

Bill
Zanker
never
wants



He's got Tony Robbins! He's got Donald Trump!
And, man, has he got a positive outlook! Meet the founder
of the Learning Annex, who might be having more
fun than anyone else in business today

By **Josh Dean** Photograph by Nathaniel Welch



to
come
down



Bill Zanker knows what you're thinking.

He knows that you paid \$99 or \$149 or, if you absolutely had to have the VIP package, \$499 to come here, to the Broward County Convention Center, in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, to figure out how to get rich.

By signing up for this two-day installment of the Learning Annex Real Estate & Wealth Expo, you have told him that you want a change. You are here to make contacts, to be taught how to lower your tax burden, to study the art of flipping houses, to unravel the mystery of federal grant programs, or most probably just to learn how to make a fortune from real estate like all the guys on the cardboard cutouts posted around the lobby. If Chris “Free Money” Johnson can do it, so can you. So here you are, at 7:50 a.m. on a sunny Saturday, standing in a long line next to some potted palms while your friends are Saran-wrapping sandwiches for the beach.

At 8 a.m., a single door to the conven-

tion center’s main exhibition hall swings open, and the opening guitar fuzz of Stephenwolf’s “Born to Be Wild” blasts into the lobby. Inside, attractive men and women in tight shorts and tighter shirts imprinted with “FUN” in bold red letters form a high-fiving phalanx through which all seminar attendees must pass. Every Learning Annex worker, every usher and guard and Ambassador of Fun (as these tight-shirted people are known) stands along the center aisle, high-fiving patrons while dancing to Gwen Stefani and the Black Eyed Peas.

And there is Zanker, off to the side, circling a pillar like a dog that’s about to lie down. He dances awkwardly but unselfconsciously, almost in time with the song, then

bobs into the line of patrons, delivering high-fives with great verve. Zanker is founder and president of the Learning Annex and the ringmaster of this circus. “We change people’s attitudes,” the 53-year-old says as he points to a man about to pass through the door. “Look at this guy. Watch his face.” The man in question looks like someone who is about to enter a seminar, which is to say his face is absent of expression. A few high-fives later, he’s practically giggling. Up onstage, some of the more comely Ambassadors of Fun have reassembled and are gyrating wildly along with members of the audience and a guy wearing a giant Donald Trump bobblehead that seems perpetually on the verge of tumbling off. There are balloons

MIKE FOX/ZUMA

Who Wants To Get Rich?

Those people on the left aren't just fun—they're Ambassadors of Fun. The people they work so hard to keep excited, like those below, have numbered as many as 70,000 for a single Learning Annex Real Estate & Wealth Expo.



and streamers and ThunderStix, all of them in the red and white colors of the Learning Annex. Six jumbo screens display inspirational sports moments carefully targeted to local tastes—the Miami Heat wins the NBA championship! The Florida Marlins win the World Series!—intercut with close-ups of crisp, green \$100 bills.

Zanker's ushers treat the room like a game of Tetris, filling it from the front with VIPs and working backward in sections, untaping a row only once the one in front of it has been completely filled. Because the morning is likely to be a little slow, more or less half of the room has been revealed. Thousands of additional seats are hidden behind screens, to be released in sections as the crowds swell. Zanker absolutely hates empty seats.

As the crowd settles in, a sprite of a cheerleader takes the stage and asks the crowd to stand. Roxy Zendejas is an actress/model whose job is to motivate and herd the Am-

bassadors of Fun and to teach the crowd the Money Dance. It's a simple dance, owing much to the hokey-pokey. There are jigged limbs, forward and backward steps, and moderate hip gyrations, as well as a simple, sing-along chorus set to an '80s pop song: "I want money. Lots and lots of money..."

"It's a subliminal thing, to get you thinking about money," says Zanker, who practically bursts with glee at the sight of 5,000 people doing his silly dance. "We're reprogramming people."

It's 8:27 a.m. Who's ready to talk taxes?

