

David M. R. Covey  
Stephan M. Mardyks

FOREWORD BY **STEPHEN M.R. COVEY**  
Bestselling Author of *The Speed of Trust*

# TRAP TALES

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OUTSMARTING

THE **7** HIDDEN  
OBSTACLES  
TO SUCCESS

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WILEY



## Praise for *Trap Tales*

“*Trap Tales* is a triumph! The book reveals the 7 traps that can turn life’s journey into an obstacle course. With clear examples and calls to actions, David Covey and Stephan Mardyks give you tools to escape and avoid these harmful traps. Read this book, apply its wisdom, and live your best life.”

—**Ken Blanchard, bestselling coauthor of *The New One Minute Manager* and *Leading At a Higher Level***

“Wow! What a tremendous book. I found myself enraptured by the story. Covey and Mardyks created characters that the reader comes to truly care about and whose stories they want to follow. That, along with very insightful content, creative analogies and relevant examples kept me deeply engaged throughout. I genuinely loved it.”

—**Jim Loehr, cofounder of the Human Performance Institute, renowned performance psychologist, bestselling author**

“Covey and Mardyks are a dynamic duo! They’ve broken free from the standard approach to bring us a novel, hopeful book—one that shows that we can change the trajectory of our lives. If you feel trapped by circumstance or stuck in old patterns of thinking, read *Trap Tales* and breakthrough.”

—**Liz Wiseman, bestselling author of *Multipliers* and *Rookie Smarts***

“Anyone interested in learning how to avoid the basic pitfalls of life will enjoy the engrossing read that *Trap Tales* delivers. Covey and Mardyks eye opening story of life imparts invaluable wisdom and is an amazing guide for people of all ages.”

—**Stedman Graham, bestselling author, speaker and entrepreneur**

“Few in the world of personal and organizational development have a more comprehensive view of all the field has to offer. I highly recommend a careful reading and application of the accumulated wisdom Covey and Mardyks have to offer for both spotting and liberating ourselves from life’s most subtle and pernicious traps.”

—**Joseph Grenny, cofounder of VitalSmarts and bestselling coauthor of *Crucial Conversations***

“Freedom is not only a mental and physical construct . . . it is a core human need. Traps catch us and hold us prisoner in unhealthy repetitive cycles. *Trap Tales* imparts invaluable wisdom that can truly set you free. This book is your key to that freedom.”

—**Brian Tracy, bestselling author of *The Psychology of Selling* and *Eat That Frog!***

“Wouldn’t it be great to be born with X-ray vision? Imagine being able to see what’s up ahead or around the next corner, aware of every obstacle in your path. This entertaining book is an amazing guide that enables the reader to do just that.”

—**Bonnie St. John, bestselling author of *Live Your Joy* and coauthor of *Micro-Resilience***

“David and Stephan have identified the most common things that trip us up in our lives and work, and they’ve supplied a set of practical techniques for directing our focus to transcend them. An easily digestible manual for getting sticky things unstuck!”

—**David Allen, bestselling author of *Getting Things Done***

“I always believed wisdom could only be acquired through hard-earned experience, but *Trap Tales* proves me wrong. It is rich with advice you can immediately act on. Read this book and you’ll learn specific strategies for avoiding the most common mistakes while capturing life’s greatest moments.”

—**Andrew Sobel, bestselling author of *Clients for Life* and *Power Questions***

“This book addresses a far more important topic than success in business. Instead, it is a remarkable treatise on overall success in life. It is chock-full of practical advice on how to avoid or extricate yourself from the many traps into which people fall. It is a powerful wake-up call to anyone who is innocently walking into a trap. It also sets some warning flares around traps by vividly and viscerally describing their consequences.”

**—Jack Zenger, CEO of Zenger Folkman and co-author  
of the bestselling *The Extraordinary Leader***

“To start thinking about our challenges as traps offers all of us a new and compelling framework that transforms our current predicaments. This book is brimming with insights and approaches that will surprise and amaze you.”

**—Don Yaeger, nine-time *New York Times*  
bestselling author**

“As story analysts, we appreciate the authors’ fine-tuned attention to the story—giving us rich characters and compelling struggles that deliver powerful concepts. David and Stephan have raised the bar for story-based business books.”

**—Wendy Gourley and Amy White, directors  
of Second Sight Studio**



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# Foreword by Stephen M. R. Covey

You might think it's automatic to trust your brother because you're related to him, but that's not always the case in families. Fortunately, it is the case in ours!

I've known David his whole life and I'm grateful to be able to share this foreword to a tremendous book that has the potential to shift your thinking and impact the rest of your life. Not only am I related to David, but I've also worked with him in a variety of capacities, and I truly trust him. Not only because of our shared parentage. Not only because he has sterling character. Yes, character is essential to credibility but so is competence, and David offers *towering competence*—his unique insight, capabilities, perspective, and expertise. Those who have worked with and for him routinely describe him as the best leader they've ever encountered. Plus, he is such fun to be around! David is very real, cares profoundly for people, and makes everything so enjoyable.

