

T H E
F O R T L I F E

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EDITORIAL

FAILURE TO LAUNCH

*Professionally Successful & Successfully Single
How To Change The Tide*



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FAILURE TO LAUNCH

Professionally Successful & Successfully Single How To Change The Tide

Humanly written by:
François Damian Aristhomene Martinez
CVO & Founder
FORT International



“You can have anything you want in this life, just not everything you want.”

It is February 2025 and this quote has been extremely instrumental to the way I approach both hemispheres of my world... The Personal and Professional ones.

When you face “unexpected failure” such as the demise of a romantic relationship, the long term emotional damage it can create, coupled with the physical side effects such as weight loss, hair loss, sleep deprivation, nausea and all the symptoms of a pharmaceutical drug commercial, easily have the ability to negatively impact the way you see and approach future romantic relationships, given that after all, no one in their right minds enters a serious commitment expecting a negative outcome.



As the world turns and new opportunities for economic freedom continue to propagate like the plague, we see ourselves in the midst of a dynamic shift, where many smart and professionally talented individuals find themselves ultimately alone, without anyone of significant personal value to share their financial success with.

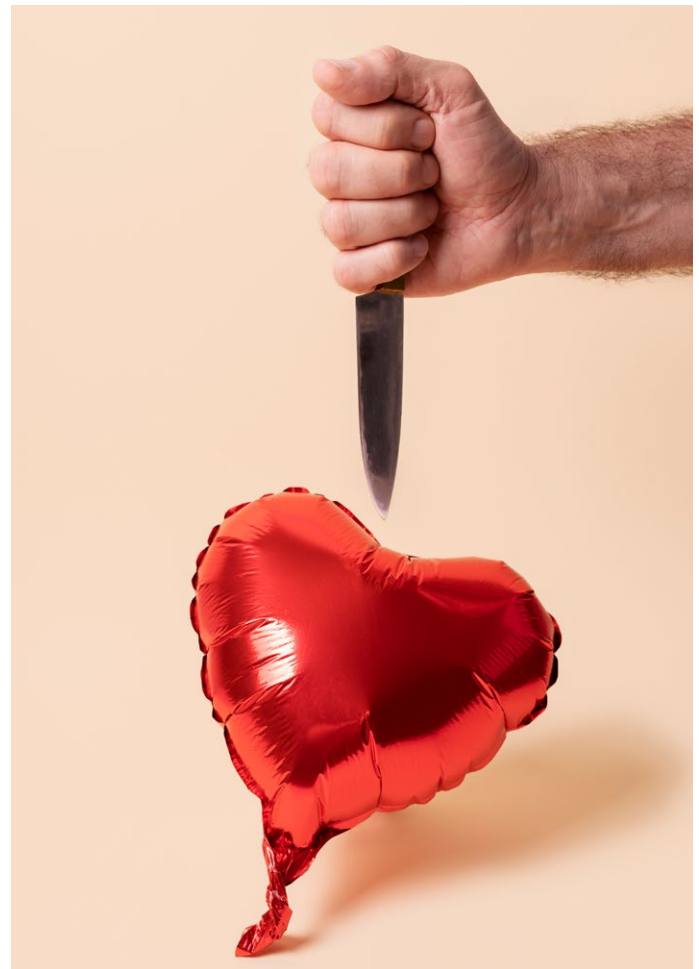
Research by the Pew Research Center shows that as of 2019, roughly 38% of adults ages 25-54 are neither married or living with a partner, in other words “unpartnered”. That is a 9% increase from the year 1990 according to the same source. Therefore we can deduce that if things do not change, by the year 2055 - 30 years from now, the number of “unpartnered” individuals would have risen to 47% - 5 in 10.

The question is why?

The answer to this question has as everything to do with you and your choices.

You can't be the most successful professional in your field without compromising personal relationships.