"THIS IS A small show," says Zanker. "The big shows are five times this. Five times *everything*." His Real Estate & Wealth Expo drew 70,000 people in San Francisco; 50,000 turned out in Toronto. This weekend, in Fort Lauderdale—in the dog days of June—he'll do 27,000, which is just fine with him. Zanker is at this moment bounc-

ing on a mini-trampoline in the green room, a small lounge where speakers can relax and nosh on almonds and raspberries in the vast area behind the main stage where the Expo's nerve center is located. The trampoline is something he picked up from perhaps his favorite human, Tony Robbins, who has been known to bounce up and down for up to three hours before a speech, taking calls and carrying on conversations. It is, in Zanker's estimation, impossible to be grumpy or stressed or to possess negative thoughts of any kind while bouncing on a trampoline.

Of course, he also bounces because he is incapable of sitting still. To shadow Zanker is to shed pounds. His normal pace is that of an Olympic racewalker, and he is prone to sudden zigs and zags; if a question occurs to him—I wonder what's going on up in the Grand Floridian Ballroom?—he will immediately set out to find an answer. It is a little like I imagine it would be to tag along

with a person's id. When not pogoing in the green room, he is pacing or stretching or rocking back and forth on a bizarre piece of exercise equipment that involves a pelvic thrust and is most likely marketed through a late-night infomercial, which happens to be a medium that Zanker loves.

Though other men might see infomercials as downmarket, Zanker sees them as effective, particularly when you're marketing the idea of changing someone's life. (If you're up at 4 a.m. watching infomercials, chances are you could use a life change.) Infomercials are just one of the many ways in which he markets his seminars—along with newspaper and TV ads and, especially, billboards. (“Nobody in education uses billboards! We love billboards!”) Later this afternoon, he will seal a deal with one of his marquee speakers, George Foreman, to market a book and tape package via infomercial. The concept will be based on Foreman's charming but rather extemporaneous Wealth Expo speeches—“Getting back in the ring” is Zanker's sell line for the product, and the message, as best I can figure it, is “everyone falls down—so go ahead and get the hell back up.”

These real estate and wealth seminars—featuring upward of 20 speakers and toplined by Foreman and Robbins and Donald Trump—have driven the Learning Annex's explosive growth over the past two years. Zanker is constantly adding dates and cities, and he will soon offer one- and two-day mini-versions in up to 100 smaller markets, filling up hotel ballrooms, testing new tour concepts—such as a pure investment show, absent the real estate component—and exposing future stars of the main stage. It matters little to him if a trend should flag. Within months of Fort Lauderdale, real estate will have gone sour, so Zanker simply cuts back on the real estate, rebrands the tour as “Wealth,” and amps up the investment content. He wants to spin off new seminar tours, as well as TV shows and books. A publishing imprint arrives soon.

This is a very different Learning Annex from the one I know back in New York, the sort of perpetual graduate school that hawks its astoundingly broad array of continuing education classes via catalogs found on half the street corners in Manhattan. Ask a New Yorker what comes to mind when he hears the words *Learning Annex*, and I'll bet you he says it's those colorful

plastic boxes full of catalogs. Maybe, on a whim or as a way to meet women, he even signed up for “Introduction to Jewelry Making” or “In-line Skating With Joel Rappelfeld.” That original core business isn't so much a core anymore, but Zanker says it's crucial. He likes to audition his speakers through the classes, which are increasingly business- and self-help-related, and which he refers to as the company's R&D.

Zanker got the idea for the Expos when Samantha Del Canto, then his celebrity talent booker and now his very well-paid Person in Charge of Expo Talent (there are no actual titles at the company), noticed that the real estate classes were selling out every time. “So we blew that up,” he says. “The other thing we do is add celebrity.” In business classes, that could mean Russell Simmons or Master P on the music business. For real estate and wealth, it's the likes of Foreman and Robbins and, most of all, Donald Trump, Zanker's keynote

speaker. Zanker is paying the Donald \$1.5 million per one-hour speech—a figure that, according to a giant press release that has been blown up into a poster and affixed to the back of the stage in Fort Lauderdale, is the “largest speaking fee in the world.”