Stephan is a French Texan with a deep soul and strong propensity for Smart Trust. I lovingly call him the International Man of Mystery because he has traveled so much, seen so much, and quietly done so much to improve people and organizations all around the world. He is David's equal in character and competence, and he has a curator's

instinct for what's distinctive and insightful. Let me share a story that illustrates Stephan's can-do beliefs and strong abilities to trust wisely. When launching *The Speed of Trust*, I met with Stephan to explore having his company distribute our program internationally. Stephan listened closely, asked a couple of questions, and extended his hand, saying, "This will be big. Let's do this. I trust you. We'll figure it out." That was it! No long drawn-out negotiations and endless cycles of back-and-forth legal agreements. (Yes, we did later work out the details of a business decision that was founded on this short, 30-minute meeting.) My experience with Stephan powerfully confirms the principles that are expressed in my work regarding trust.

Together David and Stephan are a great team and have been for years. This book is a product of their complementary strengths. They are both "make it happen" people. Both consistently deliver results. Both have an entrepreneurial edge, great business instincts, inspiring leadership skills, and the ability to naturally extend trust. They believe in people and balance a propensity to trust with good thinking and analysis, resulting in wise judgment. It doesn't surprise me they would write a story to illustrate the principles that will help you succeed in your work and life—both men value fewer words, greater action, and learning fast and forward.

Now let me tell you about the marvelous read you're about to experience.

To avoid a trap you need to see it. You will vicariously experience the awakening of the main character, Alex, as he comes to realize through the coaching of a family friend, Victoria, that he has foolishly been caught in what David and Stephan have termed "The 7 Hidden Obstacles to Success." The impact in Alex's world is not only felt in his career—it affects him even more in his personal and family life. These 7 Traps are seductive, enticing, and not always obvious. Fortunately, Alex chooses to extricate himself from these traps—but the purpose of the story isn't to experience the relief of Alex's change—it's to shine a light on how these common 7 Traps may enslave each of us.

You may not have fallen into all of these traps, but unaware, you—or someone you care about—may wander into them and be imprisoned, harmed, or limited. At a minimum, you or they will be knocked off the path of achieving what you could accomplish and become. Like Alex in this story, you will see that it takes time to escape from these traps, but it is possible to make your way out.

For each of the 7 Traps they've identified, David and Stephan reveal a corresponding “epiphany breakthrough.” For followers of our father Stephen R. Covey's work, it's another term for what he called a “paradigm shift”—and I know that paradigms can shift. These epiphanies are not just moments of clarity—they can transform every succeeding moment. Our father used to reference Thomas Kuhn's book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, and how most breakthroughs in science were truly “break-withs”—that is, they were a courageous break with traditional ways of thinking. And that's precisely what David and Stephan have done with these traps: rather than lean on current conventional wisdom, they offer eureka-like approaches to help you see—and choose—a new way forward so you can both get out of the traps and avoid them in the future.

You might wonder where these 7 Traps and their corresponding epiphanies come from. What if you could read hundreds of books on improving human and organizational performance? What if you could talk in depth with their authors? What if you could participate in their programs? What if you could interview hundreds of independent business owners in dozens of countries about the challenges they face in growing their businesses and impacting their communities and nations? Stephan and David have done just that. They are partners in a business, SMCOV, that helps authors and training companies take and scale their ideas and approaches (through both books and programs) to global audiences. This remarkable experience, combined with past senior leadership roles at FranklinCovey, DOOR International, and Raytheon Learning, provides a very practical approach to the vital challenges that beset so many of us today.

You are in good hands with these two. They know what they're talking about. The 7 Traps are real and will capture the unaware and foolish. It reminds me of my work with trust and how people don't realize its importance until they experience it themselves. I believe you'll find that this story, and the traps it illustrates, will truly affect your behavior, your joy, and thereby the outcome of your career and life.

Perhaps the greatest gift of this book is hope. If, like the protagonist of this story, you find yourself in one or more of these traps you may wish you had never fallen into it, it's important to realize that you *can* get out. And stay out. And help the people you care about do the same. In the process of doing so, you will earn the dividend of increased self-confidence—greater self-trust—enabling you to become and give to others a truly great gift: a person they can trust.

**Stephen M. R. Covey**

Cofounder and Global Practice Leader of

FranklinCovey's Speed of Trust Practice

Author of *The Speed of Trust* and  
former CEO of Covey Leadership Center

# TRAP TALES





PART

1

Alex's Story



# The Story Begins

An irrepressible smile spread across Alex's face as he lightly tapped the accelerator of his brand-new luxury convertible. The shiny black car leapt smoothly from 0 to 60 mph with a burst of power that sent his head reeling.

"Now this is really living," he mused as he merged into the fast lane on the interstate. "Nothing quite like the smell of new leather."

The Southern California sun blazed, and the wind whipped through his hair as he put the top down with one click of a button. Catching a glimpse of himself in the rearview mirror, he was struck by his reflection. Looking good. He felt younger than he had in a long time.