Being in a romantic relationship is a daily choice. Think of it as an exercise; To give it some context, a relationship is like a muscle which has the ability to make your daily life better. It is not crucial to your overall survival, but when exercised the right way, it can allow you to move, breathe, and sustain daily challenges better. Therefore If you train it with focus and intentionality, functionality will be optimal; However on the flip side, if you fail to do so, that same muscle can trigger a series of injuries which can drastically affect your quality of life and performance.



In order to achieve success in any professional field, you must dedicate yourself wholeheartedly to that endeavor. There are no shortcuts, and if you have experienced any kind of professional success, you likely have studied, trained, attended seminars, perhaps poured additional hours to a post-graduate degree, and been honing those skills for a number of years. The motivation behind those efforts were/ are monetary. Cold hard cash! The Biweekly Paycheck which grows every year, and currently accommodates the life you now have. The reward is tangible!

The same kind of dedication and energy needs to be applied to your romantic relationships as well, because if you don't, the shortcomings will surely lead to emotional atrophy of the heart.

I have learned that the difference in motivation to invest daily towards the words of the above paragraph, truly rests in that which we can not see, as love is a fleeting feeling, not a number in a bank account, although some would argue that point.

Nonetheless, love takes time and it doesn't guarantee a 3-5% annual increase in compensation just because you worked tirelessly at it. The reward often times take years.

So how do we balance our lives to make room for dual personal and professional success?

One guaranteed approach:

“Put your outdoor work in order and get your fields ready; after that, build your house.”

—Proverbs 24:27 (NIV). King Solomon.

Take care of all the things you need to build a solid financial foundation for the life you wish to have for your future family, then look for love. Easier said than done as we are not made of stone, but it's certainly doable. It just takes a ton of emotional discipline.

The other approach is to identify:

- What is it that you need professionally.
- What is it that you need emotionally.
- How do you make both successfully coexist.

Accepting that meeting a need is significantly more important than meeting a want will simplify your life. For this you need to know yourself, and in order to know yourself, you need time,

because developing the level of awareness to look inwards with honesty and clarity, is perhaps the best supplemental exercise you can practice to strengthen your heart. That takes time!

Many of us jump into relationships with the primary objective of filling a void with hopes, dreams, and unclear elevated expectations from others which we don't even have for ourselves. This often occurs because we have failed to truly embrace the fact that just like professional success is not easy to attain, neither is the emotional bliss every human being yearns for.

Factor in the basic truth that not only must we cope with our own internal changes, as the feet of father time never cease to march, but we must also adapt to the changes of another mind completely different from our own.

Understanding that you must become what you seek in order to attract it, is IMPERATIVE to your happiness.

When OUR negative choices force God/life to issue a correction and we're beaten and exhausted by our struggles, we often seek shelter and nourishment in the best tree available, the one with the best shade and fruit to replenish that which we truly long for; Love.

The problem is that at this moment of vulnerability many of us turn into takers. We enjoy the cover from the sun, relish in the fruit of the tree, but sadly have very little to reciprocate with because we ourselves need to heal. Eventually the leaves which sheltered us fall off, the fruit that fed us becomes scarce, and that which at some point filled our hearts with emotional food ceases to provide, at least for us, because a solid rooted tree will always stand.



Heartache and sadness follows, and with a bruised broken heart we move on, in search of another tree, one which will provide what we need again, until the cycle viciously repeats itself.

Change happens when we come to the realization that we are in control of this cycle. It is your responsibility to become that tree. It is your responsibility to water yourself, to improve yourself, to feed yourself with positivity, to groom yourself emotionally, physically, and spiritually so you can attract what you want.

Flowers do not go to the sparrows.

You must look inwards and surgically study your fears, insecurities, traumas and disappointments, but also your triumphs; only then, establish a set of principles based on your analysis; one which is deeply rooted in an unshakable belief system, because compromising it would mean compromising yourself.

The right partner will share your principles, allowing for a productive fruitful relationship. One rooted in acceptance, compassion and understanding.

When principles do not align, relationships of any kind result in fractures.

Life is beautiful, do not let yesterday's disappointments ruin tomorrow's blessings. Change begins with us because ultimately our actions are the only ones we can control.

