

A close-up photograph of Alton Fitzgerald White in his role as Simba from the musical 'The Lion King'. He is wearing a large, intricately carved wooden lion's head mask that covers his eyes and upper face. The mask has a textured, fur-like appearance and a large, bushy mane made of dried grass or straw. Below the mask, his face is painted with orange and red stripes, and he has a red headband. He is wearing a golden, ornate lion's collar. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

# MY PRIDE

Mastering Life's  
Daily Performance

**Alton Fitzgerald White**

Broadway's Record-Breaking **LION KING**

# Redefining Service

How to pursue and sustain a life and career of excellence on your personal life's stage

Alton Fitzgerald White

*Your work is going to fill a large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work. And the only way to do great work is to love what you do. If you haven't found it yet, keep looking. Don't settle. As with all matters of the heart, you'll know when you find it.* — Steve Jobs, cofounder and CEO of Apple, Inc.

The following is excerpted from the forward of Alton Fitzgerald White's new book "My Pride: Mastering Life's Daily Performance." Reprinted with permission from Disney Editions.

My name is Alton Fitzgerald White, and I am an actor. I do some other things, too, of course, but "actor and singer" pretty much sums up my professional life. Until recently you could have seen me on Broadway playing King Mufasa in *The Lion King*, the megahit stage musical based on Disney's 1994 animated blockbuster film. My 13-year tenure with *The Lion King* in New York, Las Vegas, and on tour around the United States has been without a doubt the highlight of my 30-year career — at least so far! By the time I left the show on July 5, 2015, I had performed the role 4,308 times. It's not a world record, but I am extremely proud of my longevity and even prouder of the work I did at every one of those 4,308 shows.

As an actor, and as a man, I have learned a lot over the years — principles that I use to guide my life,

practices that help keep me going no matter how tough things get, and insights into ways of enriching both my life and career. I may not be as wise as Mufasa, arguably Disney's wisest father, but I think there are things I have learned that might interest and even help others — not just fellow actors and singers, fellow performers, and fellow artists, but everyone. Because the principles, practices, and insights that inform my life are, I believe, universal.

As the always-insightful William Shakespeare wrote in *As You Like It*, "All the world's a stage," and in many ways, it certainly is. For one thing, I think it's safe to say that most of us seek applause—the validation that we have done well—both from our loved ones and colleagues and from the greater community. And we hope that our hard work and commitment will earn us the accolades we seek and the benefits of success. There is nothing more

natural than wanting recognition for our efforts in both our careers and in our personal lives. Now, your personal stage may be a boardroom or a classroom, or at the head of a household, or along an assembly line. Regardless, in every scenario, that desire to succeed and be recognized remains the same.

My stage of choice has been the performing arts, and my life — which did not have the most auspicious beginning — has been made richer and fuller by the extraordinary, satisfying, and sometimes glamorous life I have led. But all lives, no matter the professional and personal choices, share certain challenges that are identical for everyone. The aspiration to achieve and maintain consistent excellence and to reap the fruits of our labor is universal.

As an actor, I have worked consistently for more than 30 years in a notoriously difficult arena, with more than 20 of those years on

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Broadway. I may not be a household name, but thankfully I am well-known in the rarefied world of the theater,

thanks to having played leading roles in some major hits — shows that were socially meaningful as well as popular, including *Ragtime*, *Miss Saigon*, *The Color Purple*, and, of course, *The Lion King*. But I would never have been able to accomplish any of this without the lessons I learned along the way — lessons that, once learned, became the motivators for even greater professional and personal aspiration, achievement, and satisfaction.

One of those lessons is how important it is to balance the passion for what you do with restorative self-nurturing. We hear a great deal about being passionate in our work, about choosing our passion and following our bliss. But passion alone can lead to burning out if it is not accompanied by some understanding of the way our passion functions, and of what we must do to keep our passions healthy and focused. Unfocused passion can be exhausting and destructive, and can actually hinder rather than help us.

I want to share what I hope is the wisdom that I have gained by performing—and by performing I don't just mean acting or singing on a stage or screen. I mean performing the service of my craft to benefit others, as well as myself. These are the lessons, precious to me, that I began to learn while navigating my particular American childhood. As a young boy of color being raised in public housing, I felt that very little was expected of me. I had to learn to raise my own expectations and to succeed on terms that helped me heal myself and become something much more than what others expected of me.

My journey has been a rich

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adventure, full of triumphant highs — and intense challenges. The rewards have been great, but so have the sacrifices. The accomplishments of living our lives to the fullest can be most gratifying, but they are sometimes hard-won and come at a cost. I believe that the greatest spiritual gifts come from enduring the most challenging circumstances, and that no one is exempt. We must all go through the process in our own way. How we perceive the difficulties and what we do to resolve them define who we really are.

My experiences have taught me the importance of redefining service, which is one of the best ways we can actually motivate ourselves in

periods of boredom, doubt, or fatigue. My objective is to inspire and encourage you with what I have discovered about tapping into instinct, devotion, planning, training, investing, valuing what you have to offer, and fostering the emotional and physical stamina necessary to pursue and sustain a life and career of excellence on your personal life's stage and even beyond, to places you never thought possible.

Capabilities and talents in this world are abundant and diverse. But passion for what you do is not enough. You also need the passion to commit yourself to a kind of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual fitness in order to excel. Many strive, but only those who dedicate themselves to consistent and continued excellence endure and transcend.

This is not a program. It isn't a rule book or a catechism. My hope is that you'll see it as a gift. It comes from my heart, because I believe in what it says. I believe that my experiences can be helpful to anyone in any walk of life. If you agree, if any of it works for you, I will be thrilled — but I won't be surprised.

My hope, my prayer, is that this will inspire and motivate you to identify and nurture qualities in yourself that will help make your abundant dreams come true on your own terms. We have been taught by society to think that “the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow” is money and fame, but the authentic, lasting prize is an acknowledgment of success that is already within you. The knowledge that you have done your very best without having to rely predominantly on outside validation is a powerful asset. Only you can validate yourself, and that validation is enough! That powerful feeling is your pride. Once you learn to tap into that inner resource, your ultimate success is sure to follow. ■

*Alton Fitzgerald White is a singer, actor, dancer who has starred in six smash Broadway hits, including Disney's *The Lion King*, as well as in film and television roles.*

# See Alton Fitzgerald White at the State Education Convention

**Alton Fitzgerald White will give the keynote address** on Friday, January 19 at the State Education Convention in Milwaukee.

Growing up in the housing projects of Cincinnati as the youngest of seven children, Alton dreamt the impossible dream. He wanted to be an actor and singer. But first, he had to conquer his greatest fear – standing on stage, performing in front of others. He did it by redefining what service meant to him. The triple-talented singer, actor, dancer has gone on to star in six smash Broadway hits, including Disney's *The Lion King*, *Miss Saigon*, *The Who's Tommy*, and *The Color Purple*, as well as in film and television roles. He captivates audiences whenever and wherever he performs. In his 4,308 performances as King Mufasa, Alton found a way to bring his best to each and every show using what he calls "the power of redefining service." Alton believes that authentic power is within each of us, the control and focus of it in our hands.

Drawing on his life and career and the rich lore of *The Lion King*, Alton recently released his first book, "My Pride: Mastering Life's Daily Performance." It delivers his message of service — taking responsibility for and deriving happiness from commonplace achievements — as a philosophy that anyone can get through each day with satisfaction, pride and a sense of accomplishment. Whatever your occupation or stage of your career, Alton wants you to know that you too can be a consistent performer and maintain excellence in any endeavor. □



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