

Book Summaries

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BOOKS

Business, Success, Self-Help,
Psychology & Biography

Robbie Jacobs
Volume 1

For Ava

“Growth is the great separator between those who succeed and those who do not. When I see a person beginning to separate themselves from the pack, it’s almost always due to personal growth.”

John C. Maxwell

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Business

“Stopping advertising to save money is like stopping your watch to save time.”
– Henry Ford

Find Your Why

Simon Sinek

Do you know why you get up in the morning, go to work, eat, sleep and repeat? In other words, do you have some sense of direction and purpose in your personal and professional life? If you can't answer a clear and loud "yes" to these questions, don't worry too much; many people don't know why they do what they do and, as a result, don't return home from work at the end of each day feeling fulfilled.

Simon Sinek; a TED Talk favourite of mine; will explain to you how to Find Your WHY, so that you can wake up in the morning feeling inspired to go to work. You will discover how to realise your WHY and how to start living by it, whether it means gathering stories from your past to discover your WHY or sharing it with a group of strangers.

Knowing your WHY means having a clear purpose, and this makes you and your business more appealing. If you have ever felt lost or unfulfilled in life, it might be a result of not identifying purpose in your life – or, as the author Simon Sinek likes to call it, not knowing your WHY.

The three most powerful points I took from the book were;

1. If you dread going to work and find your job exhausting, then you are clearly doing something that does not speak to your WHY
2. Another person who knows you well can be a valuable resource in identifying your WHY.
3. When you fully realise your WHY, you can start thriving in both your personal and professional life.

Finding your WHY can be challenging, but once you have it in your life, you can wake up each morning with purpose and determination. Sinek discovered his WHY after he had lost all passion for his work. At the time, he was feeling depressed and getting lots of advice from people, but none of it felt applicable to his situation. After some soul-searching, he realised his WHY was to inspire others, and once he took this to heart, he began to see his life more clearly and with more optimism.

Knowing his WHY gave Sinek's life direction, and he soon found that this confidence was appealing to others. This not only applies to people, but also to companies. A case in point is Apple, which has strong competitors offering cheaper products with more features. But Apple's customers are loyal and inspired by their motto "Think Different," which perfectly describes their WHY.

Customers would rather give money to a business with a progressive identity than save a few bucks buying from a more generic company. To see how compelling a strong purpose can be in the marketplace, Sinek says that we need to look at two advertising pitches for a paper company.

The first one highlights the paper's superior quality and affordable price; the second one highlights the company's mission of creating a fine product that allows people to document their ideas and share them with the world. This second pitch is far more compelling and attractive, simply because it explains the company's WHY.

Sometimes we need to advertise ourselves as well, especially when we are in a job interview. When a client of one of the authors named Emily found herself shortlisted for a job and sitting in front of a panel of executives, she was asked what made her unique. This was Emily's chance to share her WHY, so she spoke about her eagerness to work with others and help people become the best version of themselves. With her clear understanding of her WHY, it is no surprise that Emily got the job.

Unlock your WHY by looking to your past

If you dread going to work and find your job exhausting, then you are clearly doing something that does not speak to your WHY. Once you find a job, you are passionate about, even the most repetitive and banal tasks become easy to tackle. A great way to find that passion is to work your way through the golden circle. The golden circle was introduced in Simon Sinek's previous book, *Start With WHY*, and illustrates how we tend to operate on three levels. The first level, the outer circle, is all about "WHAT" we do, while the middle circle is "HOW" we do it. Finally, at the centre is the golden circle, which determines "WHY" we do it.

When all these circles are aligned, you will find passion for your work. While on a flight, the author met a man named Steve who had been at his job for 23 years and was still excited by his work. How is this possible? Well, WHAT Steve did was produce steel; HOW he did it was by manufacturing a pure product that is easier to recycle and creates less pollution; and WHY he does it is to keep the environment clean for future generations.

Steve's WHY has kept him energised and passionate for over two decades – but if you are still wondering how to find your WHY, try looking into your past. In helping one young woman identify her WHY, the author performed a discovery exercise that involved the woman sharing personal stories from her past. This revealed painful, but nevertheless useful, information, as many of her stories highlighted her desire to protect her younger sister from their abusive father. So, a strong WHY for this young woman would be a career in protecting vulnerable people who cannot protect themselves.

An outside perspective can help you uncover your WHY

If you have gone over a dozen stories from your past and still cannot find your WHY, do not panic. Sometimes it is difficult to identify a common theme in the things that are important to us, and if this is the case, it might be time to bring in a fresh perspective. Another person who knows you well can be a valuable resource in identifying your WHY. This person does not need to be someone you are intimate with, just someone who's curious and observant. It can help if the person you are talking to is not overly familiar with your background and is someone who will ask thoughtful questions – and even take detailed notes.

Asking specific questions is very important to finding your WHY, and these questions often lead to vital details and intense feelings. With the right probing questions, something like "As a child, I loved visiting my cousins during summer vacation," can become, "I loved visiting my cousins because we could explore the woods along their property and find fascinating things in nature." With these details, common themes can emerge and point the way to your WHY, says Sinek.

A good listener who is engaged and asks questions will draw parallels between different stories, even when they might seem like completely unrelated stories to you. This was the case with Todd, who shared three very different stories.

The first one was about losing his basketball scholarship due to his addictive behaviours; the second was about feeling frustrated and useless while working as a bartender; and the third was about coming home from work and giving all his tips to a local girl who had set up a lemonade stand, which made him feel useful.

Listening to his stories, the author identified a running theme that pointed to Todd's WHY, which is his desire to do work that really matters and to help others do more with their life.

Why Discovery Workshops can help businesses and teams find their WHY

Even if you have found a profession you love, you can still end up feeling frustrated and disheartened

if you are working for a company that does not have a clear vision, or WHY. Even worse, that company might be your own! To prevent this from happening, there is a simple WHY Discovery Workshop you can run to share different stories and form a strong WHY for your company. One particularly memorable workshop was held by the espresso machine company, La Marzocco. Employees were urged to share stories that reflected how it felt to work for the company. One employee recalled a photography event at the store that brought the staff together and made them feel connected.

This story triggered many others just like it, and La Marzocco's WHY statement soon came into focus: to bring people together over coffee for lively conversation. Another situation a company can find itself in is to have a WHY, or mission statement, that was once clear but has since changed with the times or fallen by the wayside. A WHY Discovery Workshop can help here, too. Cuestamoras is a self-service supermarket that Enrique Uribe brought to Costa Rica in the 1950's. Recently, however, he felt his business was no longer in touch with its initial vision.

So, Uribe and his brothers decided to take part in a workshop that helped them re-identify and clarify what their business stood for now. By sharing their stories of what the store meant to them today, the WHY became a spark for innovation and helped create opportunities for everyone in the community. Uribe is not so young anymore, but he can now rest easy, knowing that his brothers and children can always look back at his original concepts for WHY Cuestamoras began. His vision will continue to inspire future generations and help them stay on the right path.

A WHY Discovery Workshop can help a business define their corporate culture, as well as their mission statement and vision for the future – all of which will make it easier for employees to make the right decisions on the ground.

HOW's bring the WHY to life and understanding them can improve teamwork

It is also important not to lose sight of the other parts of the golden circle. So, once you understand your purpose in life, it is time to look to the HOW's. After all, HOW's are the actions that bring the WHY to life, which make them a crucial part of the broader process. To uncover your HOW's, think about your day-to-day activities and how your behaviour is helping you achieve your WHY. Co-author Peter Docker's WHY is to help make it possible for others to do extraordinary things, and he has a few HOW's to make this happen. These include reaching new frontiers, creating strong relationships, simplifying things, and never losing sight of the larger context.

Knowing your co-workers' HOW's can be a major advantage as well. Peter often works with David Mead at "Start with WHY" events. At these events, everyone's "WHY" is the same, since the goal is to help people unlock their potential. But Peter and David really make these events a success by knowing how the other works and how to combine their skills to have the greatest effect.

For example, there was once a client who wanted to bring 150 people to a workshop that is normally designed for a maximum of 40 people. What is more, the workshop generally lasts a full day, but the client only had four hours to spare. Peter and David put their heads together and each one relied on the other's HOW's to bring 150 WHY's to life.

David knows how to be innovative, and he used this HOW to adapt the content to fit 150 people in four hours and still have it be a transformative event. Peter knows how to make things simple, which was extremely useful in this situation, particularly with getting everyone on board with the instructions and requirements of the workshop.

To know someone's HOW's is to understand the way they work, and with this knowledge, you can play to their strengths, divide tasks, and collaborate effectively so that every challenge can be turned into a success.

HOW's can help you in everyday decision-making

Every now and again, we are presented with a tough decision, whether it is a project proposal, partnership or job offer. Having a keen understanding of your own HOW's is key to avoiding disasters and making the right choices that will allow you to flourish, says Sinek. To really understand your HOW's, you need to break them down to their core. The author knows how to focus on the long term, but this HOW can be broken down – more precisely, Sinek focuses on creating products, services and ideas that will continue to be used long after he is gone. It also means he is less focused on deadlines and ways to make a quick profit, and more interested in building lasting momentum for his company.

Getting to the bottom of your HOW's isn't just about self-awareness – it can also reveal where opportunities lie. By being aware of his HOW's, Sinek can better determine which opportunities are aligned with his WHY, or his overall goals. A few years ago, Sinek was approached by an executive of a major corporation to start a new company that would “put people first.” Since his WHY is to inspire others to achieve their dreams, this was a tempting offer. But Sinek dug deeper into his potential partner's motivations and began to realise he was more interested in making a quick profit, which is not how Sinek does things.

Another one of Sinek's HOW's is to look at things from a different or unconventional perspective, which was yet another approach his potential partner was not interested in. So, knowing that this project was not aligned with his HOW's or his WHY, it was obvious that this opportunity would not be a good fit for him. In the end, he was able to make the right choice and politely declined. Sure, the partnership would have looked great on his resume and expanded his list of clients, but he also knows it would have been a bad experience. If you find yourself in a situation that does not feel right, you can use your HOW's to identify an imbalance and hopefully make the necessary adjustments to straighten things out.

Once you discover your WHY, it is important to share it

Part of the journey to reaching a fulfilling life is uncovering your WHY and understanding your HOW's. But the hard work does not end there; next comes the task of sharing it with the world. Start by offering your WHY statement to those who ask, “What do you do?” This is a common question in any social situation, and it is an opportunity to start getting comfortable with expressing your mission in life. Try it with the person sitting next to you on a plane, a fellow guest at a party or a stranger in a waiting room.

