolvency. I spent so many late nights locked in a room with the leaders of both parties in the legislature, trying to pull us back from the brink, that it felt like the state might legally recognize us as domestic partners.

But the people didn't want to hear any of that. They just knew that we'd cut their services while we raised their taxes. You can explain that governors don't have control over a global financial disaster—but the truth is, you get credit when the economy's on the way up even though you have very little to do with it, so it's only fair that you get the blame on the way down. It just doesn't feel good.

Don't get me wrong. We had some wins. We blew up the system that had given political parties virtual veto power over the best interests of the

people and turned our politicians into do-nothing losers. We beat the oil companies trying to undo our environmental progress and moved forward even more aggressively—we blanketed the state in solar power and other renewables and made historic investments to lead the world in clean technology.

But I learned in those last years of the 2000s that you can pass some of the most groundbreaking, cutting-edge policies that state government has ever seen and you'll still feel like a total failure when a voter asks why you can't keep them in their home, or a parent asks why you cut their kid's school budget, or workers ask why they've been laid off.

This wasn't my only experience with public failure, obviously. I had dramatic losses in my bodybuilding career, I had movies that went in the toilet, and this wasn't the first time I'd watched my approval ratings fall like the Dow Jones Industrial Average.

But I wasn't even close to rock bottom.

And it wasn't the recession that brought my world crashing down.

I did that to myself.

I blew up my family. No failure has ever felt worse than that.

I won't be rehashing that story here. I've told it before in other places, and other places have told it multiple times. All of you know the story. If you don't, you've heard of Google, and you know how to find it. I've hurt my family enough, and it's been a long road to repair those relationships; I will not turn them into fodder for the gossip machine.

What I will say is that by the end of that year, I had found myself in a place that was both familiar and foreign. I was at the bottom. I'd been here before. But this time, I was face down in the mud, in a dark hole, and I had to decide whether it was worth it to clean myself up and start the slow climb out, or to just give up.

The movie projects I'd been working on since I left the Capitol went up in smoke. The cartoon loosely based on my life I was so excited about? Bye-bye. The media wrote me off—my story would be over after three acts: Bodybuilder, Actor, Governor. Everybody loves a story that ends in tragedy, especially when it is the mighty who have fallen.

If you've ever read anything about me, though, you probably already know that I didn't give up. In fact, I relish the challenge of having to climb

back up. It's the struggle that makes success, when you achieve it, taste so sweet.

My fourth act has been an amalgamation of all three previous acts, combined to make me as useful as I can, with a little something else added in that I didn't expect. I continue my bodybuilding and fitness crusade with a daily fitness email to hundreds of thousands of hungry people and my Arnold Sports Festivals all over the world. My policy work goes on at After-School All-Stars, where we serve one hundred thousand kids in forty cities across the nation; at the USC Schwarzenegger Institute for State and Global Policy, where we advocate for our political reforms all over the United States; and at the Schwarzenegger Climate Initiative, where we sell our environmental policies all over the world. And my entertainment career? That pays for it all. This time, after climbing out of the Hollywood wilderness doing movie after movie, I returned with a television series, which is a new creative medium for me that I've enjoyed enormously trying to master.

I knew I'd continue all those careers. Like I always tell you, I'll be back. But what I never expected was that, as a by-product of all this failure and redemption and reinvention, I'd become a self-help guy.

Suddenly, people were paying me as much as former presidents to show up and give motivational speeches to their clients and their workforces. Other people were taking the videos of those speeches, putting them on YouTube and on social media, and they were going viral. Then my own social media channels started to grow, because anytime I used them to share my wisdom about urgent matters of the day or to offer a calm voice amid the chaos, those videos went even more viral.

People really seemed to benefit from learning from me, the same way I benefited early in my career from reading about and meeting my idols, many of whom you will hear about in this book. So I leaned into that. I started spreading more and more positivity out in the world. And the more I spoke, the more people came up to me in the gym to tell me that I'd gotten them through a dark time. Cancer survivors, people who had lost their jobs, people transitioning into the next phase of their career. I heard from men and women, boys and girls, high school kids and retirees, rich people, poor people, every color, creed, and orientation in the rainbow of humanity.