The beauty is in the discovery, in the exploration of the unknown. So begin by discovering and truly exploring who you are. Allow the healing to begin, so the vicious cycle of disappointment can end.

God blessed us all with the roots of an Oak tree, we just have to dig a little, clear out the brush, and nourish ourselves to become the best version for those we wish to share our lives with.

One day at a time.



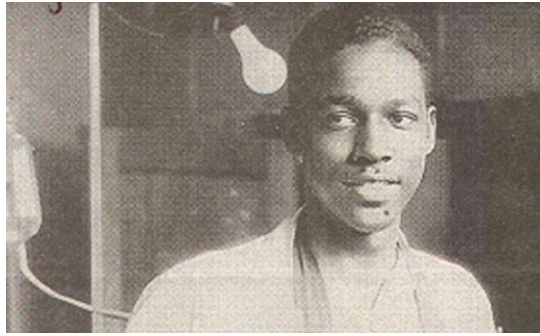
Vivien Thomas:

A Pioneer in Medicine and Unsung Hero of Surgery

As we celebrate Black History Month, we honor the remarkable contributions of individuals whose stories have often gone untold. One such figure is Vivien Thomas, a medical pioneer whose work revolutionized cardiac surgery and saved countless lives—yet, for many years, he remained in the shadows of history.

Born in 1910 in Louisiana, Vivien Thomas aspired to become a doctor. However, the Great Depression derailed his plans for medical school. Instead, he took a job as a laboratory assistant at Johns Hopkins University under the renowned surgeon Dr. Alfred Blalock. Despite having no formal medical degree, Thomas quickly demonstrated extraordinary skill in surgical research, developing techniques that would later change the field of medicine.

During the 1940s, Thomas played a pivotal role in developing a groundbreaking surgical procedure to treat cyanotic heart defects, commonly known as Blue Baby Syndrome—a condition that left infants struggling for oxygen due to congenital heart defects. Working alongside Dr. Blalock and pediatric cardiologist Dr. Helen Taussig, Thomas designed the Blalock-Taussig shunt, a procedure that improved blood flow to the lungs and gave thousands of children a second chance at life.



Despite being the true architect of the surgery, Thomas initially received little public credit for his role in its success.

For years, Thomas worked behind the scenes, training generations of surgeons while navigating racial barriers in the medical field. As a Black man in a segregated society, he faced constant discrimination and was often mistaken for a janitor rather than a brilliant medical innovator. His salary was initially classified at the level of a janitor, despite his pivotal contributions to surgical advancements. He was not allowed to operate on white patients officially, nor was he given the same professional acknowledgment as his white colleagues. Even in the operating room, he was sometimes required to stand in the background while others took credit for his work.

Despite these injustices, Thomas persevered, driven by his passion for medicine and the lives he could save. His contributions remained largely unrecognized until later in life. In 1976,

Johns Hopkins University finally awarded him an honorary doctorate, acknowledging his immense impact on medicine. Today, his legacy is celebrated in the medical community, and his story was brought to wider attention in the HBO film *Something the Lord Made*.

Vivien Thomas' journey is a testament to perseverance, talent, and the fight for recognition in a world that often overlooked Black excellence. His work laid the foundation for modern heart surgery and continues to inspire new generations of medical professionals. As we reflect on Black History Month, his story reminds us of the countless unsung heroes whose contributions have shaped our world.

This February, let's celebrate not only the well-known figures of history but also the individuals like Vivien Thomas, who pushed boundaries and changed lives through their brilliance and determination.



How I Got into Leadership and Strategic Planning

A personal journey into the leadership role.

Humanly written by:
Elizabeth Castillo
Chief of Staff
FORT International



I've always been a leader. Even as a kid, I felt a natural pull to fix things, guide those around me, and bring order to chaos—maybe it's the Virgo in me. Whether it was organizing school projects, helping friends solve problems, or making sure things ran smoothly at home (or in relationships haha), I instinctively took on the role of the problem solver. That mindset carried into my professional life, shaping the way I approach challenges and opportunities.