You might be a little uncomfortable at first, but that is the good thing about strangers – chances are you will never see them again. It also gives you the chance to fine-tune your WHY into a message you feel comfortable and confident saying. More importantly, sharing your WHY with the world will push you to commit to it and back up your words with actions. The more you give voice to your intentions, the more likely you will be to follow through with them.

Also, if your WHY statement is something like “helping people become the best version of themselves,” you could imagine that some might roll their eyes when they hear it. Therefore, you will want to have some actions that back up this bold assertion. As for your business, there are several reasons to constantly refer to its mission statement. For starters, it will make it readily apparent when a product or service becomes outdated, or no longer relevant. But it's also useful in matters of human resources, such as knowing what to look for during the hiring process or recognising when an employee's WHY isn't in line with the company's.

Finally, you will be sure to find the most productive arrangements possible when you can match the WHY's of your staff with the roles that best suit them. So, the more others are familiar with your WHY and the more familiar you are with the WHY's of others, the better off we will all be, both personally and professionally.

What I took from it

Not knowing your purpose in life, or your WHY, can be a frustrating and confusing experience for individuals, businesses, and teams. But there are ways to look within, understand your WHY and begin to live a motivated, passionate, and productive life. When you fully realise your WHY, you can start thriving in both your personal and professional life.

To find your WHY, look to your most formative stories. Our stories are an important part of the WHY discovery. When sharing your stories with someone who can help you discover important personal themes, it is important to share both good experiences and bad ones. They could be from your childhood or adulthood, as long as they played an important role in shaping the person you have become.

First Break All The Rules

Marcus Buckingham

The role of a manager in a workplace is not an easy one. At the end of the day, the performance of employees is the primary factor impacting the success of a business, and it is the manager's job to ensure that performance hits its peak. So says Don Clifton in his book, *First, Break All The Rules*. Published in 1999. Much has been written about how managers can fulfil their role effectively, but what if all the conventional wisdom about management is in fact wrong, asks Clifton.

In his book, Clifton will explain on a practical level how managers can find the right employees for the right roles and keep them satisfied with their jobs. You will also find out how to walk the tightrope of allowing employees independence while ensuring the quality of their work through guidance and control. Finally, you will also find out how to deal with situations where an employee is not performing in line with expectations.

The six most powerful points I took from the book were;

1. The first thing to understand is that a manager is not a leader. While great managers and great leaders have much in common, a crucial difference between them lies in their focus. Whereas leaders look outward, towards the future, great managers mostly look inward, at what already exists and can be turned into performance. Whereas leaders must be visionary, great managers must be empathetic.
2. Managers are mediators. They attend to the needs of both the company and the employee and address the interests of both. The key to a successful business lies in successful mediation, bringing the needs of the employee and the needs of the company into alignment
3. Although all great managers have their own individual styles of management, there is one central maxim they all share - every person is unique and therefore needs to be managed in a unique way
4. Performing at maximum level at a job is possible only in cases where talent and job demands are well-matched. Successful management is all about focusing on people's natural set of talents, then making use of them
5. Ultimately, the results of management lie in the employees' performance. For this reason, great managers shift their attention away from controlling employees and onto employees' performance results and outcomes. Yet despite their lack of direct control over the work determining performance results, managers nevertheless remain accountable for such results. So rather than establish rules that require, for example, salesclerks to follow a certain selling style, the manager should only define the outcomes she wants to see. The most important thing is that, in the end, the desired outcome is reached.
6. They also spend a lot of time with their best employees, trying to understand not only their talents, but all aspects of their lives.

Employee satisfaction is the key to a successful business

There are many ways to increase revenues for a company, yet most of these techniques result in only short-lived growth. In fact, a successful business – one which can sustain growth – can be based only on consistently good performance, which has much more to do with how things are managed within the business, says Clifton.

In other words, at the heart of a successful business is a strong and high-performing workplace. The success of any business can be based only on a revenue stream that is robust and sustainable. Such a stream is not generated by techniques like slashing prices or opening a new location but is the result of a growing base of loyal customers. Growing such a loyal customer base requires that those customers feel satisfied with a company's excellent products and services.

So, how can a company create such a strong, high-performing workplace? The key lies in satisfied employees. The more satisfied an employee is, the more she will contribute to building and maintaining a strong workplace, says Clifton.

Why is that? For one thing, satisfied employees are more engaged in their work, and because of their stronger commitment they greatly contribute to higher productivity. Another reason is that employees' commitment often has an indirect effect on company profits. A satisfied, engaged employee is more likely to save energy (by, for example, making sure to turn off the lights) and negotiate prices, and less likely to steal from the company.

Finally, such engaged employees will probably also stay longer with the company and are more likely to be friendlier towards customers because they care greatly about how the company is perceived. So, in order to be successful in the long term, companies must build strong workplaces where performance is consistently high. Ensuring that employees are satisfied in their roles is a sure-fire way of creating such a workplace.

The manager determines the degree of employee satisfaction

If the key to a successful business is the satisfaction of its employees, then what is the key to that satisfaction? The manager, says Clifton. This is because the manager is responsible for defining the employees' work environment, creating an atmosphere that will lead to employees' contentment. Indeed, an employee's satisfaction is influenced far more by the role of her immediate manager than by the policies and procedures of the company, and this is because managers transform the work ethos of the company into practices and guidelines.

For instance, in terms of practices, this transformation often involves translating new company strategies into concrete goals employees can focus on. For example, large technology companies no longer focus on producing innovative products, but instead aim to make their product the standard. When turning this new strategy into a concrete guideline, the sales manager must, for instance, make sure his salesclerks tell customers about the product's compatibility with other gadgets.

And in terms of guidelines, the benefits of a manager who knows, trusts, and invests in her employees outweighs, for those workers, any employee-unfriendly company regulations. For example, says Clifton; consider the manager of a large media company that did not give pay raises to designers unless they were promoted to management level. The main problem here was that the designers who performed excellently received no reward for doing so. To resolve the issue and reward these high-performing workers, the manager invented a new job position in which designers could continue designing but were also responsible for sharing their insights with new designers – thus making the job appear like a management role.

As these examples show, managers oversee transforming the workplace into more than just a place to make a living. And although no one should be willing to work at a company which pays poorly, what is more valuable to employees is a workplace that offers a sense of purpose and the potential for self-expression.

The work of the manager is centred on mediating, not leading

To become a great manager, you must first let go of popular management principles and learn what the essence of your job really is. The first thing to understand is that a manager is not a leader. While great managers and great leaders have much in common, a crucial difference between them lies in their focus. Whereas leaders look outward, towards the future, great managers mostly look inward, at what already exists and can be turned into performance. Whereas leaders must be visionary, great managers must be empathetic.

In short, managers deal with people, and their job is to find, focus and keep good employees. However, if managers are not leaders then what exactly are they? Managers are mediators. They attend to the needs of both the company and the employee and address the interests of both. They ensure the workplace atmosphere is conducive not only to hitting the desired economic targets, but also to making each team member feel productive and essential.

In negotiating both sides, managers try to find a point of convergence – the point at which business demands and employees are brought together productively. In this sense, managers can be seen as “catalysts.” Like a catalyst in chemistry, the manager facilitates a reaction between two discrete elements, which (although involving just the two parties) nevertheless requires an additional something to get the process started.

As you can see, the key to a successful business lies in successful mediation, bringing the needs of the employee and the needs of the company into alignment. In this regard, managers play the central role, by finding, focusing, and keeping good employees.

What talents do your staff have

Although all great managers have their own individual styles of management, there is one central maxim they all share - every person is unique. They have a unique way of thinking and relating to the world and are motivated in ways specific to them. In fact, studies show that during the first 15 years of a person's life, the brain's synaptic connections are carved in a highly individual way, and that after that age people are not capable of changing much mentally.

Furthermore, everyone's unique nature includes talents and “non-talents.”, says Clifton. Talents should not be considered special abilities possessed only by gifted people. For instance, the word “talent” should not be used to describe Mozart or Einstein, says Clifton. A talent, rather, means every recurring pattern of thought, feeling or behaviour that can be productively applied.

For example, some people are naturally outgoing, and would therefore make perfect sales reps. But people also have “non-talents” – the lack of such a recurring pattern. Some people are unbelievably messy, yet not being able to keep a clean desk does not mean that such people will not meet their deadlines.

There are three types of talents; striving, thinking, and relating. Striving talents define a person's motivation – such as competitiveness. Such people are motivated by the goal of being better than others. Thinking talents define how someone approaches any mental work. Some have the talent of being focused, while others can leave options open.

Finally, relating talents define communication habits; some people have the talent of confronting people, others of avoiding confrontation. In a work environment, the first kind of person might cause friction, whereas the latter will contribute to a pleasant working atmosphere.

For instance, she might be the kind of person who brings homemade cake to the office. Contrary to popular belief, people cannot become everything they want to be. However, each person has a distinct set of talents – a fact all great managers know and make the most of.

Managers must consider each employee's unique talents

The fact that each person has his or her unique and unchangeable set of behaviours means that, for managers, this must be translated into management guidelines. This is because each employee's unique nature plays a crucial role in their individual job performance.

For example, although accumulated experience can contribute to a performance increase, it is the

employee's unique talents that determine how well they perform. Performing at maximum level at a job is possible only in cases where talent and job demands are well-matched. Consider a common task of nurses: giving injections. The more injections a nurse performs, the better he gets at them. However, if a nurse lacks the required empathetic talent, he will never be able to relate to his patients the way that care workers are required to do. Thus, his non-talent has become a weakness, and he will never succeed as a nurse.

How, then, can managers best deal with the situation where every employee is naturally talented in unique and different ways? They should capitalize on them. Successful management is all about focusing on people's natural set of talents, then making use of them. Managers must establish techniques which allow their employees to use and develop their innate and unique talents, rather than neglecting such uniqueness and trying to force-fit employees into a certain mould. But not only do great managers capitalize on their employees' uniquely different talents, they also redress the fact that employees have non-talents by preventing them from developing into weaknesses. For managers to put employees' natural talents to use, they can follow these four general guidelines.

- Select for talent
- Define the right outcomes
- Focus on strength
- Find the right fit

Great managers find people who have the right talent for the job

As we have seen, the snug fit of an employee's talents with company demands contributes greatly to good performance. But how do great managers find such employees? And how do they decide which qualities they are looking for; asks Clifton.

