



**Leadership from  
the Ground Up**





# 2 HOUR HOUSE

Leadership from the Ground Up

Brian Conaway  
with Jose Feliciano

*2 Hour House: Leadership from the Ground Up*

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Requests for information should be addressed to:

2 Hour House

P. O. Box 108

Whitehouse, TX

75791

[www.2hourhouse.com](http://www.2hourhouse.com)

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## Dedication

*I would like to dedicate this book to my children  
Ashlyn, Taylor, Karsyn and Conley.  
Dream big—anything is possible!*

## 2 Hour House

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I would like to give special recognition to the following individuals who made the 2 Hour House a success.

To my wonderful wife for her encouragement and patience during the two-plus years it took to make this a reality.

To my father, Steve, for teaching me the values it takes to be a great husband, father and leader.

To the entire 2 Hour House Team for being an example of what a dedicated team working together in unison can accomplish. It never would have happened without everyone's involvement. Thank you all for your time and dedication.

To Brad Root and Carey Crist for their enormous time and dedication to this project.

To Jose Feliciano, CFP, for recognizing the leadership principles and life applications involved throughout this project and for inspiring me to write this book.

To Mary Ann Lackland for her desire to make this book a reality.

To Chuck Shinn for teaching me the organizational skills needed to coordinate such a massive undertaking.

To everyone who reads this book. I hope that our story will make a difference in what you do every day. It's not what we accomplish; it's the difference we make in someone's life that is rewarding.

To all the friendships created throughout this project. World Records will come and go, but the memories and friendships that the 2 Hour House created will last a lifetime.

Brian Conaway  
June 2007



## **Leadership from the Ground Up**

### **Introduction**

Something amazing happened on October 1, 2005. What was perceived as an impossible task, building a house in two hours, was in fact, actually achieved. Despite the skeptics, the challenges, and the extreme weather changes, 400-plus volunteering suppliers, friends and civic leaders joined me to fulfill this singular purpose that day. We met at a vacant lot in Tyler, Texas to build in record time, a 2,249 square foot home from the ground up.

What originally started as a lofty goal and charity fundraiser soon transformed into a life-altering, perspective-shifting phenomenon. The greatest outcome wasn't building a house in record time, it was creating a new way of thinking about building – everything. We built bridges between competitive suppliers and lifetime friendships with former acquaintances; we innovated industries and standardized convoluted construction processes. Equally significant, we discovered that a grand purpose pursued by inspired people could make anything possible.

We celebrated and cheered this feat, and all of us were forever changed because of it. Just when I thought it was over, my good friend Jose Feliciano proposed something equally daunting: take the 2 Hour House principles to people – everywhere.

“Brian,” Jose pointed out, “What you learned from this experience about building a 2 Hour House should be shared with business people hungry to build richer lives and better businesses.”

Jose's enthusiasm for taking what we learned and presenting it to entrepreneurs building dreams equaled my passion for building the 2 Hour House. It would take a lot of work to package this experience for executive training. I pointed out to Jose that I already operated a thriving home building company ([www.conawayhomes.com](http://www.conawayhomes.com)) and that he ran a fast-growing wealth management firm ([www.felicianofinancial.com](http://www.felicianofinancial.com)). I added that we both had families and that it was just this side of crazy to start another enterprise, but he would not be swayed or deterred.

He was right: my 2 Hour House experience had little to do with a one-time record-breaking moment for the community and everything to do with forever altering business-building methodology. We could show entrepreneurial leaders how to defy the odds and build what others might perceive as impossible.

So, in late 2007, Jose and I co-founded the 2 Hour House company. The company is designed to reveal the proven eight-phase building process I refined from my experience, packaged with the proven business-building methods Jose developed with his clients over the last 15 years. The 2 Hour House membership-based training program provides the techniques and tools CEOs and spirited entrepreneurs need to build dreams beyond the imagination. We hope you enjoy our story (in this book) but we also hope you will check out our "building" the impossible membership program at [www.2hourhouse.com](http://www.2hourhouse.com).

Dream Big,  
Brian Conaway  
Jose Feliciano

I experienced the miracle from conception to birth. It was simply a match made in heaven. I had wanted our builders association to build a house that year. But Brian let me know he had a little bit larger plan...and so we did. And so we did.

Cherie' Paro  
"The Granite Girl"





# NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE

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Nothing is impossible  
if you believe it can happen

It was 4:30am. I shoved my keys into my pocket that autumn morning and took a deep breath. The distinct smell of wet earth—fresh dew from the night before—filled my senses.