Photo by Freepik

My journey into leadership and strategic planning wasn't the result of a single moment but rather a series of experiences that reinforced my ability to optimize processes and drive efficiency. With over a decade in business operations—spanning financial services, risk management, and business process optimization—I've had the privilege of leading teams, streamlining workflows, and implementing strategies that make organizations run more effectively. From overseeing operational excellence as Chief of Staff at FORT International to managing risk and business process design at UBS, my career has been about bridging vision with execution.



Photo by Freepik

Leadership, to me, isn't just about making decisions; it's about creating clarity, empowering teams, and ensuring that the bigger picture always aligns with the details.

Looking back, stepping into leadership and strategic planning wasn't something I intentionally pursued—it was something I naturally gravitated toward. Today, I embrace that role with a passion for continuous improvement, collaboration, and driving meaningful change.

The Most Rewarding and Challenging Aspects of Working in Operations



Humanly written by:
Brian Jimenez
Operations Coordinator
FORT International



Photo by Freepik

Challenging Aspects:

Operations are the backbone of any business, ensuring everything runs smoothly behind the scenes, handling everything from supply chains to process optimization, and our work is critical to business success. The job comes with both challenges and rewards. One of the most challenging parts of operations is dealing with unexpected problems. Whether it's a supply chain disruption, shortages, we often have to think quickly and implement solutions under tight deadlines. The need for constant vigilance and adaptability can be stressful, especially when the stakes are high.

Efficiency and Quality

Operations teams are tasked with improving processes to make them more efficient while maintaining high-quality standards. Striking this balance can be difficult because speed and cost-cutting often seem to clash with maintaining high standards. We must carefully consider trade-offs, optimize workflows, and continuously monitor performance to keep everything running smoothly.



Data Overload

Operations are data-driven, meaning that we often deal with large amounts of data to track. Sifting through this data to extract meaningful insights can be overwhelming, especially when decisions must be made based on this information in real-time.

Rewarding Aspects:

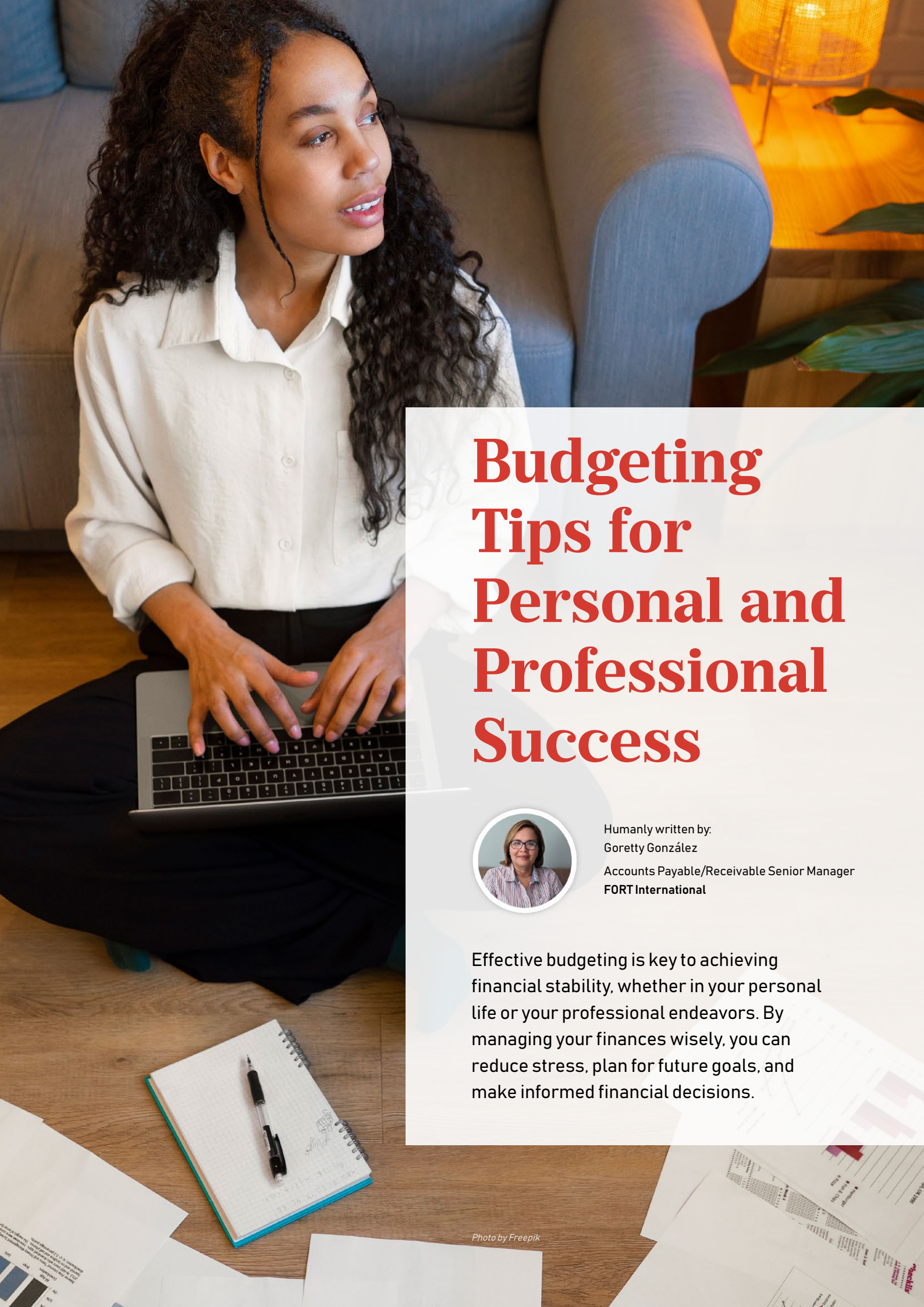
Making a Direct Impact on the Company. One of the most rewarding aspects of operations is the ability to directly impact the success of the company. Whether it's streamlining processes, reducing costs, or improving customer satisfaction, the work done in operations is often visible and has measurable results. Seeing the fruits of our effort in real-time, which can be deeply satisfying.

Solving Complex Problems

We are often tasked with solving some of the most complex and intricate problems in a business. The challenge of finding creative solutions to optimize processes, reduce waste, and improve efficiency can be incredibly rewarding. When a solution works, it often leads to significant improvements across the business, bringing a sense of accomplishment.

Continuous Learning and Growth

The field of operations is dynamic, with new tools, methodologies, and technologies constantly emerging. This presents an opportunity for continuous learning and skill development. From mastering new software to learning lean management techniques or getting certified in project management, there are always ways to grow and improve.



Budgeting Tips for Personal and Professional Success



Humanly written by:
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Accounts Payable/Receivable Senior Manager
FORT International

Effective budgeting is key to achieving financial stability, whether in your personal life or your professional endeavors. By managing your finances wisely, you can reduce stress, plan for future goals, and make informed financial decisions.

Here are some practical budgeting tips that employees and customers can apply in their daily lives:

1. Track Your Income and Expenses

Understanding where your money goes is the first step in creating a budget. Use budgeting apps or a simple spreadsheet to categorize your expenses and identify areas where you can cut unnecessary costs.

2. Set Clear Financial Goals

Define short-term and long-term financial objectives. Whether it's saving for a vacation, paying off debt, or investing in professional growth, having clear goals helps you stay motivated and Focused.

3. Prioritize Essential Expenses

Separate needs from wants. Rent, utilities, groceries, and transportation should always take precedence over discretionary spending like dining out or entertainment.

4. Create an Emergency Fund

Unexpected expenses can disrupt your financial plans. Aim to save at least three to six months' worth of living expenses to cushion against unforeseen circumstances, such as job loss or medical emergencies.

5. Automate Savings and Bill Payments

Set up automatic transfers to your savings account and schedule bill payments in advance to avoid late fees and ensure consistent savings.