First, by being aware of the different kinds of talent a job position requires. For each position, they should consider at least one critical talent in each of the talent categories (striving, thinking, and relating). In order to determine the appropriate talent for the job, great managers consider not only the job title and description, but also the culture and ethos of the company, and the team which the new employee will join. For example, in any given team, distinct roles are required. A team consisting of people who tend to avoid confrontation might benefit from an employee with the relating talent of bringing issues to the surface.

Second, great managers conduct job interviews in a way that allows the candidate to reveal their personality. To this end, they do not put candidates under stress, base their evaluations only on appearance, or judge candidates hastily. Great managers know that people need time to adjust to the often-awkward interview setting, and that if they put people under stress, they will end up evaluating whether the talent can perform under stress. Of course, such a talent might be crucial for some job positions, but certainly not for all of them' says Clifton. Furthermore, by focusing only on this quality, the manager can blind herself towards a candidate's other, potentially well-fitting talents.

Another interview technique great managers use is to ask open-ended questions – those which prompt the interviewee to answer in a personal way. And when considering the candidate's answers, great managers look for specificity and "top-of-mind" responses, as these guarantee the answers are more personal. In sum, managers must find a way to ensure that, whatever work needs to be done, it should be done by employees with the talent most suited to succeeding in that task.

Great managers keep their staff in flow

Gathering a team of talented employees is not enough. Managers must also make sure that employees' talents are used properly. What often gets in the way of achieving this is the conventional career path – a model of progress with many flaws. What are those flaws?

First, just because an employee excels at a certain job does not mean that they will excel in a higher position. One rung in the career ladder does not necessarily lead to another. Second, the conventional path limits prestige to those who manage to climb the ladder, thus generating conflict as co-workers compete for the limited, higher positions. Finally, this system overemphasizes the value of experience, leading to a “hunt for marketable skills and experiences”; if an employee has managed to climb a rung of the ladder, this is interpreted as a gain in marketable skills.

Great managers have little use for the conventional career path. Instead, they use a range of techniques to establish alternative paths that better suit the employee. In doing this, great managers create an environment where money and prestige are spread equally throughout the company, and, because of that, the employee is much freer to base her career choices on her talents.

One of these techniques is to define graded levels of achievement. This technique is practiced in many law firms, where promotion makes a significant difference to prestige and salary but not to the work itself. Another technique is broadbanding the pay structure: the pay for each position is structured so that the top-end of a lower-level position overlaps the bottom-end of the position above. In this way, excellent performance in a lower-level position becomes more lucrative than poor performance at a higher-level position. Great managers know that the conventional career path is full of wrongheaded assumptions, so they try to make it possible for their employees to climb up the career ladder while always doing the work that best suits their talents.

Great managers focus on reaching desired outcomes, not on controlling their employees

Ultimately, the results of management lie in the employees’ performance. For this reason, great managers shift their attention away from controlling employees and onto employees’ performance results and outcomes. Behind this is the manager’s awareness that they have only limited control over workers. For a start, managers are not the ones who do the work that may lead to the results they desire. All they can do is motivate their employees to do it. Thus, the manager’s control should be reconceptualized as a mediated form of control – or, “remote control.”

Yet despite their lack of direct control over the work determining performance results, managers nevertheless remain accountable for such results. Therefore, they must focus on the desired outcomes the work is intended to produce. Great managers define these desired outcomes for employees and allow them to find their own ways of reaching them.

Often, there is no one right way to accomplish such goals. So rather than establish rules that require, for example, salesclerks to follow a certain selling style, the manager should only define the outcomes she wants to see. This allows her sales staff to choose the selling style they are most comfortable with. There are many advantages to this approach. One is that it is efficient, because the manager does not waste time by devising and trying to enforce a style of working. Another advantage is that it encourages employees to take responsibility, and thus attracts responsible employees. By defining the outcome, great managers create a work environment where employees feel motivated to achieve, to move towards a definite goal without being told how to get there.

Finally, such a work environment helps employees to become aware of their talents, as they are put to the test. Great managers know that they do not need to establish a strict, clear method for achieving a desired result. The most important thing is that, in the end, the desired outcome is reached.

Great managers establish basic rules that ensure a baseline of customer satisfaction

While great managers allow employees to be individuals, that does not mean employees are free to do whatever they wish. Indeed, in terms of certain aspects, there are some rules employees must adhere to.

First, any rules concerning accuracy and safety must be followed. For example, banks have defined regulatory steps and strict internal guidelines to ensure money is handled securely and precisely. Second, any rules essential to industry or company standard must be adhered to, as this ensures the legitimacy of the company and its comparability to other companies on the market. For example, accountants must know and apply the rules of double-entry bookkeeping, and engineers must ensure the product will operate on the standard electrical frequency.

Such rules represent the minimum standard for meeting and satisfying customer expectations, which revolve around accuracy, availability, partnership, and advice. The most basic factors here are accuracy and availability; they meet the minimum requirement for customer satisfaction. For example, it is obvious that if a customer wants her car wheels changed, the workshop must have wheels in stock and a mechanic who'll do the job correctly.

The rules that great managers insist their employees obey all relate to those two basic factors. But to achieve maximum customer satisfaction, much still lies in the hands of the employee. For example, says Clifton; the customer wanting her wheels exchanged might become a maximally satisfied customer if the mechanic exceeds the customer's expectations by offering advice on how to make wheels last longer, or simply involves the waiting customer in a nice conversation.

Furthermore, if the motor mechanic has the additional talent of being outgoing, they might even transform the customer's waiting time into a pleasant experience. Following these basic guidelines ensures the minimum performance results, and the baseline for customer satisfaction. As for the rest, employees must be allowed to follow their talents.

Great managers focus on excellent employees, who they try to develop and learn from

Great managers establish successful, personal relationships with employees, and they do this in order to help those employees to develop. They also spend a lot of time with their best employees, trying to understand not only their talents, but all aspects of their lives. It is only by knowing their employees this well that great managers can choose the right ways to develop them.

For instance, it is only by knowing what is important to employees that the manager can motivate or reward them appropriately. What is more awkward than rewarding a worker with a gift she does not like? If an excellent though naturally shy employee is rewarded with a very public display of appreciation, this will at best make her uncomfortable, and at worst, misunderstood. When it comes to finding out how to improve employees' performance, great managers refer to excellent employees, not past mistakes, or average employees. Why? Firstly, learning from mistakes can lead to wrong assumptions. Say you are observing nurses with emotional relationships to their patients, but you notice also that they become so overwhelmed they cannot do their job. You might conclude that forming emotional relationships is a bad thing. But you would be wrong.

The truth is that forming strong emotional relationships with patients is a key talent which excellent nurses possess. The problem is that you observed only bad nurses, and with those nurses this talent for emotional connection can develop in the wrong way. Secondly, establishing business goals based on average employee performance will lead you to underestimate what is possible. It is only by learning from excellent employees that the criteria for excellence can be discovered. Excellent nurses show that an appropriate relationship with patients is needed for care work, and excellent workers likewise show that performance can be improved continually.

As we can see, high-performing employees are worth learning from and about. By doing so, these employees can be helped to perform better, and they can also help managers to understand how they achieve excellence.

Great managers carefully analyse poor performance and work around employees' non-talents

Because great managers focus on performance, they immediately address any performance that is not meeting their expectations. Rather than drawing hasty conclusions about poor performance, great managers first analyse the situation. For instance, they will try to determine whether poor performance is caused by lack of teachable skills or knowledge. If so, the right training will likely improve performance. But they also question their own work, wondering whether it was an error in management that led to a poorly performing employee. Yet, what if instead of being caused by lack of skills, or by bad management, poor performance is caused by an employee's non-talent? Since no one's perfect, nor has all the requisite talents to excel in a certain position, this might not be a particularly unusual situation.

So, what do great managers do in those cases, asks Clifton. They try to "manage around" the non-talent. They do this by, for example, building up a support system to alleviate the employee's weakness or make it irrelevant (e.g. a spell check software for a bad speller). Or they find the employee a complementary partner, forming a team in which each member's specific non-talent is supported by the talent of the other. However, in those cases where a non-talent proves to be a real weakness, great managers do not hesitate to let go of the employee. Where a certain talent is an essential requirement for a job position, an employee who does not naturally possess this talent is better off leaving the position.

Of course, this does not mean the employee is a generally useless person. It simply means that their talents can be applied more productively elsewhere. Great managers do not feel bad about being tough because they do not blame the employee. In fact, if they blame anyone, it is themselves because they made a casting mistake.

What I took from it

Each person has a unique set of talents which make him or her the right fit for a certain job. Successful management encourages and helps employees to develop these innate talents and to become even better at what – thanks to their natural inclinations – they are already good at.

Select for talent. When recruiting, one of the most important things to remember is to "select for talent." The unique talents of candidates and the job they are applying for must make a good fit. So, during the job interview, ask open-ended questions and listen to specifics to discover the candidate's talents.

Good To Great

Jim Collins

Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don't, is a management book by Jim C. Collins that describes how companies transition from being good companies to great companies, and how most companies fail to make the transition. The book was published on October 16, 2001.

"Greatness" is defined by Collins, as financial performance several multiples better than the market average over a sustained period. Collins finds the main reason certain companies become great is they narrowly focus the company's resources on their field of key competence. This book has become an important manual in how we run our business and some of the quotes by Collins, like getting the right people on the bus, a catchphrase frequently used in the way we manage our company culture.

Collins goes on to say that most great companies enjoyed years of obscurity before their great results compelled the world to look at them. In fact, they seemed just like any other company until a certain 'transition point' saw them leave the pack behind.

The three most powerful points I took from the book were;

1. Great-company leaders are an unusual blend of ambition and humility and not expensive new dynamic CEO's with big personalities and seeking all the attention and glory.
2. Success depends firstly on getting the right people on the bus (and the wrong people off the bus) and then figuring out where to drive it
3. Continual self-assessment and relying on the facts is key to success. They do not rely on management fads or heroic dreams of greatness to achieve their goals

Contrary to popular opinion, these firms did not get in an expensive new CEO to turn things around. (This, in fact, is the mark of a mediocre company.) And although the remarkable results of great companies sometimes make it look like their success happened quickly, the 'leap' only happened after years of effort, what Collins calls 'pushing against the flywheel'.

Collins give an example of American drugstore chain Walgreens, who is an old company which followed the general market in its performance. Then, in 1975, the company began its remarkable success. From 1975 to 2000 it outperformed the stock market by 15 times, the much-lauded General Electric by five times and the famed Coca-Cola company by eight times.