It was fantastic. It was also surprising. I wasn't sure why this was happening. So I did what I always do when I want to understand something. I stopped and analyzed the situation. What I noticed when I took a step back was that there was so much negativity and pessimism and self-pity out in the world. I also noticed that a lot of people were really miserable, despite the fact that experts keep telling us that things have never been better in the history of human civilization. There has never been less war, less disease, less poverty, less oppression than right now. This is what the data shows. It's objectively true.

But there is another set of data. A more subjective set that is harder to measure but that we can all see and hear when we watch the news, or listen to talk radio, or scroll on social media. So many people talk about feeling irrelevant or invisible or hopeless. Young girls and women talk about not being good enough or pretty enough. Young men talk about being worthless or powerless. Incidents of suicide and rates of addiction are on the rise.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, in particular, we are experiencing an epidemic of these emotions across virtually every segment of our society. Depression and anxiety have increased 25 percent worldwide since 2020. In a study by the Boston University School of Public Health published in September 2020, researchers discovered that the prevalence of depression among US adults had *tripled* between 2018 and the spring of 2020, just a few months into the lockdowns. Whereas before, 75 percent of American adults reported feeling no symptoms of depression, by April 2020 that number had dropped to under 50 percent. That's a huge swing!

But the problem goes beyond COVID-19, because there are groups out there—entire institutions and industries, if we're being honest about it—that are taking advantage of people's misery and selling them nonsense, making them angrier, feeding them lies, and inflaming their grievances. All for profit and political gain. These forces are incentivized to keep people miserable and helpless, and to obscure how simple it should be for them to engage with the tools of usefulness and self-sufficiency that are the primary weapons in the fight against unhappiness and apathy.

That, I think, is why so many millions of people all over the world have flocked to podcasts and Substacks and newsletters like mine in search of answers that make sense to them. Things have gotten so bad out there in the culture that they are seeking out someone they can trust, someone who

refuses to play the bullshit games, someone who tries to be ruthlessly positive when everyone else is being relentlessly negative.

Those are the people I was bumping into at the gym every single day. And I felt a kinship with them because they were expressing a lot of the same emotions I felt after I left office in 2011 and things fell apart. I also noticed that when I offered them advice and encouragement, when I tried to inspire and reassure them and pump them up, I was pulling from a very familiar tool kit.

It was the tool kit that I'd developed over the course of sixty years and followed successfully on my journey through the previous three acts of my life. It was the very same one I reached for more than a decade ago now, when I hit bottom and decided to dig myself out of the hole. This tool kit is not revolutionary. If anything, it's timeless. These tools have always worked. They always will work. I think of them like elements of a blueprint or a road map to a happy, successful, useful life—whatever that means for you.

They involve knowing where you want to go and how you're going to get there, as well as having the willingness to do the work and the ability to communicate to the people you care about that the journey you want to bring them on is worth the effort. They include the capacity to shift gears when the journey hits a roadblock, and the ability to keep an open mind and learn from your surroundings to find new ways through. And most important of all, once you get where you're trying to go, they demand that you acknowledge all the help you had along the way and that you give back accordingly.

This book is called *Be Useful* because that is the best piece of advice my father ever gave me. It has stuck in my brain and never left, and my hope is that the advice I am offering you in the pages to follow will do the same thing. Being useful was also the motivating force behind all my decisions, and the organizing force around the tools I used to make them. Being a bodybuilding champion, being a millionaire leading man, being a public servant—those were my goals, but they were not what motivated me.

For a number of years, my father didn't agree with my version of what it means to be useful, and I might not agree with your version, when it comes down to it. But that is not the purpose of good advice. It's not to tell you what to build, it's to show you how to build and why it matters. My father

passed away at the same age I was when I brought my world crashing down on me. I never had the chance to ask him what I should do, but I have a good idea what he would tell me: “Be useful, Arnold.”

I wrote this book to honor those words and pay forward his advice. I wrote it in appreciation for the years I’ve had that he didn’t, which I’ve used to make amends, to climb back from the bottom, and to build the fourth act of my life. I wrote this book because I believe that anyone can benefit from the tools I’ve used through every phase of my life, and that all of us need a reliable road map for the kind of life we’ve always wanted to live.

But most of all, I wrote it because everybody needs to be useful.

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