6. Review and Adjust Regularly

Financial needs change over time. Periodically review your budget to ensure it aligns with your income, expenses, and financial goals.

7. Practice Smart Spending

Look for ways to reduce costs without sacrificing quality. Compare prices, use coupons, and take advantage of discounts to make the most of your money.

8. Invest in Your Professional Growth

Budgeting isn't just about saving—it's also about growing. Allocate funds for professional development, such as courses, certifications, or networking opportunities, to enhance your career prospects.



By implementing these budgeting tips, you can achieve greater financial security and success in both your personal and professional life. A well-managed budget empowers you to take control of your finances, reduce stress, and build a more stable future.



Photo by Freepik

Designing for Impact:

The Power of Visual Storytelling

Humanly written by:
Sebastián Vásquez
Graphic Designer
FORT International



It is very easy not to “see” the world we live in today, we are so immersed in it that everything seems so normal to us. However, we do not realize the place we frequent daily: we are surrounded by so much information and stimuli that they go unnoticed by the unconcerned eye. We are in the middle of a constant visual battle to capture our attention and we do not realize it... at least not all the time. In this context, visual storytelling has emerged as a “science” among the media to transmit complex messages, connect with the audience, and hopefully, become engraved in people’s memories. The power of telling visually striking stories is becoming everything for those of us who work in marketing and product design. And it is not easy to connect with people in the middle of an ocean of advertising, memes, TikToks, and viral challenges.

The practice of telling stories through images, graphics, illustrations, videos, or any other type of visual element is what we know as Visual Storytelling. It is a new way of communicating ideas in the 21st century, sometimes non-verbally, appealing to empathy, identification, our emotions, or ways of thinking. This is without forgetting that our message must be renewed every certain (small) time, otherwise it will lose interest, be forgotten, or lack any meaning. Visual storytelling must rely on visuals to keep the attention of viewers, but this narration must be easy to understand and above all memorable.

“Bad design shouts at you. Good design is the silent seller”

-Shane Meendering

Human beings are naturally predisposed to connect with images. According to studies in cognitive psychology, our brain processes images much faster than words: while text requires decoding, images can be understood in fractions of a second. In addition, images appeal to our emotions, which makes a visual narrative much more effective in generating a deep emotional connection.

When designers manage to merge text and visuals effectively, they create an immersive learning experience, making the message not only retained but also understood at a deeper level.



Photo by Freepik



Visual storytelling is not just an aesthetic technique: it is a deeply effective means of communication to achieve specific goals. One more reason, and a truly powerful one, to count on the professional services of a graphic designer for your business: Designing with a clear purpose can have a more significant and lasting impact on users.

Whether through creating an emotional atmosphere, simplifying a complex message, or triggering action in an advertising campaign, visual storytelling is a means of effectively connecting ideas and people.

A design that is made with a purpose and has a clear narrative focus can elevate a simple product or campaign into a meaningful experience.

When people feel that a design has a purpose behind it, they appreciate it more, feel connected to it, and are therefore motivated to act in a way that, in many cases, goes beyond the rational.

The power of visual storytelling lies in its ability to create an emotional connection, simplify complex concepts, and make a message unforgettable. Designers have a vast set of visual tools at their disposal to tell stories that not only inform but also impact and leave a lasting mark. In a world where information is consumed quickly and audiences are increasingly difficult to engage, visual storytelling has become an essential resource to ensure that the message is not only heard but felt, remembered, and shared.



Photo by Freepik

Why Corporate Social Responsibility Matters More Than Ever



Humanly written by:
Helina Awayehu

Social Responsibility and
Community Impact Associate
FORT International

In today's rapidly evolving business landscape, corporate social responsibility (CSR) has shifted from being a mere option to a necessity. Consumers, employees, and stakeholders increasingly expect companies to operate ethically, contribute to social causes, and minimize their environmental impact.

Businesses that embrace CSR not only strengthen their brand reputation but also build long-term trust and loyalty. Ethical business practices such as fair labor policies, sustainability initiatives, and transparent operations set companies apart in a competitive market and foster a positive public image.