What accounts for the sudden and sustained rise out of mediocrity? Jim Collins began a five-year research effort to find out. Of the list of 11 great companies he came up with, whose inclusion was based on superior performance for at least 15 years, Collins says, "a dowdier group would be hard to find". It included Fannie Mae (a mortgage finance house), Gillette (razors), Kimberly-Clark (nappies/diapers, paper towels), Kroger (discount supermarkets), Philip Morris (cigarettes, chocolate, coffee) and Pitney Bowes (back office equipment).

Level 5 leadership

Collins wanted to get away from the 'great leader' complex of many businesses where it is thought that bringing in a dynamic leader will transform everything. But he did discover that leadership is extremely important, but the type of leader that makes for greatness was the surprise. Great-company leaders are an unusual blend of ambition and humility, "more like Lincoln and Socrates than Patton or Caesar".

Such leaders do not seem outwardly ambitious because they channel their drive and determination

into securing the long-term success of their company. They are reluctant to talk about themselves, instead pointing to other people who have contributed. These leaders also share a passion for the products they create, however commonplace. For instance, the people at Gillette, sunk \$200 million into developing the Mach 3 razor. They are in it for the future greatness of the company.

By putting their firm first, these 'level 5' leaders ensure that whoever succeeds them is likely to be just as effective, if not more. In contrast, executives of the comparison companies wanted their personal record to stand out, especially if they picked weaker successors. Level 5 leaders intentionally keep a low profile, "ordinary people quietly producing extraordinary results". They are in it for the future greatness of the company, well beyond their tenure. Many kept offices in the building long after retirement.

First who, then what

Collins goes on to say that conventional wisdom has it that if you want to start and build a great company, you develop the concept to perfection and then hire the best people you can find. Collins and his team found that when the executives of good-to-great firms began their corporate transformations, "they first get the right people on the bus (and the wrong people off the bus) and then figured out where to drive it."

This approach has many benefits: if you have the right people from the beginning, they will be able to adapt to any changes in direction or strategy. You will not have to motivate them because they share the desire to achieve greatness. Interestingly, great companies pay no more than the merely good; remuneration is not a big factor in motivating people when they have something more than money to aim for.

Finally, great companies have cultures that are 'rigorous but not ruthless'. Rigor means that everyone knows the standards they and the firm must live up to. Ruthlessness, on the other hand, is a characteristic of the merely good companies. With little thought, they will hack off whole divisions through 'restructuring' and terminate thousands of workers through top-down decisions. Such a climate of fear is inherently unproductive and de-motivating, whereas great companies have an esprit de corp that challenges everyone to be their best. They know, "Great vision without great people is irrelevant."

Confront the brutal facts

Great companies are set apart by their reliance on the facts when making their decisions. They do not rely on management fads or heroic dreams of greatness to achieve their goals. But instead, engage in continual self-assessment. Collins found that charismatic leaders can often get in the way of a company's greatness because the staff refer only to "what the CEO will think" instead of data being the basis for decisions. The best companies want the truth to be heard, whoever speaks it. They have a culture of questioning and openness uncorrupted by a pecking order.

Collins quotes Winston Churchill: "I had no need for cheering dreams. Facts are better than dreams." Churchill was also famous for his attitude of 'never surrender'. Great companies also have this combination of believing they will prevail in the end, while also being able to face up to the reality.

Culture and discipline

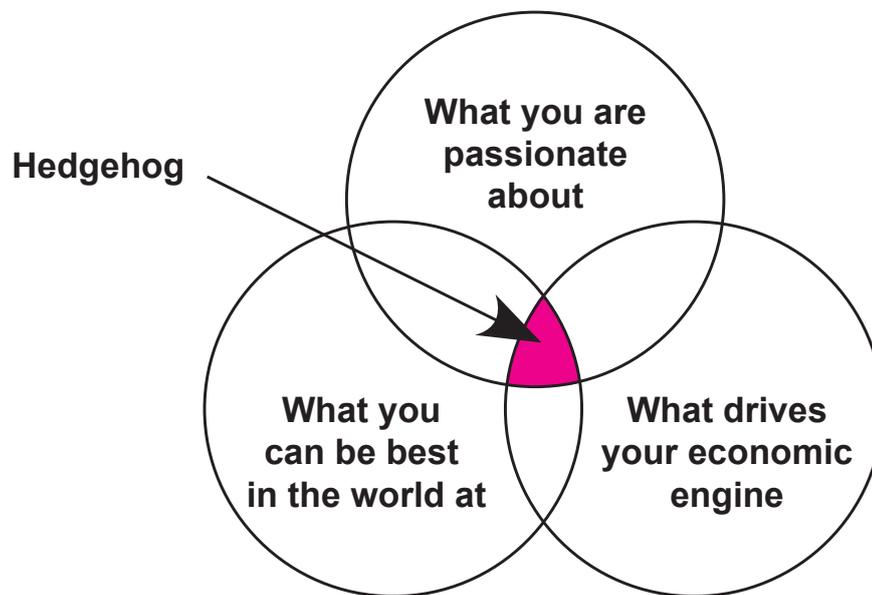
Great companies have a single idea or a focus which guides everything they do. Such concepts may take years to refine, but once in place can generate enormous success because they are so differentiated. Walgreens has as its self-defining concept the best, most conveniently located drugstores, with high profit per customer visit. Wells Fargo did not try to beat Citicorp or Bank of America to be the biggest global American bank. Instead, it focused on being a very profitable bank

focused on the western United States.

Collins has a 3-circle model to test for greatness

The first circle is being aware of what you can be the best in the world at. This involves a realistic appreciation of your abilities; not letting your ego run wild. Neither will it involve simply what you are competent at; the second circle is what drives your economic engine i.e. what areas are the most profitable.

The third circle is passion: very simply, doing only what you are deeply passionate about. If you can find something that you really can be best in the world at, that you love doing and that makes you money - you have the beginnings of a great enterprise. If you have two out of three, you are likely to be merely successful, not great. The book is worth reading for this chapter alone, as it applies to your daily life and work life. What is it exactly that you stand for? Can you sum it up in a few words? If not, your current efforts are likely to be scattered and lacking energy, just like the 'merely good' companies.



Technology

The technology was rarely mentioned as a major factor for success by executives in the great companies. It was never a case of 'this technology will make the company', more like 'we could use this to take us further with what we are doing'. Other companies chose technology for technology's sake, but the exceptional companies only invested in cutting-edge ways of doing things when it coincided with their larger vision. Collins' assessment is that "technology by itself is never a primary cause of either greatness or its decline." The wise use of technology, however, is part of great company culture.

What I took from it

Good To Great was researched at the height of the 'new economy' mania. Collins says of these years: "We entered a remarkable moment in history when the whole idea of trying to build a great company seemed quaint and outdated".

Having a 'culture of discipline'; one of the key characteristics of great companies that Collins identifies did indeed seem old-fashioned. It turned out that these firms had become great not through being 'in the right industry at the right time but had identified their unique strengths and worked relentlessly to capitalise on them.

Before Good To Great, Collins wrote another book called Built To Last, a book about visionary, iconic companies that have stood the test of time. As the recipe for pushing yourself to an initial stage of greatness, Good To Great is the 'prequel', Collins says. Built To Last is worth a read as well. The book was cited by several members of The Wall Street Journal's CEO Council as the best management book they have read, and I would agree with that too - I loved it.

The principles of good-to-great can apply to any sort of organisation, as well as your life. You may be surprised how inspirational this book is; the excitement is in the knowledge that success can be measured, and its lessons applied methodically. With Good to Great, you will have a well-researched foundation for success that puts results before charisma and big persona.

In Search Of Excellence

Thomas J. Peters

The path to the holy grail of business management has proved elusive. While many loyal Lancelot's and management consultants have fought the dragons guarding the secrets of management, few have survived. So says Peters and Waterman JR, in the book; In Search of Excellence, first published in 1982.

This book is the result of their quest of finding how to achieve true excellence from the people running the most successful business at the time. An instant classic that shows how the great companies built their successes and faced their challenges.

The five most powerful points I took from the book were;

1. The top companies the authors surveyed had an action bias. That is, these firms had the ability to get things done, regardless of the complexity of the task
2. The top companies all have a service obsession. Meaning, the needs of the customer intrude into every facet of the business, from research to sales to accounting. So ultimately, excellent companies know that customers bring value beyond the final sale
3. Although these companies are big, they act small in terms of innovation. Internal competition plays a key role because it fosters a sense of autonomy and entrepreneurship – even within the large corporate structure. And autonomy and entrepreneurship are crucial to innovation because they give employees the opportunity to develop creative ideas that go beyond their job description. The underlying belief here is that everyone is capable of innovation, not just the research and development departments. This mind-set leads to a company-wide culture, where everyone is always on the lookout for the “next big thing.”
4. Great companies also established a formal policy that allowed different brands in the company to actively compete. They embrace failure by encouraging experimentation and an entrepreneurial spirit. When something does not work out, these companies just move on to the next thing.
5. Excellent companies have deeply ingrained respect for individual employees

The debate on how to manage a company

Every business leader wants to know the best way to manage their company. But why are there so many different approaches and schools of thought, asks the authors. Well, management theory has long been a topic of general concern and disagreement among academics. In the 1930s, Harvard's Chester Barnard rejected long-held ideas about bureaucratic management that were put forward earlier by thinkers like Max Weber.

Barnard's work kicked off a debate about whether management was an impersonal, objective, and exact science, or more of an art relying on charismatic leadership. In the 1970s, when the authors began their research, a key area of concern among management theorists was international competition – especially in countries like Japan, where companies were growing at a much faster rate.

Observers noticed that Japan's lack of business schools had produced a different management culture than in the United States. This observation led to questions about whether Americans, with all their management classes, had adopted an overly theoretical approach. The authors decided to find some concrete answers amid the speculation. They assembled a list of America's top 15 companies – boiled down from 43 contenders – and spent six months conducting interviews and doing research to figure out what they all had in common. Their results were popularized in the book's first edition, published in 1982.

The 15 companies were selected using two criteria;

1. The company's reputation among businessmen, consultants, and business academics.
2. Basic measures of growth and long-term wealth creation (like average return on capital or average return on sales) over a 20-year period. Companies were deemed excellent if they had stayed in the top half of the original ranking of 43 companies for these measures over the full period.

According to these criteria, in 1982 the 15 top American companies were: Bechtel, Boeing, Caterpillar Inc., Dana, Delta Airlines, Digital Equipment, Emerson Electric, Fluor, Hewlett-Packard, IBM, Johnson & Johnson, McDonald's, Procter & Gamble and 3M. But what attributes did all these companies share?

