

## Welfare Cheese to Fine Caviar: How to Achieve Your Dreams Despite Your Upbringing

**Thomas Wideman**

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*Welfare Cheese to Fine Caviar is an inspirational memoir that also serves as a self-improvement resource for others.*

Chemical engineer Thomas Wideman's motivational memoir *Welfare Cheese to Fine Caviar* focuses on self-improvement and the successful, faith-filled negotiation of life challenges.

Wideman recalls being raised in the projects of Greenville, South Carolina, where he watched his mother struggle to stretch the family's welfare dollars to their breaking point. Recollections of a childhood spent in rough neighborhoods where drugs and violence stripped hope away are followed by accounts from his college years. Then, Wideman's story continues into his professional life and relationship building. Tying each section of the book together is a focus on Wideman's unwavering faith and trust in God to guide him toward a life lived with integrity and humility.

Each of the book's sections open with remembered incidents or stories about Wideman's family or career. These are designed to illustrate particular struggles or challenges and are written in parable form—both brief and accessible. Most are effective in getting their perspectives across, though a few are too hesitant in their deliveries, as with an entry that dances around the realities of working in a disrespectful, prejudicial work environment.

Reflections follow the stories, often posed as questions or prompts for the audience to muse about the lessons learned. These are followed by applications, or guides on how to convert the lessons into real-life changes in one's behavior or attitude. Next come prompts toward personal affirmations, which are structured as mantras, followed by suggestions for applying the lessons in professional environments to generate personal success. Recommendations for additional reading and success tips also play in, though most of the recommended books are standards, including Stephen Covey's *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* and Richard Carlson's *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff*.

While some of the book's supplementary materials and exercises are useful, not all of the follow-up sections will be beneficial to wider audiences. The book's reflection and application pairings are often thoughtful and engaged, but they include some reductive suggestions, including that substance abuse—a complex issue—can be dealt with by staying focused on a long-term goal. They are also sometimes undone by their overconfidence of hindsight, with their stories remembered from a position of maturity that feels artificial. Nonetheless, the book's language and delivery are strong. Wideman is a natural storyteller, and he frames his story in a compelling, informative, and inspirational way.

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KLAY DYER (March 31, 2021)

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