“Nobody's made adult education sexy,” Zanker said to me before we left for Florida. We were in his New York office, a decidedly unsexy place with scuffed, lime-colored walls, and he was standing on an exercise device called a core stabilizer. He was wearing a purple shadow-striped shirt with green enamel cuff links and black Prada shoes, and looked quite different than he had in even fairly recent press shots; he'd lost weight and had a more stylish haircut—it seemed he'd taken the whole Changing Your Life thing to heart. “You think of adult education, who do you think of?” he asked me. “The Learning Annex.”

Since Zanker bought the company back from his former partner, in 2002, sales have increased from \$5 million a year to \$107 million a year. In 2005, revenue was \$36.5 million. “Right now I'm trying to digest,” Zanker said, but in 2008 he expects sales to jump again, to \$300 million, and “by 2010 we'll be a billion-dollar company.” To drive his hy-

perambitious growth, Zanker two years ago sold a 40 percent stake to a private equity group known as Apax, and he is targeting seminar companies for acquisition. Zanker says the Changing Your Life business is worth \$18 billion a year, and he plans to own it. He describes it, in typical hyperbole, as “probably the biggest industry in the world.”

“Everybody wants to change something,” he said, “and we're right here—waiting at you. Here we are!”

He recently inked a deal to do tours for the stars of *The Apprentice* and *Survivor* and is already prepping a second major seminar tour. “The working title is ‘Attracting Wealth,’” he told me. “How to Attract Wealth.”

“Which is different from—” I began.

He finished my sentence: “Getting rich. It's different. It's a different mindset.”

An intellectual might suffer a stroke attempting to parse the marketing lingo of

To shadow Zanker is to shed pounds. His normal pace is that of an Olympic racewalker, and he is prone

Zanker and his speakers. They wander around that foggy land of business best-sellers, in which entire chapters (or speeches) are built on obvious statements like “don't take no for an answer.” Or, you know, “get back in the ring.”

At about this moment in our first meeting, Heather Moore came into Zanker's office. Like everyone at the Learning Annex, Moore wears various hats. She's ostensibly the director of public relations and marketing, but she also designs many of its ads and buys millions of dollars of local advertising per year.

She laid a sheet of paper on Zanker's desk; it was the design for a billboard—simple and featuring bold red letters—that would promote the Fort Lauderdale show.

“Do you like the headline?” she asked. It read: “Don't miss this life changing event!”

“It's OK,” Zanker answered.

“Got something better?” she asked.

Zanker thought for the briefest of seconds. “Yeah,” he said. “Change your life.”

EACH OF THE 21 speakers at the Fort Lauderdale Expo offers some sort of promise for personal betterment—sometimes vague and

self-helpy but often very, very specific, as in “Earn \$5,000–\$10,000 a Month With Tax Lien Certificates,” taught by Ed Broderick three times over the course of the weekend.

“Not only are we giving you the tools to make millions; we are giving you the techniques to attract that abundance,” says Zanker. The latter is the role of Tony Robbins and of Jack Canfield, a star of *The Secret* and co-author of *Chicken Soup for the Soul*. (Canfield will actually appear this weekend via taped speech and, in a mind-boggling bit of meta mind power, will have the entire ballroom crowd telling their palm lines to grow longer by chanting “grow longer” at them.) Paula White, the popular Christian televangelist, is included to clear your conscience. Indubitably one of America’s sexiest church leaders, she’s so perfectly put together that her image in the catalog looks like a computer rendering. White teaches “that faith and finance are interrelated” in a lecture titled “Why God Wants You To Be Wealthy.”

As Day One gets under way—a Floridian named Robert Shemin has the honor; he’s

As Zanker’s crew stages its 22nd Expo, the logistical process of putting on a show has become seamless. Zanker, though, is constantly fine-tuning the elements. In Fort Lauderdale he is testing a bar code system written by his ace programmer, a Buddhist surfer from Santa Cruz, California. Each attendee will be tracked over the weekend, his badge scanned every time he enters and exits a particular seminar or purchases a DVD package. Zanker will know who’s watching what, and when, precisely. He likens the idea to cookies, which track your Internet usage: “I’m building a cookie system for your weekend. I know who customers are, when they bought tickets—say, 3 a.m. during an infomercial—who they like—Tony, Raymond Aaron, etc.” Possessing this intelligence, he says, “we can then talk to you better in the future.”