Action speaks louder than words

So, what do successful companies have in common? Well, the authors noticed that all the top companies they surveyed had an action bias. That is, these firms had the ability to get things done, regardless of the complexity of the task. Although most companies want to believe they have an action bias, not many do. Instead of getting things done, most businesses get tangled up in bureaucracy. After all, when countless committees must sign off on any given decision, there is a high barrier to action.

Excellent companies deal with this issue by adopting organizational fluidity. This term refers to the ability to resolve issues, especially problems that require multiple levels of bureaucratic attention. For example, top companies would have a system in place to efficiently cope with a product issue that needed input from a variety of departments – such as the product, legal and advertising teams. These organizations create fluidity by promoting vast informal networks for communication, like open door policies. At IBM, for example, the chairman personally addressed any complaints he received from his 350,000 employees.

United Airlines had a similar policy, called "Management by Walking Around," which encouraged quick, casual conversations at every level of the company. These informal communication processes created opportunities for companies to quickly address issues without superfluous bureaucracy.

Chunking – breaking things down – is another way a company can encourage action and optimize organizational fluidity. By creating small groups – task teams of fewer than ten people dedicated to solving specific problems – companies can nimbly deal with problems as soon as they arise.

Although these task teams do not typically show up on formal organization charts (which represent more conventional units like departments and divisions), small groups tend to be the true organizational backbone of excellent companies. Consider Canon, which organized a task team to develop and launch the AE-1 camera in just two and a half years. Today, the camera is widely regarded as a groundbreaking technological advancement.

The customer is still king

As Lew Young, former editor-in-chief of Businessweek, once observed, too many companies regard the customer as basically a bothersome nuisance who damages carefully laid business plans. But excellent companies take a different approach.

America's top companies have a service obsession. Meaning, the needs of the customer intrude into every facet of the business, from research to sales to accounting. These companies may seem almost ludicrously committed to their customers, but in fact they are using this service obsession to make up for shortfalls in other areas. IBM, for example, has not been a leader in the technology sector for decades. However, since the brand is synonymous with service, the company has maintained its position as an industry leader.

While assistants at other companies spend their days fetching coffee or pushing paper, entry level IBM staffers spend their first three years fielding customers complaints – which must always be resolved within 24 hours. This practice yields a better understanding of what products and services the company needs to satisfy its customers.

Additionally, this policy builds customer loyalty. Since IBM is committed to quickly resolving all issues, many businesses have come to rely on the company for all their software and hardware needs. But good customer service does not just allow a company to resolve issues and build a customer base – it also enables innovation.

Consider the fact that Procter & Gamble, one of the most consistently successful companies ever, was the first consumer goods corporation that put a toll-free number on its products. Employees later reported that this move led to most of the company's product improvements. An MIT study about the innovation of scientific instruments corroborates P&G's experience. After studying 11 new inventions, researchers found that they were all originally conceptualized by end users – not producers – of the instruments. So ultimately, excellent companies know that customers bring value beyond the final sale.

Excellent companies promote experimentation and internal competition

Did you know that small businesses produce 24-times more innovation per dollar than larger firms, state the authors. So, what about the excellent – and huge – multinational corporations surveyed by the authors? Although these companies are big, they act small in terms of innovation.

How do they do it? Well, internal competition plays a key role because it fosters a sense of autonomy and entrepreneurship – even within the large corporate structure. And autonomy and entrepreneurship are crucial to innovation because they give employees the opportunity to develop creative ideas that go beyond their job description. Internal competition creates the space for this kind of creativity. It brings the competitive outside market into the company, thus promoting innovation and preventing stagnation. IBM, for example, uses a “performance shoot-out” approach: proposed products are pitted against each other, which results in real performance comparisons between prototypes.

Procter & Gamble also takes an interesting approach to adopting internal competition. In 1931, the company established a formal policy that allowed different brands in the company to actively compete. Managers typically do not have access to information about other P&G brands, beyond what is publicly known.

This competitive element motivates brands to continuously improve their products, which ultimately benefits P&G's overall sales. There is another key characteristic that promotes innovation among the big companies surveyed in the study. These companies embrace failure by encouraging experimentation and an entrepreneurial spirit. When something does not work out, these companies just move on to the next thing.

3M is one such company. For example, when a new ribbon material the company was developing failed, 3M tried using it as material for a brassiere. When that also failed, the company did not give up. Eventually, it became the standard material in safety masks worn by government workers. So, as you can see, promoting internal competition and encouraging experimentation ensures innovation even at large companies.

Really care about your employees. Do not just talk a great game

There's another thing excellent companies have in common, and that is a deeply ingrained respect for individual employees. In other words, top companies sincerely care about their employees and create people-oriented working environments. Management who respects individual employees invests time and money into their development and holds them to reasonable expectations.

Many companies pretend to be people-oriented and give the outward appearance of caring about their employees, but it is often just a facade. This attitude typically results in two kinds of management disasters:

1. The lip service disaster. Although management says they care about their employees, they do very little. For example, employees may never get proper training.
2. The gimmick disaster. Here, management relies on fads and incentives – like “employee of the month” awards. These novelties typically fade away after short trial periods, but even if they persist, they still do very little to change the management–employee dynamic.

So, if that is what insincere people-orientation looks like, how do companies of excellence show that they genuinely care? Well, these top companies typically adopted people-oriented policies long before they were the norm. For example, these firms were among the first to implement training programs. They also encouraged employees and managers to communicate on a first-name basis back when the traditional business culture was more formal.

Hewlett-Packard is a fantastic example of a people-oriented company. In fact, in individual interviews with 20 HP executives, 18 mentioned the company’s people-oriented philosophy as a key reason for its success. As it happens, the “HP Way” has a long history. In the 1940s, executives decided that they did not want HP to be a “hire and fire” company. So, instead of firing employees during the 1970s recession, the entire company took a ten percent pay cut. In the end, HP survived the recession without terminating anyone’s employment.

It is all about WHY you do it and not WHAT you do

As a manager, what can you do to mimic highly successful companies? Well, you might start by establishing some company values. That is because excellent companies set out qualitative values aimed at inspiring employees at every level of the company.

The authors cite a study conducted by McKinsey & Co. that also looked at top-performing companies, but through the specific lens of company values. The results showed that nearly all the companies surveyed had well-defined guiding values. One such value at the Dana Corporation, for example, was an inclusive management style that prioritized simplicity. Companies that performed less successfully shared two defining characteristics:

1. Most of these companies had no coherent beliefs or values.
2. Those that did have distinct objectives focused predominantly on attributes that could be easily quantified – such as earnings per share.

To that last point – and this may seem counterintuitive – the companies whose values were the most financially oriented and quantifiable fared worse than firms with broader qualitative values (such as customer service, for example). And if there is one such broader qualitative value that is shared by all top companies, it is a commitment to innovation at every level.

It is important to note that innovation is crucial at all kinds of companies, be they technology companies (like Apple and Hewlett-Packard), manufacturing companies (3M) or consumer goods firms (Johnson & Johnson). And this value is characterized by the understanding that innovation is a somewhat random and unpredictable element of business. So, since it cannot be centrally planned or side-lined into just one department, it needs to be the goal of the whole company.

The underlying belief here is that everyone is capable of innovation, not just the research and development departments. This mind-set leads to a company-wide culture, where everyone is always on the lookout for the “next big thing.” And ultimately, this forward-looking ethos helps the company achieve consistent growth.

Build on your core strengths

As a company becomes more successful, there is always the temptation to buy out the competition or branch out into new markets and sectors. This is called diversification, and it can be done by creating a new product or buying a company in a different sector – with the ultimate hope of making more money.

Apple is a diversification success story. Consider the fact that it expanded its product range from computers to music players to phones. Today, it is even making watches! But the truth is, it is not always so easy. Because diversification is not necessarily linked to profitability.

That is what the economist Michael Gort discovered when he conducted the first systematic study of diversification in American businesses. Although he did notice a mild positive correlation between the number of new products a company introduced and increases in sales, he saw no positive relationship between new product launches and actual profitability. But as it turns out, there is a secret to profitable diversification – and it is called “sticking to your knitting.” Companies that “stick to their knitting” are the ones that diversify but keep their new products and services consistent with their central skills and strengths. This principle comes from Richard Rumelt’s seminal study on diversification, which found that successful companies would only branch out when they could build on their existing strengths and competences.

These companies would achieve a 12.4 percent return on the money they spent; all in all, that’s 30 percent more than companies that diversified haphazardly. 3M, for example, has over 50,000 products, with 100 new ones added each year. However, each one of these products relied on the company’s signature coating and bonding technology. And 3M is not alone; from Boeing to Walmart, the dominant approach to diversification among top companies is one of sticking to core strengths.

Keep things simple and lean

Success has its own challenges. And one of the drawbacks of growth is that as a company expands, it hires more people, ends up with larger departments – and finds itself with a super-complex organizational structure. Imagine a small company with a functional organizational structure. Employees are grouped together according to whatever function they perform, such as marketing, legal work, or sales. In this structure, it is clear whom people should report to – be it the manager or the CEO. But as the company gets bigger, it outgrows this rigid structure. And it becomes inefficient for everyone to report up the hierarchy all the time, because it prevents individual employees from dealing with unpredictable or time-sensitive issues.

Companies try to cope with this issue by implementing a matrix organizational structure, creating discrete teams responsible for specific products and functions. So, for example, Product Team A works with Legal Team A and Sales Team A.

But this gets complicated very quickly, says the authors. Since there are many different managers running different teams, employees get confused about whom they should report to. But excellent companies find their way around this by embracing simple form – stable, unchanging organizational structures – and lean staff.

“Lean staff” means minimal administrative, managerial, and executive layers. So, at these companies, there will be just one manager or department head, instead of multiple people for employees to report to. And even though Johnson & Johnson was a \$5 billion company with 150 independent divisions – each worth an average of \$30 million – it was a perfect example of this kind of organizational simplicity.

Each division is called a “company” and has its own “chair of the board.” Even though the “companies” do not have their own stocks and are by no means independent from J&J’s top management, they still play a very important role. The chairmen shield their divisions from unwanted bureaucratic interference. Furthermore, since each division controls its own marketing, distribution, and research, it

leads to better, more efficient decision-making, and ultimately requires fewer people.

What I took from it

People have long debated the best way to manage a company. Well, it turns out that excellent companies have a lot in common. Top businesses put a premium on customer service. They also sincerely care about their own employees and promote experimentation within the company.