It was another typical East Texas morning. Cows meandered lazily in the nearby pasture while several horses snorted and stretched their stiff muscles. But this morning wasn't like any other morning.

No, this morning we were trying to set a world record. We were going to try to do something so unusual that it would question the impossible.

This morning, the world watched and waited.

Either we would prove the doubters wrong and go down in history. Or we would go up in flames.

Only time, the next few hours to be exact, would tell.

## SETTING A RECORD

“What exactly did you want to do?” Whenever people ask me that, I have to stop and smile.

I remember when I first heard about a Home Builders Association in San Diego who had set a world record by



building a traditional concrete slab house in less than three hours using standard building techniques. That record had stood unchallenged for over twenty years. I knew that I wanted to set a new record. My father had been in the home building industry all of my life and, at that time, I was serving in our local home builders association.

I wholeheartedly believed it could be done. And I knew we would be the ones to do it.

In fact, that's how I started out whenever I talked to anyone about my plans. "We're going to set a new world record. Want to be a part?"

Despite my candor, I realized immediately that this was the most challenging undertaking I'd ever encountered to that point in my professional life. And I also knew that it would likely be the most challenging project for 99% of the people I would need to help me accomplish it!

Still, it didn't take me long to get hooked on the idea.

The presenters at a Chuck Shinn management seminar showed some inspirational footage of how the San Diego team made history from the ground up. As I watched the video, I was intrigued.

Fascinated may be a better word.

Although the purpose of the film was to teach time management skills, I was concentrating on how innovations in the building industry could shave time off that world record. Despite the fact that building codes get more stringent every year, I knew that now, over twenty years later, it was definitely feasible to build an entire slab house in less than three hours. That's roughly the same time it takes to watch a college bowl game or play eighteen holes of golf.

I saw the possibilities. And I was excited. I couldn't wait to return home and start building momentum and enthusiasm for the idea among my colleagues. Traditionally, the president of our Tyler Area Home Builders Association (TABA) chose a project for the association to accomplish. In previous years, we had worked on various philanthropic projects, including a fire safety

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house my father had built in conjunction with the Tyler Fire Department that served as a traveling training and educational resource for children's fire safety. Another year, members of TABA had also donated materials and built cabins for a boys home.

At the time, I was the Secretary/Treasurer of TABA, and I knew that it would be a short two years before I became the president. I was already searching for something to do during my term that no one had ever done before. Something that would bring together the talents and resources our association represented among our 600-plus membership. So, when I heard about this world record from the eighties, it seemed to be the perfect fit for us in 2005.

By the time the inspirational footage was over and the lights came back on in the room, the ideas were flying through my mind. My first thought was, "What will my buddies (and fellow builders) Carey and Brad think about this idea?"

And the second was, "What will our dads say?"

In some ways, I didn't know what to expect from either one.

## **WANT TO SET A RECORD?**

I first pitched the idea to my good friends and colleagues, Brad Root and Carey Crist. I wanted them on my team—they would be crucial to the success of the project. Brad and I had known each other since high school, and Carey was one of my most trusted friends in the business.

I knew they were used to my penchant for challenges, so I didn't hesitate to discuss my plans with them.

Playing video poker with Brad a while later on at a builders show in Las Vegas, I just put it out there. "Want to set a world record?"

I pretended to be intrigued with my poker screen at the same time as my question, letting it hang in the air for a good, long minute. Since we'd been friends so long, I could almost hear him thinking, "*Conaway, that guy...you never know what he's going*



*to come up with next.”*

But I was totally serious. And he knew it.

Before he could answer me, I started in. “When I become the President of the TABA, we’re going to build a house from the ground up and do it in record time,” I continued. “It’s going to be a charity/fundraiser to draw our community together and see something they’ve never seen before. Want in?”

Brad, type A like me, was the first one to speak his support of the idea and gel with the general concepts I came up with later to get it done.

Carey, the more philosophical one among us, was a little more reserved when I sat down with him a few days later. I could tell it would take some time to win him over. In fact, by his own admission, he didn’t even “get it” the first time I explained the full scope of the project.

It was so out of the ordinary in our business to even consider all that would have to take place to pull this off.

Setting up a concrete slab in twenty-two minutes when it usually took several hours to harden? Painting an entire house in less than ten minutes?

But, as Carey would later recall, it wasn’t my grandiose plans that convinced him. I’d had time to prepare a basic flow chart and rough schedule by the time I talked to him. But he wasn’t even all that impressed with the eloquent way I answered the questions he had. What helped him come around was my bedrock confidence that we could do it.