The drive home ended all too soon. In no time at all he pulled his sparkling new acquisition to a stop in front of his home in an upscale Los Angeles neighborhood. Wouldn't his wife and kids be thrilled

with his flashy new purchase! He couldn't wait to see their reaction when he boasted about his latest coup—a deal that had been too good to refuse. One minute he had been on a test drive, the next he was talking about a down payment . . . before he knew what had happened he was driving his new car off the lot!

Alex bounded up the front steps and through the front door with the energy of a man half his age.

“Kim, kids, get out here, there’s something I’ve got to show you!” he exclaimed.

His two teenagers, lounging in the front room, barely raised their heads to acknowledge their father. Kim looked up from the desk where she was seated, poring over the family’s finances, with an inquiring look on her face.

“What’s all the excitement about?” she asked.

“Come on, you’ve got to see this,” he said. He grabbed her hand and nearly dragged her out the front door.

He felt her jerk to a stop as her eyes settled on the gleaming new car parked in front of their house. Her face registered disbelief mixed with despair. This was not the response he’d been hoping for.

“What is it? What’s wrong?” he asked anxiously.

Kim had sunk down to sit on their front steps, looking like she might collapse at any moment. “Alex, what have you done? Where is your car? Where did this convertible come from?” she gasped.

“I got the best deal ever! It was a no-brainer! We had the money, and putting \$8,000 cash as a down payment gave me the lowest interest rate possible.”

“You can’t be serious. You can’t be *serious*!”

“Kim, honestly. You’re overreacting,” Alex responded.

“Overreacting?” Kim cried incredulously. “That \$8,000 was set aside for our trip to Hawaii! That was our entire year’s savings! And you just up and decide to blow it all in one go . . . on something we didn’t agree upon? Out of the blue? No discussion? Unbelievable!”

“But Chaz said we wouldn’t see a deal like this again. I had to move fast,” Alex defended.

“Please! Chaz? I don’t ever want to hear that name again,” Kim exploded.

Chaz, Alex’s friend and coworker, was always encouraging Alex to live life the way he lived it himself. That meant extravagantly, at least according to Kim. She had reminded Alex all too often that Chaz’s bachelor lifestyle had nothing in common with theirs. As far as Kim was concerned, Chaz was a bad influence and a bad friend. The expensive golf trips to beach resort locations were one thing, but to blow their stash of \$8,000 on a down payment for a new luxury convertible was going too far. What about the sedan Alex had been driving? It was barely three years old.

“Babe, don’t worry! Seriously. I’ve got another credit card that will pay for our Hawaii trip—it’s all taken care of.”

“But I don’t want to add any more damn credit card debt to what we already owe! We’re up to our eyeballs in debt, Alex!” Kim raised her voice angrily. “You take that car to the dealership tomorrow and get our money back. You don’t need a new car and we don’t need any more debt.”

“I can’t do it. It’s already paid for. And I got an awesome trade-in price for my old set of wheels. Chaz said we couldn’t pass up a deal like this. He used to sell luxury cars, Kim. He knows these things. C’mon, let’s go for a ride. You’ll feel better after you see how great it handles!”

“I’m not speaking to you anymore, not tonight. You either take back that car or I’m not going to Hawaii next week.”

“Kim, honestly. It’s done. Don’t be insane. Of course you’re coming to Hawaii.”

“I’m serious, Alex. You have a decision to make.” Kim stormed back inside the house, slamming the door behind her.

Alex and Kim slept in separate rooms that night. The next morning, Alex drove the shiny black convertible to work. Chaz was eagerly waiting for him in the parking lot.

“You are looking sharp in that car, my friend! How about letting me borrow it for my date this weekend?”

Alex laughed. “And who’s your girlfriend this week? Is it still Jasmine?”

“Jasmine?” Chaz said with a hint of disgust. “I broke up with her two weeks ago. I’m dating Darci now.” Chaz passed his phone to Alex to show a selfie he’d taken with his new girlfriend on the beach.

“Nice photo. But I don’t think so, Chaz. What if she spills a drink on the leather seats?” Alex joked.

“Good point,” Chaz laughed. “Come on, let’s go make some sales.”

Alex had little time to dwell on whether Kim would follow through on her threat. His day was packed with meetings and calls, one right after another. At the end of the workday Chaz and a few other coworkers were going to go out for drinks and watch the game together. Alex didn’t want to seem antisocial—besides, he wasn’t really looking forward to seeing Kim right then. He decided to tag along, just for a few minutes.

Before he knew it, it was nearly nine o’clock. Alex couldn’t believe it had gotten so late. He excused himself from the group. Only one missed call from Kim. Maybe she wouldn’t be so angry after all. He wondered what she had made him for dinner.

Alex knew he was going to be in trouble when he got back, yet he couldn’t help but smile as he considered the drive ahead. Sliding behind the leather steering wheel, he gripped it firmly as he pulled out of the parking lot and onto the road. “This feels so right. Kim will get over it,” he told himself. “It’s just a matter of time.”

Soon he was lost in the joy of handling the sleek convertible as it responded to the slightest touch, as if he and the car were made for each other. He resisted the urge to take the long way home—it wouldn’t do to upset Kim further. As Alex wheeled into the driveway and opened the garage door, he noticed her car was missing. She must be out running an errand, he thought.