Let your employees use the company's resources and tools in their free time. If you want to promote innovation at your company, encourage your employees to freely use the company's resources – like laboratory or manufacturing equipment – in their downtime. Being able to “play” with the tools of the trade without a specific, defined purpose might lead to startling and unexpected breakthroughs.

Principles

Ray Dalio

Ray Dalio is among the world's wealthiest people, so he must be doing something right, yes? But as you will see from this book - Principles; that running a successful operation should not be rocket science. According to Dalio, anyone can lead a successful organization by having a set of core principles that are always there to keep them on the right path. Let us investigate.

Understanding what is most important in your company is, of course, a very personal matter that you must figure out for yourself. But from a business standpoint, there are some values that just make sense, like being honest with your staff in order to create an environment of trust and transparency that will keep problems from festering says Dalio.

Dalio goes on to say; look to nature and evolution in order to keep your eye on the big picture. Sometimes life can be so overwhelming, with so many questions coming at you from every direction, that it feels like you are trapped in a blizzard, unable to see more than a foot in front of your face. In such conditions, it is impossible to tell which way you are supposed to turn or what decisions you should make.

Therefore, having a concrete set of guiding principles in your life is crucial. Like having a compass in a blizzard, being equipped with such principles means you will always know exactly where you are headed and which choices will keep you on that path, no matter the circumstances. In short; having principles will provide you with fundamental truths that can be applied to any situation, allowing you to move toward your goals and the life you want to live.

The five most powerful points I took from the book were;

1. Always be guided by rational thinking, not emotions
2. Thinking of life as a game can help keep you focused on getting results and reaching your goals.
3. With an accurate view of exactly what employees are doing, and how well they are doing it, you will find that the job of supervision almost takes care of itself
4. If you hope to turn problems into advantages, you need to design your business so that problems get noticed and solutions get implemented as quickly as possible
5. It is wise to keep a balanced ratio of managers to staff. A good rule of thumb is not to exceed a ratio of ten to one

When you are figuring out what your guiding principles are it is important to keep a realistic outlook on life. Do not fool yourself into thinking that life will not be messy and uncomfortable from time to time. The author is keenly aware that reality is not always pretty, and this understanding led to one of his principles: to always be guided by rational thinking, not emotions. Sooner or later we all get reminded of the fact that life is not always ideal, and it is important to keep this in mind.

Think of nature. It is sad to see a beautiful gazelle get eaten by a pack of vicious hyenas. But this is just a natural fact of life – part of the balanced ecosystem that has evolved over time. If you were to deny this reality and try to intervene, it would have dangerous repercussions. So, remember that things will go wrong sometimes. And keep in mind that failure often provides a valuable chance to learn, adapt and evolve.

Any business that has been around for a long time has had to adapt to change and bounce back from hard times, which is what you will eventually have to do, too. Take the hard times in stride, and always keep learning and improving.

Set yourself goals and always keep on learning

You do not have to be a professional athlete to put athletic training methods to work. In fact, thinking of life as a game can help keep you focused on getting results and reaching your goals. This perspective can also make it easier to get through the bad times. Even the best athletes have dry spells. So, it is wise to remember that life will not be one long winning streak. When things are not going perfectly, it is best to keep calm until things turn around.

But you cannot start playing without having a goal in mind, and the secret to good goal setting is to prioritize and narrow things down early. Anything is possible in life, but you cannot have it all. A common mistake is to reach for too many goals, all at once. But the truth is, whenever you choose one goal, you are automatically ruling out several other goals in the process. So, the smart thing is to choose wisely by looking within and identifying what you desire most.

Now, if there is something you feel passionate about but do not feel skilled enough to master, that does not mean you should push it aside. Remember, it is never too late to continue your education, learn new skills and improve the ones you already have. Once your goal is in place, the next step is to methodically examine the situation and identify any challenges or obstacles that are in your way. This is where being realistic is key. Do not ignore problems because they are too personal and do not underestimate a potential issue by being overly optimistic.

If you have a personality trait that you would rather not admit, like a tendency to be easily distracted, do not avoid it. Acknowledging your weaknesses is not the same as letting them control you. Admitting they exist is the first step to improving yourself and learning how to control your shortcomings.

Truth and transparency are key to a successful business

The author, Ray Dalio, is the founder of Bridgewater Associates, an investment firm that practices another of Dalio's principles of doing business: extreme truth and transparency. Radical truth is about making sure that important issues do not remain hidden, which means creating an environment where employees feel free to speak their mind. This kind of transparency is a safeguard against poor decisions, since co-workers will constantly be exchanging criticisms, making improvements, and catching mistakes before they happen.

At Bridgewater Associates, radical truth applies to the executives as well. When a company is considering closing or selling one of its divisions, many executives decide to keep things quiet and only tell the employees at the last possible minute. But when this scenario was playing out at Bridgewater, the senior managers held an employee meeting and were completely candid about the pending sale.

Here is the thing, says Dalio; if managers are not upfront about an upcoming sale, it can cause a great deal of distrust and animosity among employees – because, likely, rumours about the sale will spread no matter what. So why not show respect by telling the truth?

Radical transparency is like radical truth. It means being open about the kind of behaviour and work that management expects from employees, and vice versa. Managers and employees should treat one another as they would a partner in a long-term relationship. This means showing mutual respect, looking out for what is in the other's best interest and being crystal clear about who is responsible for what.

You will find that a workplace is at its best when employees show more consideration for their colleagues than they expect to be shown. Yes, this is a radical approach since most people might be used to cutthroat workplaces where everyone is only looking out for him- or herself. But you will find that productivity and quality will improve when employees drop the selfish behaviour and start developing strong relationships based on generosity, cooperation and honest transparency.

Radical truth extends to performance evaluations as well

Being dishonest is not always a malicious act. Indeed, people are often most dishonest when attempting to be kind. Once, the author was considering promoting an employee to Department Head. He knew that many of this employee's co-workers felt he deserved the job. However, when the author looked at the company's performance tracking system, which contained hundreds of pieces of data on every employee, the evidence told a different story – the employee being considered for promotion simply did not have the right qualities for the job.

You may think the nice thing to do in this situation would be to give the employee the position based on the praise of his colleagues, but the secret to success is not radical kindness, it is radical truth. And the truth is, you will be doing everyone a disservice by ignoring the evidence that the employee isn't ready for the promotion. As most people overestimate their capabilities and the amount of work they do, performing accurate evaluations is essential to preventing problems.

When the author polled the employees of Bridgewater Associates, and asked them to estimate what percentage of the company's achievements they were personally accountable for, the combined percentages added up to 301 percent. Clearly, managers must have an accurate understanding of how much work each person is doing, because employees usually do not. But accuracy and honesty are not only good for the overall business; they are also good for each employee.

Psychologists believe the biggest motivator for personal improvement is the pain you feel after making a mistake. When you feel so terrible about having done something wrong that you never want to feel that way again, it's called "hitting bottom" – and it's often what a person needs to finally change his or her ways. It is also important to remember that sorting out an employee's shortcomings is very time-consuming, so it should be given priority over celebrating success. When dealing with strengths, it's a relatively simple matter of encouraging an employee to keep up the good work. For problems, the cause needs to be identified and solutions need to be worked out, all of which can take much more time and resources.

It is all about the data

When you have a goal in place for your business, you can start to think of your employees as parts within an engine – an engine that is powering your company, or machine, down the path toward its goal. For the author, his goal was to provide clients with the best possible return on their investments, and he often felt like a mechanic, popping open the hood to improve the engine of his Bridgewater machine.

This analogy, of manager as mechanic and company as machine, is a great way to keep your mind focused on the responsibilities of the job and what needs to be repaired. Every machine should have a process flowchart that clearly shows how work enters and travels from one employee to the next until it is finished. With this tool in hand, you will always be able to spot the exact place where problems are occurring and what you, the mechanic, need to do.

No one likes to reprimand or fire an employee but remember that one of the fundamental principles of success is to be realistic. This means you cannot fool yourself into thinking there is a way to avoid unpleasant business. Another great tool to check your machine for possible maintenance needs are metrics, or performance measurements.

When you have a system in place to accurately measure performance, it is like having a dashboard for your machine, complete with flashing lights to alert you the moment something goes wrong. Metrics can provide a considerable boost to productivity, and since they are unbiased, accurate, and reliable, they are perfectly suited to an environment that practices radical truth and transparency. With an accurate view of exactly what employees are doing, and how well they are doing it, you will find that the job of supervision almost takes care of itself! Now that you know how to keep your engine running

smoothly, let us look at how to build a solid machine.

Start your business foundation with having great managers

As you move toward your goals, it is only a matter of time before problems arise. But there is no reason to panic or be deterred by these bumps in the road. Developing solutions for problems is how many companies improve. In other words, most problems will end up providing fuel for your machine. However, if you hope to turn problems into advantages, you need to design your business so that problems get noticed and solutions get implemented as quickly as possible. One of the best ways to build your organization is from the top down. You can think of a good business structure as being the opposite of a building – your foundation is located at the top, which means that, first and foremost, you need to make sure you have great managers.

Every manager should be trustworthy and have high standards. If this is not the case, their weaknesses and poor performance will eventually spread to their staff. On the other hand, managers who show their appreciation for excellent work, and have strong oversight and strict quality control, will lead teams of employees who rise to their level of great performance. So that problems can be dealt with swiftly, each department should be given a certain amount of self-sufficiency and control over the resources they require. If bureaucracy is keeping departments from acting fast, your teams simply will not be able to do their job.

Finally, it is also wise to keep a balanced ratio of managers to staff. A good rule of thumb is not to exceed a ratio of ten to one. The ideal ratio is closer to five employees for every manager, as this will give your managers the best chance of having meaningful relationships and mutual understanding with each employee. But rather than setting strict rules on team sizes, you will get the best results by assessing each manager's capabilities and proceeding accordingly.

So now you have a basic idea of the principles the author has used to find amazing success. It's up to you to start putting them to use and turning your organization into a constantly evolving and constantly winning enterprise.

What I took from it

A collection of firm principles will help you make decisions, even during the most chaotic and confusing times. These principles depend on you, but it is always a good idea to build radically truthful and radically transparent relationships with all the people you work with. As a manager, you are like a mechanic, and your company is like a machine. You can use flowcharts and metrics to keep things running smoothly and ensure that your company is solid by building it from the top down and keeping manager-to-employee ratios relatively small.