Beyond reputation, CSR plays a crucial role in community development and global progress. Companies that give back, whether through charitable donations, volunteer programs, or sustainability efforts help address pressing societal challenges like poverty, education gaps, and climate change. Initiatives such as investing in renewable energy, supporting local businesses, or funding scholarships demonstrate a company's commitment to making a meaningful impact. These efforts not only benefit communities but also create a sense of purpose among employees, leading to increased engagement and job satisfaction.



From a business perspective, CSR initiatives also drive profitability and innovation. Companies that prioritize sustainability often discover cost-saving opportunities through energy efficiency, waste reduction, and ethical supply chain management. Moreover, socially responsible businesses attract top talent, as many professionals seek employers whose values align with their own. Investors, too, are increasingly favoring businesses with strong CSR commitments, recognizing that ethical and sustainable companies tend to have long-term resilience and growth potential.

In an era where consumers are more informed and socially conscious than ever, businesses must rise to the challenge of integrating CSR into their core strategies. Giving back to society and operating with integrity is not just the right thing to do, it is essential for long-term success and positive global change. By prioritizing ethical business practices and social impact, companies can create a future where business growth and social good go hand in hand.



Photo by Freepik

How I Got into Sales:

My Journey to Fort International



Humanly written by:
Daniel De Leon

S. East Regional
Sales Director
FORT International

First let me start by saying: Sales is in everything we do in life. You recruit, prospect, and sell 24/7 out of your life, the majority of people just don't get paid for it.

People come off vacation, they love Mexico, they tell their friends to go to a certain resort, the resort didn't pay them a dime, but they still referred people to the resort. When people go to a concert, they tell all their friends "Hey! Let's all go to this concert!" the person singing at the concert didn't pay you a dollar to bring other people and yet you recruited them.

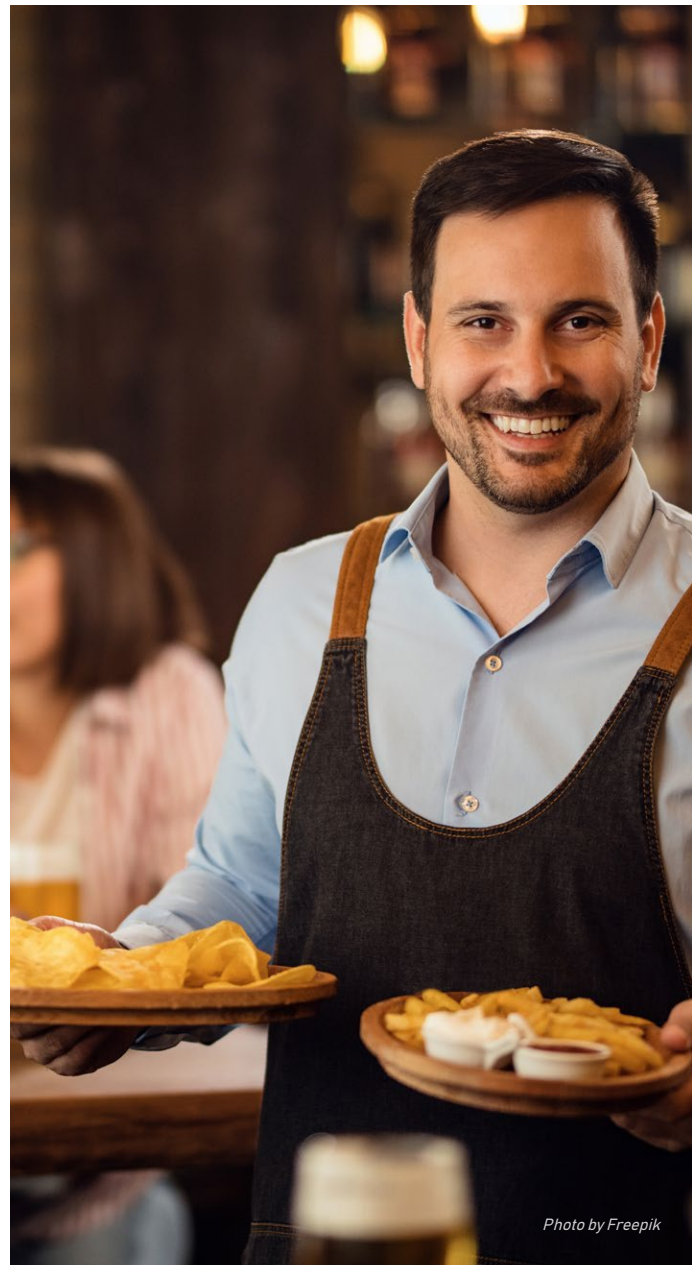
If I call up my friends to go see the new movie that just came out; I'm selling them the idea of going to see the movie. I worked in restaurants most of my young adult life. Started off as a busser but was quickly bumped up to server. I guess this is where the "Sales Journey" actually begins.