With the exception of Trump, Foreman, White, and Robbins, all of the main-stage speakers also do breakout sessions in adjacent ballrooms. At big shows, they might be on the hook for up to six over the two days.

plains. “If you don’t get in, come back.”

Zanker also likes his rooms icy cold. Heat makes crowds lethargic, and Zanker hates lethargy. The Broward County Convention Center was warmer than he liked Friday, so he had Javer harass the management until it was sufficiently chilly. By Saturday, it’s frigid. Employees hand out candy to people in line, and bowls of Jolly Ranchers and Tootsie Rolls sit at the entrance to every room on the premises. Flats of candy are loaded in along with the amps and jumbo screens and loudspeakers.

“How many pounds of candy, Harry?” Zanker asks.

“Thousands of pounds,” Javer answers.

“Every time we give you a piece of candy, we’re connecting,” Zanker says.

“It’s connection,” Javer says.

The Learning Annex is far from the only company staging self-empowerment or personal-betterment seminars. The difference, says Zanker, is that “nobody’s doing it on the scale we are. It takes big *cojones* to do what we do.” *Cojones* and a

thick wallet—each show costs from \$3 million to \$5 million, including \$500,000 to \$2 million in advertising, which pays for a lot of billboards. Zanker says that even a small show like Fort Lauderdale’s is profitable, just less so than a mega

Expo like Los Angeles’s, which grosses more than \$20 million. And the Learning Annex has figured out how to extend those profit streams, coming back to its customers later by targeting their specific interests. If foreclosure lectures, say, are a big hit, the Learning Annex will bring smaller, one-off seminars back to the city later.

“We’re the largest consumer show in the world,” Zanker says, tossing out another of his grand boasts. “The knowledge we have is huge. We do 8,000 shows a year in the U.S. and Canada.”

Wait a second—8,000? Can I see your math?

“Every time somebody speaks for us, it’s a show,” he says, meaning that he counts every Learning Annex class. “What is a show? It’s an experience.”

to sudden zigs and zags. It’s a little like I imagine it would be to tag along with a person’s id.

here to help the audience understand “the difference between deals and duds”—Zanker takes me for a spin around the Expo along with his executive producer, Harry Javer. Javer is a thin man of few words; his expression rarely changes from one of stoic resolve. He prefers dark shirts and is always seen wearing a headset. I ran into him almost everywhere I went on the premises, causing me to wonder if he had somehow acquired the ability to teleport. “It’s his show, good and bad,” says Zanker. “Everybody goes to Harry.” Javer oversees some 200 employees and 10 tractor-trailers’ worth of equipment, including 100,000 pounds of promotional product, 84 speakers, 700 linear feet of hard-wall, and more than 200 lights. Is the air conditioning sluggish? Ask Harry. Need more chairs? Harry’s your man.

Zanker’s *modus operandi* is to flit in and out of rooms, motivating workers or pumping up patrons; he doesn’t wear a headset. “I had one once and went a little crazy,” he admits.

“Some people should not have this privilege,” Harry says drily.

It’s a lot of work for a weekend, but their relationship with the Annex is symbiotic. Their lectures sprinkle nuggets of actionable information—enough so that you do, indeed, take away, say, a number of tips on how to get government grants from Chris “Free Money” Johnson, but not so much that you wouldn’t seriously consider picking up his book and DVD package, available for \$700. (Packages can range up to \$5,000 for some speakers, who spend the final 15 minutes or so of their allotted time on the main stage hawking said goods. All fees are, of course, shared with the Learning Annex.)