Identify your blind spots. Everyone has areas where they are closed-minded – that is, where they have blind spots. Unfortunately, it is very difficult to see where your blind spots are. So, to identify them, keep a list of the circumstances surrounding bad decisions you have made in the past. You could ask other people – especially people who spotted what you missed – to help you in this endeavour. Tack this list up on the wall and look at it every time you are considering making a decision in your blind-spot area. And do not be afraid to consult others before moving forward.

Rework

Jason Fried

You need less than you think to start your own company – launch as soon as the core of your business is ready, so says Jason Fried and David Heinemeier Hansson in their book, *Rework*, published in 2010. Founding your own business has never been easier than today, they go on to say. If you start small, you need far less time and resources than you imagine.

First, test the waters; do not quit your day job to slave 100-hour weeks, but rather gauge your enthusiasm by squeezing in a few hours each week to work on your idea. You do not need to take on crippling amounts of debt either; just use whatever facilities and equipment you have at your disposal or can easily afford. Only use external investment as a last resort, as it will not only dilute your stake in the idea but the process of looking for funding is time-consuming and distracting. In most cases, all you need is a laptop and an idea to get started; everything else is peripheral to your success anyway.

When starting your company, focus all your efforts on building the core of your business. Without this core, your business cannot function. For example, hotdogs are the core of a hotdog cart operation. The core should be something you think will be stable in time. Amazon's core is not only about books; it is about fast shipping, affordable prices and a great selection. Publishing fads come and go, but these are things people will always be willing to pay for.

Once your core is ready, launch immediately. Do not wait for every aspect of the business to be fully complete. You can work out the details later. When 37signals launched its Basecamp product, they could not even bill customers yet. But with the monthly billing cycle, they knew they had four weeks to fix the issue. Just get started and wing it, says the authors. You need less than you think to start your own company – launch as soon as the core of your business is ready.

The three most powerful points I took from the book were;

1. You need less than you think to start your own company – launch as soon as the core of your business is ready.
2. Relish the good sides of being small, but do not forget you are running a business.
3. Create an environment where people manage themselves and communicate with each other honestly. Productivity does not stem from long hours, but rather from focused work and quick wins. Hire people only when absolutely necessary and forget about resumes – trust your instincts.

Make a stand for something you care about

The only way you can attain the sense of urgency and devotion that running a successful company requires is by doing something that matters to you. If you are going to do something, make it something you can be proud of. Some people start their business with an exit in mind from day one. This is the equivalent of entering a relationship with the aim of breaking up – absurd. Just like a relationship, running a business should be based on commitment and passion rather than the willingness to sell out at any moment.

Making a stand for something that is important to you is also a great way to attract loyal followers and fans. Consider Vinnie's Sub Shop in Chicago; they stop selling sandwiches in the afternoon because the bread is no longer as fresh as it was in the morning. The extra income they could earn in the afternoon would not make up for the loss of pride they would suffer from selling mediocre sandwiches. Their customers love this devotion to freshness.

Once you have a stand, a great way to emphasize it is to pick a fight with an existing competitor. If you run a small coffee house that you see as a haven for individualists, position yourself as the anti-Starbucks. Having an enemy will provide you with instant positioning in the customer's mind and a great story to tell, says the authors.

Do not, however, let your competitors dictate your own strategy. If your immediate goal is to copy the iPhone 5 or to come up with a response to it, you are doomed to always be one step behind your competition. Focus on what you are doing, not on what others have done. Make a stand for something you care about, says the authors.

Share everything you know

If your company is successful, others will try to copy it. Your only defence is to make your product inimitable by injecting it with what is unique about you. For example, Zappos CEO Tony Hsieh is so obsessed with customer service that he decided to make it the guiding ethos of his company. While competing shoe stores can sell the same sneakers as Zappos, they cannot imitate this utter devotion to good customer service.

A great way to find your passion is to make a product or service that you yourself would love to use. For example, when track coach Bill Bowerman wanted lighter running shoes for his team, he poured rubber into his family's waffle iron, inventing the famous Nike waffle sole. Usually, people expect great things from products they buy but are disappointed at the actual performance delivered. Your product should be the opposite; make it so simple and easy-to-use that people will love it even more than they expected and tell their friends about it, too. If you accomplish this, you can sell your product like a drug dealer; give people a taste for free, knowing they will happily come back for more.

Once you have a product that is unique and keeps customers coming back, you can share everything you know without giving away any secrets that would create imitators. Just as great chefs can promote themselves by publishing cookbooks with their prized recipes, you too can promote your company by sharing your valuable experiences and specialized knowledge openly. Better yet, teach people with how-to guides, courses, and videos! Most companies – especially big ones – are so secretive that you can gain a real competitive advantage by actively teaching people about things you have learned. Make your product inimitable so that you can share everything you know, says the authors.

Relish the good sides of being small, but do not forget you are running a business

Many small start-ups long for mass and greater recognition, but bigger is not always better. Consider elite schools like Harvard and Cambridge. Do you think they aim to expand their campuses all over the world, educating hundreds of thousands of people annually? Unlikely. Instead, they are comfortable being the size they are, as should you.

For example, having less mass and being off the media radar allows you to experiment with your business without potential screw-ups being publicized. Just like Broadway musicals are first tested in smaller cities before reaching New York, you too should take advantage of your obscurity in the beginning to experiment with different ideas and processes. Being small also allows you to keep your entire team on the frontline of the business, interacting with customers firsthand and hearing their requirements and feedback. A complex hierarchy can muffle that feedback and slow you down, says the authors. When everyone is responsible for customer satisfaction, you can respond to any problems quickly, which is essential for effective customer service.

Nevertheless, being small to begin with does not mean you should forget that you are running a business. Many start-ups live in a make-believe land where they happily spend investors' money without worrying about profitability. Such companies are not really businesses but merely glorified hobbies of their founders. If you want to build a successful business, you should have a clear path to

profitability in mind from the very start. Relish the good sides of being small, but do not forget you are running a business.

Less is more. Start saying no and keep your product lean

When chef Gordon Ramsay fixes ailing restaurants in his TV show, Kitchen Nightmares, he always starts the process the same way; by cutting out around two thirds of the menu items. Similarly, when you run into problems with your product, consider cutting features from it. If you want to make something great, you need to chisel away stuff that is merely good. In fact, embrace your constraints. Just like Ernest Hemingway wrote Nobel-winning fiction with very sparse language, you too can make a great product or service with very few features.

If your competition offers a product with lots of features, do not try to one-up them by offering everything they do plus more. Instead, offer less features, making your product simpler and easier to use. Add value by deciding what not to sell. Think about it; great art galleries do not display every painting in the world but rather a select few. You too must cut out the garbage and personally vouch for whatever is left.

Keeping your product or service simple is not easy, though. As you gain more and more customers, you will start getting more and more requests to develop the product further, both from users and from within your own team. Never overreact to these requests by immediately modifying your product and adding new features as requested. If you do, your product will rapidly become unrecognizable, and probably scare away new customers since the changes have been catered to the wishes of existing ones. Say no to even the best-sounding ideas at first. If a customer request is truly important, it will keep coming up so often that you cannot ignore it. Less is more – start saying no and keep your product lean, says the authors.

Be honest, personal, and nimble in your marketing communications

There is nothing wrong with having communications that reflect the true size of your company. Be proud that your small size lets you communicate frankly, contrary to the meaningless jargon-filled press releases of big corporations. For example, do not talk about how “transparency is a corner stone of your communications strategy,” when you could just say you are honest.

Advertising and active marketing are expensive ways to connect with customers. Instead, build an audience by sharing information that they value and willingly come back for. This way you will get their attention without paying a dime, says the authors. Remember that in a small organization, marketing is everyone’s responsibility. Every email, phone call, blog post and social media update constitutes marketing and can deepen your bond with customers. In fact, why not give customers a behind-the-scenes view of your company, so they can get to know you and your employees.

When you do strive for actual press coverage, go for niche rather than mass media. An article in a well-targeted small magazine or blog will create much more website traffic and sales than a story in a well-known newspaper. This also allows you to approach journalists with personalized calls or notes rather than with mass press releases.

The bond you form with customers will inevitably endure some rough weather as well and being a straightforward communicator means being frank about your shortcomings and imperfections too. No one likes companies that try to sweep problems under the rug. If there’s bad news to be told, skip the pseudo-apologies in corporate lingo such as “We apologize for any inconvenience this may have caused you.” Instead, think about what kind of apology you would like to hear as a customer. Do not emulate big corporations in your marketing and communications – be honest, personal, and nimble.

Create an environment where people manage themselves and communicate honestly

If you treat your team like children, they will act accordingly, and you will need to spend half your time managing them and making decisions on their behalf. Your team will quickly turn into non-thinkers and non-doers and end up costing you a lot of time and effort while accomplishing very little, says the authors.

What you need are employees who can manage themselves, and such individuals only thrive in working environments where they are given trust, responsibility, and autonomy. One defining characteristic of a good environment is directness in communication. Avoid abstractions and long-winded, high-level explanations. Get real and show your team exactly what you mean. Do not sit in meeting rooms discussing problems but go to the problem sites themselves to get a grip on what is wrong, says the authors. Criticism should be equally honest. If your team is too large and unfamiliar with each other, you will find that the discussion does not flow freely. You need frank, honest communication within your team so that bad ideas are criticized when they should be.

Finally, there are certain words you should avoid when communicating within your team. Consider a situation where you are facing a seemingly impossible task, and someone belittlingly says to you “We can’t survive without this; it should be easy for you to do.” It does not exactly leave a lot of room for discussion, does it? Abrasive, value-laden words like need, must, only and cannot imply judgment about the realities of someone’s situation and can rapidly obliterate any hope of a fruitful discussion. Also, says Fried, stop using the word “ASAP” entirely when asking someone for something. It suffers from inflation and merely makes other, non-ASAP requests seem less urgent. Create an environment where people manage themselves and communicate with each other honestly.

Do not over-plan. Stay agile with quick and flexible decisions

As a small company, one of the key advantages you have over your larger competitors is your ability to make quick decisions without getting bogged down in bureaucracy. Start saying, “Let us make a decision,” instead of, “Let us think about it.” Do not look for a perfect solution; get to good enough quickly and keep moving, says the authors.

Do not over-analyse or over-plan. Unless you have a crystal ball, estimating and planning are basically guesswork anyway. If you start assuming your plans are correct and following them blindly, you lose your ability to improvise, which is downright dangerous. Instead, just wing it. Do not make decisions far in advance but rather on the spot. Think about things that affect you this week, not next year.