Carey recalled, “What hooked me, and I saw how it hooked other people, was the fact that Brian believed we could do it. He was so confident. I think when Brian proposed this idea to [other people], they didn’t know exactly what hit them. He was obviously completely sold. He was closed. He was a Lay down Larry. And there was no talking him out of it.”

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It was so out of the ordinary in our business to even consider all that would have to take place to pull this off.

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Later, Brad recalled the moment this way. “At the onset, there was no doubt that we could do it.” He added, “It was not a matter of, ‘Could it be done?’ It had been done. The question was could we do it and do it better?”

## INITIAL PLANS

When I started this project, I immediately set three goals. First, this project would set a new world record, and it would take about 1000 workers and volunteers to accomplish tens of thousands of details in order to do it. Of that I was certain. Second, it would involve the builders association but also bring together the entire Tyler community, a growing city close to 100,000 people located two hours east of Dallas. Third, it would be a volunteer event to raise money for several local non-profits including Habitat for Humanity, Azleway Boys Ranch, a faith-based medical clinic called Bethesda Health Clinic, East Texas Food Bank, PATH (People Attempting to Help) and the American Red Cross. I knew we could get many of the materials donated in order to keep costs down. The home could be sold at market value and the money given to the non-profits. I hoped we could already have sold the house by the time it was built.

The founder of U.S. Steel, Charles Schwab, once said, “You can succeed at almost anything for which you have unlimited enthusiasm.” When it came to building what I began to term the 2 Hour House, my enthusiasm was out the roof.

I have always been a can-do guy. A dreamer. A thinker. But one who also gets it done. I never spend too much time with a dream before I start planning exactly what it will take to get there. Step by step, inch by inch. I envision where I want to go and then harness all of my energy to get there.

Maybe that’s part of what made it difficult to understand why some of my colleagues tempered their response with trepidation when I told them about the idea.

After securing my friends, Brad and Carey, my next stop was convincing the Board of Directors for TABA to sign on to



the project. Their first reaction to my proposal was the same as anyone who initially heard about the idea. They said, “You’re crazy. That’s impossible to do.”

I just kept talking.

I talked to them about my three goals and made it clear that there were several other benefits to this kind of project. It would capture local attention for sure, but something like this could reach statewide and national recognition as well. In that sense, we could be an example for other home builders associations in our philanthropic tradition and really showcase what the home building industry was all about.

Something drew them about the brash idea; after all, human beings live for a challenge. But the same things that attracted them were probably the same things that made them extremely nervous.

Was it really possible to trim what was a typical 120-day endeavor (and that was working fast with no changes or delays) into a matter of mere hours? Nothing would be pre-built or pre-assembled. It would take months, even years, to get ready for it. How would we cover the thousands of tiny details? And get several hundred workers lined up to execute them? And who would do all of that—for free?

It must have sounded daunting. Whatever fears I’d had at the beginning, I was already over it by the time I started explaining it and drumming up support. But that wild-eyed look in their faces when I initially sprung the idea on them...that *worried* me a little. At least it gave me pause.

Was I crazy to think like this?

Was it really worth attempting (even with the distinct possibility that we could fail)?

I wouldn’t know until I tried.

## **YOU GOTTA BELIEVE**

“You gotta believe” was the catchphrase of New York Mets relief pitcher Tug McGraw in 1973. The Mets had come from far

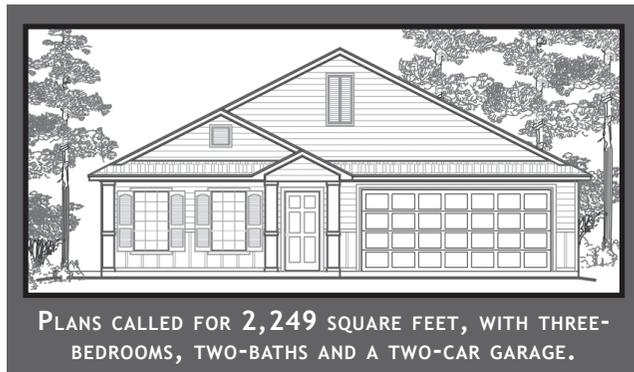
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behind in a crowded field to win the division and the National League pennant.