Nearly every time I checked out a breakout room, it was packed—though exactly how packed is determined by Javer, acting as Zanker’s brain. Zanker wants seminar attendees to feel that it’s difficult to get into a room. He likes to see long, snaking lines outside the doors. His room attendants are to wait until the last possible minute to open doors, and then customers are seated from front to back; rows are taped off until needed. “We’re keeping that idea of a hot restaurant,” Zanker ex-

AS I SAID, this isn’t the first time Bill Zanker has owned the Learning Annex. He was in his late twenties and had enrolled himself in film school—having returned from 10 years of living in Israel, where he served in the

military, earned himself a passport, and started a real estate business—when his dad called him to lunch and said, “Get a job. I’m not paying for this anymore.” Score one for tough love. “And I like school,” Zanker explains. “I would go to school for the rest of my life.” That gave him an idea: The original Learning Annex would be a film school. He asked his former teachers if they would moonlight. His girlfriend at the time was studying pottery, so he invited her teacher to teach a class, too.

This was 1980. Zanker took \$5,000, printed up some catalogs, and ran the whole thing out of his apartment on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. He added classes whenever an idea struck him—gardening, guitars, tantric sex—and ran into a young and mostly unknown guy named Tony Robbins, who signed up to teach fire-walking. “I picked him,” Zanker says. “I’m a self-help junkie. I read self-help books, even as a kid. I just love them.”

Robbins at the time was just starting to develop a name. “That’s what we do at the Learning Annex,” Zanker says. “We get them before they become famous.” Deepak Chopra gave his first talk for the Learning Annex in front of 36 people.

Robbins, Chopra, psychic Sylvia Browne—Is Bill Zanker some sort of self-help talent scouting savant? He found Chopra by browsing in a bookstore. “A lot of the books in the self-help section, they’re not getting widely read,” he says. “I can’t help it. I go right to them. I’ll take the name down and call the office.”

Do people ever say no?

“No is just the beginning of yes.”

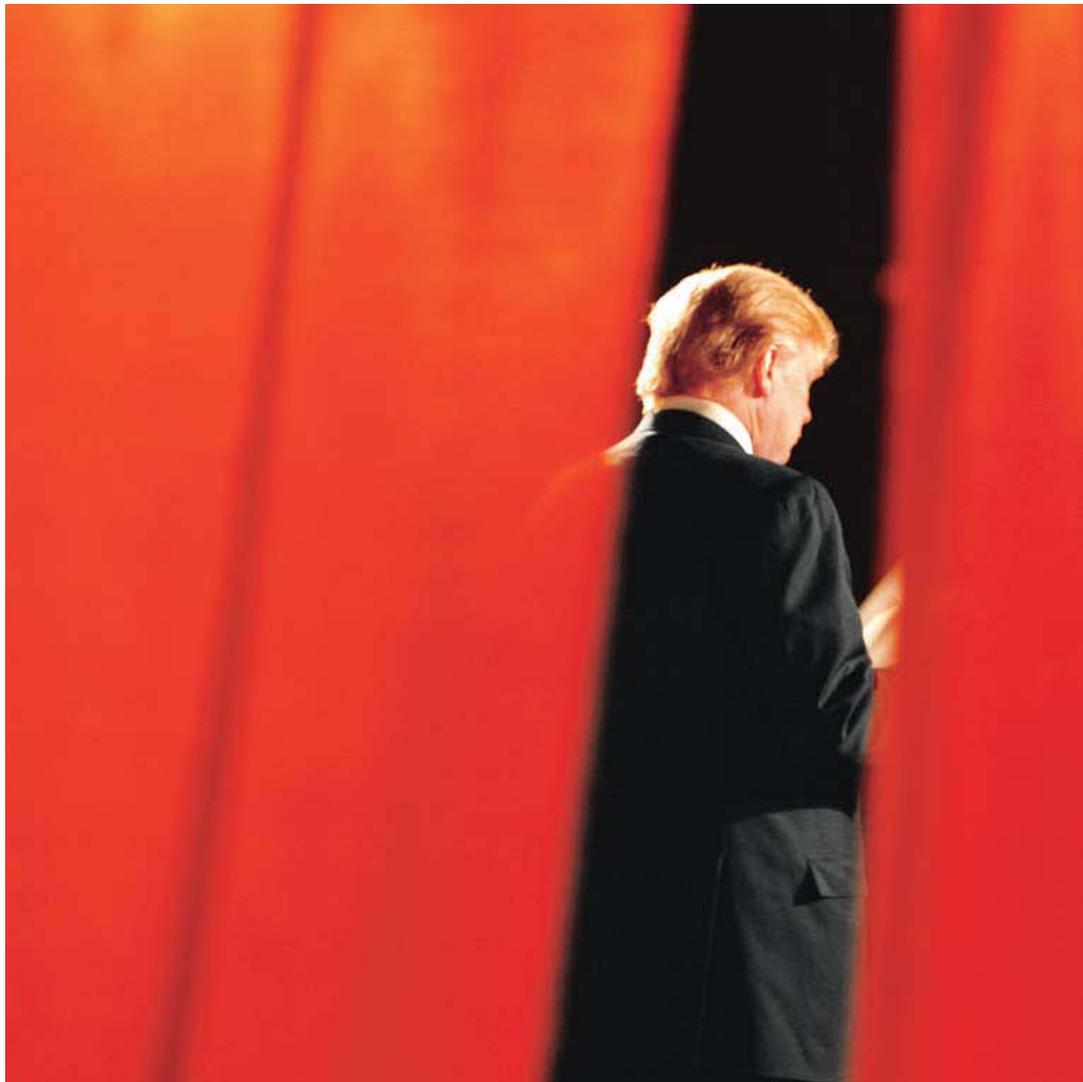
You don’t accept a no?

