

# MAKE TODAY MATTER

REVIEWED BY DIARMUID ROONEY, MPsych, MTS, DSocAdmin

When reading any of Chris Lowney's books, one often is struck by the depth of his spirituality and how he is a leader who has embraced formation as a way of life.<sup>1</sup> These observations are writ large in his most recent publication, *Make Today Matter: 10 Habits for a Better Life (and World)*.

Many readers may know that Lowney was in formation as a Jesuit seminarian before transitioning very successfully to the world of big business. Despite this "career" change, one can hear his Ignatian spirituality on virtually every page of this simple and profound book. Even the structure of each chapter reads like a well-crafted Jesuit homily: setting the theme; offering a beautiful, pithy story, often from his personal experience and full of meaning; then bringing it home with the moral or principle he wishes to convey. These principles are what Lowney calls habits, and from the outset he is emphatic that if we "pay more attention, every day; we'll acquire habits that will help us pursue what matters."<sup>2</sup>

Lowney's Habit No. 1 is "Point out the way." Leadership, he explains, is the ability to point out a way, direction or goal and to influence others toward it. Having an effect on others is something each of us is doing every day, in every encounter, and Lowney invites us to become actively aware of it so that the process of influencing by our presence, actions and words impacts those around us — and the world — in a positive way.

Another habit, "Bring big heart every day," emphasizes truly "showing up," making the most of every opportunity, intentionally recognizing and developing our gifts as fully as we can and using those gifts for the benefit of all. Lowney does not shy away from how countercultural the concept has become in our present era. He clearly shows his belief that we are on this planet to be here for

each other. For him, this is associated with serving and making manifest God's love in the world.

In the chapter he calls "Don't Win the Race: Contribute to the (Human) Race," Lowney tells humorous stories of humiliation as the path to humility. He does not deny the tension between competition and sharing, but asks, what is the benefit of winning unless it changes things for the better?

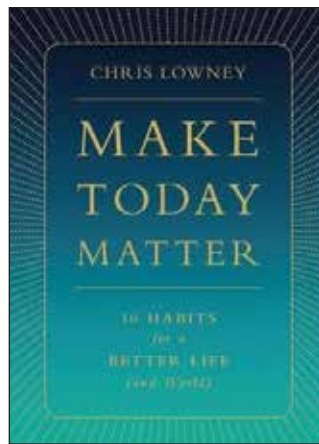
"A meaningful life entails doing your best with your talent, not getting the best of another person," he writes. "Forgetting that difference is a first step toward a bitter life."

One unique aspect of *Make Today Matter* is that each chapter ends with excellent formation and reflection questions. For example, Lowney asks, "When are you most likely to feel as if you're in competition with others rather than in partnership with them? In what ways do you contribute to some cause greater than yourself

and your interests?" Questions like this make the book a very useful companion, engaging us in continually reflecting on what it means to live out our personal, and organizational, mission and values.

Lowney lets the book's 10 habits emerge through inspiring stories of ordinary people who are making each day count in extraordinary ways, whether in a high school classroom, a hospital emergency room, one of the planet's largest garbage dumps or a sprawling, impoverished shantytown in Venezuela. All are worth reading and reflecting on. So is answering the evocative questions posed at the end of each chapter.

Many of us have heard the story he tells to illustrate the "Give Away Your Sneakers" habit: that of a physician who takes off his shoes and gives them to a shoeless, homeless patient so the man can walk in the snow to the nearest shelter. These "sacred stories" are more than just inspirational



**MAKE TODAY MATTER:  
10 HABITS FOR A BETTER LIFE  
(AND WORLD)**

BY CHRIS LOWNEY  
Loyola Press, \$17.95  
120 pages

niceties, they are meant to compel us to action. Namely, we are urged to reach out to the most poor and vulnerable daily, “don’t judge others, just act.” Lowney illustrates this idea with the simple but profound example of St. Robert Bellarmine, SJ, the Italian theologian and cardinal. Beggars would often call at his episcopal residence, and he always gave whatever he could, including some of his own furniture. Friends chided him, calling him naïve and saying he was being duped by charlatans, to which Bellarmine replied that he would rather be taken advantage of a hundred times than send away one needy person.

How loudly this calls to us today in our ministries.

Lowney insists that it’s one thing to know what matters in life, quite another thing to do what matters, day in and day out, despite the confusing, unpredictable and frustrating environments in which we all live and work. In the author’s words, “this book is about seizing today’s opportunity, and rising to the occasion of every single day.” To that end, he describes a powerful practice that, for Lowney, ties the 10 habits together and that anyone could begin implementing tomorrow as a first step along the path to making every day matter. It comes straight out of his Jesuit formation and is a centuries-old practice often referred to as the Examen. It especially incorporates the habit of gratitude, and taking time to listen to the still, small voice of our heart, combined with perseverance.

Lowney explains his adaptation of this practice for contemporary life, and invites all of us to simply set aside two 5-minute segments of our day to engage in a “mental or spiritual pit stop.” He offers straightforward guidelines in which intentionality is the key, combined with real silence: Step back from the day’s chaos, recall, if you are so inclined, that you are in the presence of God (however you understand that). Pray for wisdom and really al-

low yourself to practice the feeling of gratitude. Then revisit your day (or part thereof) and pay attention to how God/Spirit may have been present in the events and conversations. Be honest with yourself, acknowledging where you were living out your values, or not. Finish the practice with hopeful resolution for the future.

By cultivating this practice, you are allowing space to intentionally revisit your attitudes and habits. For Lowney, this enables, along with grace, greater authorship of your life’s journey. Most of all, it makes today matter, not just for you but for all of us.<sup>3</sup>

**DIARMUID ROONEY** is senior director, ministry formation, the Catholic Health Association, St. Louis.

#### NOTES

1. Chris Lowney was once a Jesuit seminarian, which left a major impact on his life’s journey. In his later professional career he served as a managing director of J.P. Morgan & Co. He currently chairs the board of Catholic Health Initiatives, one of the nation’s largest health care/hospital systems, and devotes his time to writing, public speaking and philanthropy. He co-founded Contemplative Leaders in Action, an emerging leader formation program now active in a half-dozen cities; and he founded Pilgrimage for Our Children’s Future, which supports education and health care projects among severely impoverished, marginalized communities. To learn more, visit <https://pocf.org>. All the proceeds from *Make Today Matter* are being donated to this organization.
2. Chris Lowney, *Make Today Matter: 10 Habits for a Better Life (and World)* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2018), 6.
3. Visit this Ignatian Spirituality website where Chris Lowney introduces each *Make Today Matter* habit in a short video, and different bloggers write about each habit, as well. [www.ignatianspirituality.com/27319/make-today-matter-blog-hop](http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/27319/make-today-matter-blog-hop).

JOURNAL OF THE CATHOLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES

[www.chausa.org](http://www.chausa.org)

# HEALTH PROGRESS®

---

Reprinted from *Health Progress*, September - October 2018  
Copyright © 2018 by The Catholic Health Association of the United States

---