Honestly, there were times during the next 18 months that “belief” was all we had. I believed it could happen, and I tried to transfer this hope into the other people around me. The Board eventually approved my idea to build a three-bedroom, two-bath, 2,249 square foot two-car garage home in less than three hours. I knew it was up to me to show them how serious I was about the project and begin putting details and plans in place. We scheduled the date of the build almost two years in advance for October of 2005.

During the first few weeks after the Board approved the



project, I scheduled initial planning sessions with Brad and Carey and left each meeting with even greater momentum fueling my steps. We’d been friends for many years, and I think we all knew that if one of us was going to undertake a challenge, we’d want the others to be right there beside us. Win or lose.

Our dads, however, were a different story.

## DADS WEIGH IN

“You’re going to get someone killed.”

That was Brad’s father’s initial reaction when I tossed the idea his way. Brad’s father, a successful high-end luxury home builder, did not mince words.

Even when Brad tried to counter with, “Yeah, Dad, but doesn’t it sound neat?” he met with fatherly resistance.

“Sure,” his dad responded with a glimmer of interest. “But



why would you want to do something like that?”

And then he returned to the line that would ring in our ears for months: “You’re going to get somebody killed.”

We laugh about it now, but deep down we all respected what his dad said at the time. His support of our endeavor would mean a lot—he was older and more experienced than any of us put together. My father, the retired CEO of our home building company, warned me that I had taken on an extremely large goal (which he knew would make me want to do it that much more!). He had been my mentor for all these years, and yet he wasn’t

“You’re  
going  
to get  
somebody  
killed.”

entirely sure at this point that I hadn’t lost my marbles somewhere along the way.

Fortunately, our dads did eventually warm up to the idea and gave us their full support. However, there were plenty of others who remained unconvinced. It would take some major selling on my part to get people to sign on to something of this magnitude.

One thing about me you have to know from the onset is that I never let up. I never give up. I could deal with a little objection or even an outright naysayer more easily than I could accept the slightest doubt in my own heart and mind.

There just wasn’t room.

Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, “Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm.” I didn’t just want to do something good for our community by raising some money. I wanted to do something great. I wanted to break the tape and reach the finish line on a project that would require everything I had to give.

And I didn’t want anyone on the team who didn’t want it as passionately as I did.

## HANDLING THE CRITICS

Theodore Roosevelt once gave a speech on citizenship at the University of Paris in 1910 and included his feelings on critics. He said:

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“It's not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled, or when the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena; whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions and spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best, knows in the end the triumph of high achievement; and who at the worst if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory or defeat.”

I don't know what it is about human nature, but some people don't want you to attempt something extraordinary with your life. They are much more comfortable meeting the status quo day after day; the impossible is just too threatening. So, if you begin to move beyond the acceptable average, they want to drag you down and your dreams, too.

It's not that I didn't expect objections. In anything you do in life, especially something daring and out of the box, there *will* be critics. You just can't let them distract you from your goals or derail your intentions.

In this process, I found that anticipating objections is a successful way to deal with the critics and move forward. The best thing I could do to ward off the critics involved three facts: 1) There will be doubters; 2) They will have tough questions; and 3) It's best to anticipate what those top questions will be and have airtight answers.

In my mind, I tried to see a doubter as just another potential supporter who needed more of the right information. I was convinced that once the information was communicated to them in the right way, they would either support us wholeheartedly or they weren't the best fit for the team.



For instance, one of the examples I often used to explain how an entire house could be built in less than three hours was the sheetrock. Under normal circumstances, two people can hang one piece of sheetrock in a minute. Let's say that every person we assigned to sheetrock the house hung four sheets each. If we had enough people working in a highly organized manner, we could hang the entire house in record time. And I proposed that we would do it this way for every stud, window, piece of trim, light switch and doorstop.

When I explained it like this, people began to see the possibilities. It was exciting to watch their reaction! We took the simple approach that having enough people in the right spots doing the right things the right way could actually make this happen.

This philosophy formed the beginning stages of an enormous schedule and flow chart that identified every step to build a house from the ground up. We counted every second; and every second counted.

What about the ones who didn't understand or support our plan? Well, we had to move forward with or without them. The difference between a potential supporter and a critic is that a critic does not want to be confused with the facts. Their mind is made up. It is not worth your energy to address every question the critics may have. However, with a potential supporter, your careful preparation and presentation of the facts will make all the difference in the world.

Interestingly, through this process I also learned that just because someone says they will support your endeavor (and even invests time and energy into it), it doesn't really mean they believe in it like you do. And that's okay. Keep moving.

I met many people throughout this process who didn't really believe it could be done but they supported us anyway! They

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It is not worth your energy to address every question the critics may have.