“Never take no. We teach people to never take no for an answer.”

The first time around, Zanker owned the Learning Annex for 11 years. He says he sold it because he was “ready for a change.” That may be true, but it’s also true that he expanded too fast, and the company went bankrupt despite annual revenue of \$8 million to \$10

The Catalyst

Donald Trump is the reason the Learning Annex has moved from hotel ballrooms to convention centers. If he does say so himself.



million. He sold it to his San Francisco business partner, Stephen Seligman.

For the next 10 years, Zanker dabbled in other entrepreneurial ventures, most prominent among them the Great American Backrub, which New Yorkers might remember as a short-lived storefront operation offering bargain back rubs. At its peak, GAB had 18 stores, but Zanker’s plan for muscle-rubbing domination was foiled by a lack of quality masseurs willing to work for the low wages that made McBackrubs possible, and by Asian-owned nail salons that practically gave the things away.

Eventually, after some fits and starts

and travels with his wife and three children—he started an online learning venture called Brainfuel, sold it to Tony Robbins for \$9 million, and took his family on a three-year walkabout—Zanker found himself wondering about the old company. He’d never really stopped talking to Seligman, and after September 11, his old partner was getting antsy. “He called me up and said, ‘If you’re not working, can you pop in and help me out?’” Zanker recalls. “So I started going into the office, and I was jazzed again. I remembered the energy, the fun...and then I offered to buy it. And he didn’t want to sell, so I overpaid to buy it back. In

MIKE FOX/ZUMA

even talk about. But that's part of his motivation—he creates goals for himself that are way above the average person. It doesn't seem so daunting anymore."

"I THINK WHAT Tony is, he pushes you past your limitations, and that's what we look for," Zanker is saying. "Because everyone thinks, This is what I can do. And Tony says, 'No, you can do more'—and if you buy into that, what a great thing to get out of the Learning Annex. The Learning Annex went from \$5 million to \$107 million in less than four years. You can't do that if you have limitations."

If it isn't already obvious, Zanker is positively crazy for Tony Robbins. He listens to tapes of Robbins on his drive to his train station in Westchester County and in 2006 attended a six-day "Date With Destiny" seminar, which featured 14 hours of Tony Robbins per day. He credits Robbins with—all together now—Changing His Life. Making him a better husband and father, helping him lose weight, even making possible the deal with Donald Trump, without which there would be no Expos.

As Zanker tells the story, he rang up the Donald's office and got the secretary, who refused to put him through. When she asked what business he had with Mr. Trump, Zanker replied that he wanted to book him as a speaker and was willing to pay \$10,000. Not interested, she said. "She didn't even bother to ask him," Zanker recalls. So he called back and upped his offer to \$50,000. When he told me this story he was sitting on a chair in his office, but as the story's momentum built he hopped up onto the seat and assumed a squatting po-

aid himself. He said, 'How many people can you get?' I said 500 or 1,000." Not enough for Trump. "He said, 'You promise me 10,000, and I'll do the deal.' He never once mentioned the money." The deal that was eventually signed gives Trump \$30 million for 20 appearances.