As most people know, servers work off tips. Two must know to be a successful server: Know the food and know your wine. Both are easy starters to any convo and if you know your "product" well, it makes it easier to sell.

Guests appreciate a server that is knowledgeable, can recommend new things, who is very attentive when needed, and in the end makes them feel like they've had an amazing experience. You want them to come back. Years go by, I'm living the restaurant night life.....I'm nocturnal at this point. Not the healthiest of lifestyles might I add. Still I go to the gym to stay fit but felt that I needed more structure in my life.

Jiu Jitsu.....An old hobby of mine when I was younger. I decided to try and get back into it. I found a school nearby. Haven't stopped since. In Jiu Jitsu you meet all kinds of people. Students, police officers, doctors, teachers, and even young business owners. A few weeks in, I'm getting to know everyone after a few training sessions, and one day this guy comes up to me after class. We become a little more acquainted with each other, I tell him I work as a server at a restaurant in Coral Gables, he tells me he's in sales, I tell him that's cool, and he asks me, "Have you ever thought of a career change in Sales?".

Before I could even answer, he told me "I'm going on a trip to DC in a week or two, come shadow me, and see what I do. Think about it". Ladies and Gentlemen, this was my introduction to Damian Aristhomene. A charismatic Afro-Latino with dreads, a selling prowess like I've never seen, because I tell you what, I went on that trip to DC and little did I know this was the start of a great friendship through a mentor that I greatly admire and appreciate. It's been almost 10yrs since I've been with FORT and it's been crazy fun.



The transition from Server to actual sales was very natural for the most part. Know your product, be there for your client when they need it, make them feel like they've had an amazing experience. You want them to come back. The only job where you can have unlimited income based on how hard you work.

Word Search

Entertain yourself for a while and solve this word search as quickly as possible. If you prefer you can click on the link below and solve the challenge from your cell phone or computer.

Beads Direct February Word Search

C	I	V	E	V	S	T	I	A	D	A	S	S	B
A	N	Q	N	V	I	S	E	V	B	T	N	D	W
U	P	A	U	A	H	O	E	K	A	R	O	B	I
V	S	A	R	A	A	L	L	P	M	L	W	E	N
C	A	H	N	E	L	O	T	E	E	F	D	A	T
L	S	L	B	C	N	I	E	R	T	K	R	D	E
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B	Q	T	D	I	Q	C	I	E	G	T	U	C	A
A	A	S	O	D	I	N	G	S	D	E	E	T	V
D	A	Y	C	R	A	F	T	I	N	G	I	I	E

VIOLET
VALENTINE
CRAFTING
HEARTS
BEADING
QUALITY
VALUE
WINTER
AQUARIUS
SNOWDROP
CUPID
AMETHYST
BEADS DIRECT
LOVE
PANCAKES

Play this puzzle online at: <https://thewordsearch.com/puzzle/1997829/beads-direct-february-word-search/>

TEAM FORT



Damian



Ely



Danny



Sebas



Goretty



Helina



Brian

The Social FORT

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Comment and see what the FORT difference is all about!



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