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were involved, but their hearts weren't really committed. Like children at the pool on the first day of summer, they stuck their big toe in the water to test it. However, the vast majority of people who worked on the 2 Hour House were just the opposite. They were doing half-gainers and cannonballs off the diving board before they were even sure there was water in the pool!

## TRUTH IN CRITICISM

I heard what the doubters, criticizers and opposition had to say, and I even listened for a kernel of truth in it to see if I was off base. For example, when Brad's father initially painted a picture of mass chaos leading to massive injuries, safety became an even higher priority in our minds.

We had to ask ourselves a specific question early on, "Was there potential for injury in this undertaking?" With a 30,000 pound roof section hanging in the air by the arm of a crane and a thousand people milling nearby, the answer was "yes." Definitely.

I have a friend who points out that we have "two ears and one mouth for a reason." In other words, we ought to listen twice as much as we talk. Do you listen for the caution in every criticism? We did, and then we discussed whether or not the caution was valid.

Sometimes it was obvious that we should blow it off and forget it. But other times we had to ask, "Was there a truth to apply? A lesson to learn? A base to cover?" We didn't let any critique go to waste...we shrugged off what was dispensable criticism and held onto whatever improvements we could make. In this way, we made it so that even our opponents helped us tighten up and get better.

These categories represented three pressing questions for which we knew we had to have answers. Our potential supporters (again, my definition for a doubter) wanted to know three things. How did we plan to have the concrete set up in 22 minutes? How could we tape and bed all of the sheetrock in the home in less



than 15 minutes? How would we paint wall-to-wall in less than 10 minutes?

According to Brad, the answers to those questions were the key to securing early buy in. “When we realized we *could* do [those three things], we knew we could communicate how to do it to the people we needed buy in from...it opened their eyes and pushed them out of the box.” We answered their questions by designing a system that would pull it off in record time.

(And as it turned out, 10 minutes was more than enough time to paint the house!)

## THE BIG QUESTION: HOW?

From the beginning, it became obvious that even the most talented workers, engineers and sub-contractors were not going to build this house in record time. We could not point to a crack team of painters or contractors to address all the questions sufficiently. We would have to have something more.

Certainly, our plan was to have top quality people on our team; but we had no expectations that they were going to build this house in less than three hours by themselves.

No way.

We knew this house would be built in world record time not by the best human effort, but only if we had a system in place. Clever people would not build it, although we had the most talented people on task; only a foolproof system would. Therefore, we set our sights on designing a no-fail plan for every detail surrounding the project. I didn't even care who was going to do what...I would worry about that later. I mainly wanted to know everything I could about what was involved, and then I knew we could put people into action, tackling it piece by piece.

We spent two years developing a process to include every stick of wood, sheet of drywall and drop of paint that would come into the house. We knew where it would go, when it would go there and exactly how much time it would take to do it.

And then we assigned a person to every piece. The result was

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far beyond what several hundred volunteers could imagine... even with all of their best talents combined.

You see, the system clocked in early and stayed late. It worked rain or shine. It didn't grow weary or need to sleep in, even after two solid years of planning. The system needed to run on its own, once the clock started on the day of the 2 Hour House. There would be no time to pull out the plans and blueprints to see what to do next. The system that we designed set the new world record and it allowed all of us to celebrate.

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I didn't even care who was going to do what... I would worry about that later.

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## A SYSTEM TO BUILD A HOUSE

Which brings me back to the morning of October 1, 2005. We chose to stage our production on three adjoining lots in a developing subdivision because no other houses were around it. We could park trucks, build a 2,000-seat grandstand and not worry about crowding in on the neighbors' houses. We had completed a practice house two weeks earlier (which was a total disaster...more on that later), and now the morning had finally arrived.

It seemed like a dream...I remember how the dawn crept up on the horizon and one million thoughts jockeyed for position in my mind, vying for my attention.

Snapshots of the last of the flow charts and production schedules panned by...only to be interrupted by one, pressing thought. Something most everyone there that day had on their mind: the concrete. Would it really harden enough to build on it in only 22 minutes?

Suddenly, headlights sliced the darkness wide open. One after the other, caravans of heavy equipment trucks, big rigs, vans and carloads of people began to arrive. And an endless parade of pick ups.

It was time.

# To THINK ABOUT

- What is your dream?
- What would you be doing right now with your life if you could do anything in the world?
- Who has told you it can't be done?
- Who would support you in this dream?
- How would your dream benefit others?



## NOTES

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