I promised Zanker that if I did one thing at the Florida Expo, I would watch Robbins perform. He says it is the moment in the Expo—the end of Day One—when people go from hoping they will become rich to *knowing* it's going to happen.

"He's America's success coach!" says the emcee, and then Zanker sprints onstage and howls his introduction in front of a giant image of Robbins's head. "There has never been a speaker like Tony Robbins. He changes lives! He changed my life!"

Out comes Robbins, full throttle, his black baggy pants billowing in front of AC units that blast the stage. He is a large man, but his presence is positively massive. "I'm not a big believer in positive thinking," he says. "I do believe in energy."

In print, most of what Robbins says comes off as hokey:

The ultimate resource is human emotions. It's not resources; it's resourcefulness.

Whatever your limits are, they're self-imposed. They're not physiological; they're not financial.

I want to scoff at the guy, but I have to say I find it uplifting. So many of Robbins's ideas are obvious—*Momentum is the key to everything; Depressed people get more depressed; happy people get more happy*—but when they are delivered by him via his Jedi mind tricks, they make you feel better.

"The most important skill is influence. The person you most need to influence is yourself," he continues, moving on to the idea that will most stick with me. "Emotion is the secret, but emotion is created by motion. The more you move, the more alive you are." Robbins's show is built around audience participation, and his way of illustrating this last point is to have audience members jump up and down, shaking limbs and screaming at the top of their lungs. It is impossible to hold on to negativity after doing this; just try it. I think back to the trampoline.

Robbins calls this the "peak state"—on an emotional scale of one to 10, the peak state is in the eight to 10 range—and he urges us to think of triggers that will recall this state. When you're feeling troubled or need a little boost, use a trigger. Zanker

"I just went crazy," Zanker says. "I offered \$1 million. Not three minutes later my cell rings. It's Donald."

hindsight it was cheap, but I overpaid just because I wanted it."

Seligman, who maintains a small stake, says the price was fair and that, anyway, Zanker had developed a vision that couldn't be denied. He says Zanker was talking about a billion-dollar business long before he hit \$100 million. "When he first told me that, it seemed pie-in-the-sky," Seligman says. "It seemed like a daunting goal to

sition. Zanker offered \$150,000, at which point the secretary said—still having yet to relay any of these opportunities to her boss—"Donald makes a lot of money. Make him a reasonable offer."

"I just went crazy," Zanker says. "I took a walk, went to the bathroom, and offered \$1 million." Robbins, he says, gave him the strength to do something so bold. "Not three minutes later my cell rings. It's Don-

says his is to hit his chest. Before he called Trump's secretary to offer the \$1 million, he says, "I went to the bathroom, changed my state, and called back."

"If you only did one thing," screams Robbins, "do everything at state 8, 9, 10—you will change your life."

Wealth, my friends, is a feeling. It's not a dollar amount.

"I'm a passionate guy; I love to see people glowing," Robbins tells me backstage,

"Money" and accompanied by several lovely Ambassadors pounding ThunderStix, Trump emerges. Trump will later brag that he doesn't prepare for these speeches; he reads from a single page of hastily scrawled notes, covering a range of subjects, from his personal lows ("1990; I'll never forget it. I had 99 banks wanting to just kick my ass") to his love of revenge ("Get even, but not for satisfaction, though that's nice. Because people leave you alone"). He also tells the

secrets of *The Secret*. In October, he shared authorship with Donald Trump on a book bearing the measured title *Think Big and Kick Ass (in Business and Life)*. As of November, 400,000 copies were in print.

What's more, he feels as though he has yet to tap online learning—and he has Tony Robbins in his corner.

I tell him that Robbins told me to ask how he has changed.

"Good question," Zanker says. "I've con-

In October, Zanker shared authorship with Trump on a book with the measured title *Think Big and Kick Ass*. As of November, 400,000 copies were in print.

towel sweat off his face. And how does he fit into this celebration of wealth? "I want to take them from 'I want to get rich' to 'I want an extraordinary life.'"

"Tonight is designed to trigger them, to inspire them to change. This is my mission."

And Bill Zanker—has Robbins's mojo worked on him?

Robbins flashes a big, toothy, billion-dollar smile.

"He's radically different than he used to be—you should ask him."

IF TONY ROBBINS IS the emotional center of the Expo, then Donald Trump is its exuberant encore. In Fort Lauderdale, he's scheduled to go on at 6 p.m. on Day Two, but the reality is that the Donald takes the mike whenever he feels like it. He arrives at the Convention Center in the late afternoon and spends some time visiting backstage, posing for photos with the Ambassadors of Fun. Meanwhile, the jumbo screens begin to flash "Trump is in THE HOUSE!!!" (their caps, not mine), and the crowd actually seems to buzz. At 7 p.m., Zanker chokes down some water, musters the last remnants of his voice, and dashes onstage for the capstone of his weekend: "I gotta tell you, the next speaker is my hero," he yells. "He is a brilliant entrepreneur. But whatever he does, it's quality. I just signed a book deal with Donald backstage. Imagine that: I'm a small-business owner, and Donald took my business and built it into one of the fastest-growing companies in America according to *Inc.* magazine!" (His plug, not mine, and he's right: The Learning Annex is a two-time *Inc.* 500 company.)

Then, to the sound of Pink Floyd's

people in the room that many of them will never succeed, and he will later pride himself on providing a rare moment of negativity for the crowd. He's funny and charming and really hits his stride during the question and answer session, which lasts as long as he feels like standing up there. I have never seen a man more confident in his opinions. His role in the weekend is as attention magnet and also preeminent example of where wealth can lead you.

Trump doesn't need the \$1.5 million. In fact, he says he gives it to charity. His only point in demanding such a price was to insist that this is what his time is worth. I ask him afterward what he thinks of Zanker as entrepreneur. "He's a very fine businessman, and he's able to give people what they want," Trump says. "Which is very important. I think people have come to trust them."

Trump does, of course, have one major concern about the Learning Annex. "Before I agreed to do the speeches, it was a much smaller enterprise—like 300 people in a hotel ballroom," he says. "But it's become very big, and he's able to reach people who are very interested. Now I don't know what happens after I no longer want to do it. I just don't know. I said to him, 'Someday I won't be there.'"

I say that I have asked Zanker the same question—who replaces Trump?

"And what did he say?"

That he doesn't know yet. But he doesn't seem worried.

"It's a tough one. Well, he's been very good to me."

Truth is, Zanker feels as if he's on a snowball rolling downhill. By next summer, he will have Expo tours built around

quered fear. We all have fear. And there's always that question: Should I do this? For me, he's helped me conquer my fears. It's allowed me to build a \$100 million company. Because if you have fears, you get paralyzed and can't move forward."

Looking forward, I wonder, what will a billion-dollar version of the Learning Annex look like?

"We'll own online; we'll own books; we'll own videos; we'll own audio; we'll own the self-help business; we'll own the management. If you're an upcoming guy, I want to manage your career. I want to have a television division; I want to own the touring rights for television shows, so that when you have a TV show and you're famous, I want to tour you. I want to create the next great psychic and then tour that person. I want to own a phone line; I want to own anything to do with changing your life. And feel comfortable that the brand is a little edgy, a little wacko, but cool, solid—stands behind the product. And we'll be there as you change, or whenever you want to change. Because I think people have transitions all through their lives. So you need to come back and learn more. As you get older, you're going to be learning in a community. So we'll either own the community, or there will be a Learning Annex in your community center. It could be in a big building in Florida. In a high-rise condo.

"As expansive as the self-help business is, it's just beginning. There's so much of it out there! It's just starting!"

Josh Dean's most recent story for Inc., "The Greatly Improbable, Highly Enjoyable, Increasingly Profitable Life of Michael Kobold," appeared in the May 2007 issue.