Small, reversible decisions that work for the time-being are much easier to make than big, life-changing ones where you must worry about long-term consequences, says the authors. Similarly, do not make wide-ranging estimates like, “This one-year project will cost us about \$1 million.” If you want to have any semblance of accuracy, chop your estimates into more manageable bits, like weeks rather than years. The impact of being wrong will also be far smaller this way.

Finally, says the authors; when you are trying to decide, do not be daunted by what might go wrong. There are always possible downsides to any decision, but you can always deal with them when they happen. (Most never will.) Do not over-plan – stay agile with quick and flexible decisions.

Productivity does not follow from long hours, but rather from focused work and quick wins

Many people equate productivity with working long hours when the opposite is true. The best employees have busy lives outside of work, so they work hard to leave at five o’clock. Workaholics who stay late can even hurt the overall productivity of an organization by making non-workaholics feel guilty and less motivated, says the authors.

The way to maintain high productivity at work starts by stripping away interruptions that break people's concentration. Ensure your team has some designated time during the day or week when there are no interruptions. The worst kind of interruption, of course, is a meeting. A one-hour meeting of ten people will in fact cost at least ten hours of aggregated working time. In some rare cases this may be warranted, but often meetings lack goals, agendas, and any connection to actual work. In short, they only generate talk, not action.

Another enemy of productivity is perfectionism. Getting bogged down in complex problems and trying to devise perfect solutions for them can consume weeks' worth of effort, when in fact a quick fix would often be fine. To really be productive, go for solutions where you achieve the maximum effectiveness with minimal effort. "Good enough" is often better than "perfect." One way to encourage this non-perfectionism is to chop large projects and tasks into small chunks and to-do lists. This not only makes complex endeavours more manageable but also provides more causes to celebrate along the way as minor milestones are reached. Such quick win's help sustain momentum and motivation. Productivity does not follow from long hours, but rather from focused work and quick wins.

Hire people only when necessary and forget about resumes – trust your instincts

Some companies are addicted to hiring people. They find someone great and decide to hire her, even without a specific job or title in mind. This is where trouble starts. When you hire someone, it should only be to solve an acute problem that is causing your company immense pain. Keeping your team lean for as long as possible will force you to adopt time-saving practices and an efficiency ethos, whereas hiring unnecessary people, no matter how great they are, will just lead to frustration and the creation of unimportant, artificial work to keep them busy.

You might worry about missing out on "once-in-a-lifetime" hires, which might be a legitimate concern if your hiring pool is small. But if you are willing to hire employees from across the globe, you will always be able to find more great people. Almost anyone can work online these days, so the geographical location of your employees is basically irrelevant. When you do end up hiring someone, ignore the established recruitment doctrine of analysing resumes, grade point averages and years of experience. Instead, trust your instincts and concentrate on what they have learned to do thanks to their experience.

Finally, test-drive your employees. No amount of interviewing will show you how a person will perform on the job but giving them a mini project to work on will let you judge them by their actions, rather than their words. BMW even went as far as to build a fake assembly line where recruiters could watch prospective employees in action. To better facilitate this on-the-job testing, always hire people to do jobs that you yourself have done at some point or another. This will also help you to manage them later. Hire people only when necessary and forget about resumes – trust your instincts.

What I took from it

Starting and running a company is far easier today than ever before. To build a successful business, you must inject your own uniqueness into your product and embrace the benefits of being small. Build a great working environment by emphasizing trust, independence, and focus.

Rocket Fuel

Gino Wickman

The best way to grow a business – particularly one in the \$2 - \$50 million annual revenue range is to have a “Visionary” link up with an “Integrator”. When you have these two types of leaders working together in unison, magic happens. Visionaries see the future whereas integrators make it happen. So says Gino Wickman and Mark Winters in their book Rocket Fuel, published in 2015.

They go on to say that the world of business is full of stellar visionary/ integrator combinations including;

- Walt and Roy Disney at Disney
- Henry Ford and James Couzens at Ford
- Ray Kroc and Fred Turner at McDonalds
- Joel Pearlman and Rob Dube at imageOne
- Randy Pruitt and David Bitel at Detroit Radiator.

The simple fact is that growing companies need the skills of both visionaries and integrators, but it is extremely rare for an entrepreneur to be strong in both areas. More than likely, your company will excel only if you can combine the efforts of a visionary with the discipline of an integrator. If you can figure out whether you are an integrator or a visionary, then you will know which role you need to assume to excel and what type of person you need to work with to soar.

“An entrepreneur’s lust needs to be counterbalanced with a manager’s prudence and discipline. When it’s structured correctly, the dynamic that exists between these two distinct leadership gifts can be magical. We have the privilege of spending everyday teaching business leaders. We witness the beneficial results achieved by defining and clarifying these two vital roles. With them, companies gain faster growth, more peace of mind, more freedom, higher profitability, more fun, and considerably increased cohesiveness. When harnessed, it is very effective. It may be your way to finally break through the ceiling that’s been hanging over you for so long.”

Gino Wickman and Mark Winters

The three most powerful points I took from the book were;

1. Visionaries are passionate about seeing the future. They tend to think strategically and at the same time have their finger on the pulse of a market or industry. They tend to be good at connecting the dots and seeing linkages others just gloss over.
2. Good integrators are like the glue in any organization. Simply put, they make the trains run on time
3. It is vital that the visionary and the integrator stay on the same page and should have monthly ‘same page’ meetings to make sure that they are in sync

Visionaries & Integrators

To harness the dynamic power of V/I match-ups, you first have to get to know the context of these relationships. Have a good idea of what being a visionary is all about, what a good integrator will bring to the party and how the V/I relationship can be structured and run. When you bring together the right visionary and a proficient integrator, you can spur your company to genuine greatness.

1) The Visionary

It has been estimated that around 3% of the general population are visionaries, and that those visionaries then go on to create about two-thirds of the new jobs being created in the economy.

Visionaries are great to have in your organization for a variety of reasons including;

1. Visionaries tend to be superb idea generators. It is not unusual for a highly engaged visionary to be churning out ten or more ideas every week. Some of those ideas might be impractical and some might even be downright dangerous, but a few will be breathtakingly good and end up being game changers.
2. Visionaries tend to be superior big picture thinkers. They often excel at closing deals with major clients because they are interesting to deal with. If you are a visionary, you are probably good at solving big problems for your clients and customers.
3. Visionaries are passionate about seeing the future. They tend to think strategically and at the same time have their finger on the pulse of a market or industry. They tend to be good at connecting the dots and seeing linkages others just gloss over.
4. Visionaries are 'hunters'. They live to find big ideas, interesting opportunities, and solutions which nobody has thought of before. They like to plunge in and actively explore the terrain.

Visionaries can crop up in a variety of different roles in an organization, including;

- Founding entrepreneurs of the company
- As the organization's "spark plug"
- In-house ideas people and inspirers
- Problem solvers
- As the heart and soul of the creative team
- Rainmakers who close the big deals
- As innovation champions

The downsides of being a visionary are that;

- Visionaries have difficulty staying focused. You get bored if things stay the same way for too long, so you would rather spice things up to keep it interesting and engaging. Most visionaries get bored when a business is running smoothly and nothing challenging is happening.
- Visionaries sometimes generate too many ideas. Far more than they can ever execute properly. That means it is all too easy to start something and then move on to something more interesting. For a visionary, storming the beaches is the fun part.
- Your organization can get a little confused if you are a visionary. One day you will be passionate about heading in one direction and the next day in an entirely different direction. After a few of these flipflops, everyone can lose a sense of where to head.
- If you are a visionary, you probably are not good at sweating the details – particularly at managing people and holding them accountable. Visionaries generally think in big picture terms and get frustrated slowing down and articulating the details of what needs to be done to others.
- Visionaries typically are not good at developing talent. They prefer to do everything themselves because it is quicker and less frustrating. If you are a visionary, you probably see your company as a way to dazzle the world rather than as a platform to let your employees take it further than you can.
- Many visionaries are highly competitive. This is great for getting out in the marketplace but less helpful when you are supposed to be building a team. It is not at all unusual for visionaries to be aggressive and condescending in meetings and to appear dismissive of anyone who "doesn't get it."

When visionaries start their own enterprises, they often manage to achieve growth and success by sheer brute force rather than by finesse or systems. Eventually, they tend to come face to face with what can be termed the "Five Frustrations:"

1. Lack of control. You started the business to get more control over your time, but it has now become so big it feels like the business controls you instead.
2. Lack of profit. You are working hard but the business still struggles to pay its bills.
3. People. Nobody can do things the way you want them to be done. They are not on the same page.
4. Hitting the ceiling. Your growth has slowed, and you cannot quite put your finger on why.
5. It seems like nothing is working and therefore you keep cycling through remedies and quick fixes looking for a silver bullet.

As counterintuitive as it may sound, the way to move forward and to defeat those frustrations is to embrace your role as a visionary and look for an integrator who will build the backup systems you need. You need to find someone you can trust and delegate the role of implementing your ideas to them. The sooner you do that, the sooner you will free up your energy and creativity to apply where you can add the most value.

“Entrepreneurs have an unrealistic optimism. It is chemical in the brain. They see things others can’t.” – Dan Sullivan, creator, The Strategic Coach

“If you are looking to grow your company, you can’t do it without an Integrator. At some point you will have to relieve the weight carried on your shoulders and find someone to carry it with you.” – Randy Pruitt, visionary, Randall Industries.

2) The Integrator

Good integrators are like the glue in any organization. Simply put, they make the trains run on time. Integrators can go by a variety of titles – general manager, chief-of staff, inside man, Chief Operating Officer, or something else, but they all do the same thing. They integrate the major functions of the business and make sure the right things happen.

Integrators are very capable. They have many, many strengths such as;

- Integrators are usually very good at managing people and holding them accountable for what they do. They are passionate about handling the day-to-day aspects of having a smooth-running business.
- Integrators are typically very good at getting the details right. They enjoy being accountable for results and removing obstacles so others can do their jobs effectively.
- Integrators can foresee the operational challenges in new initiatives much better than a visionary can.
- Integrators are quick. They can usually resolve an operational issue on the fly whereas a visionary would get bogged down on this.
- Integrators are a steady force. They provide organizational clarity about what needs to be done and who is ultimately responsible.
- Integrators are often fanatical about resolving differences of opinion. They are usually very good at forcing conclusions and aligning everyone to the business plan.
- A good integrator will create strong functions which in turn will create the healthy tension between functions which is a hallmark of well-run companies.
- Integrators get everyone in sync. They make sure everyone who works for the organization is pulling in the same direction. They create integrity and make certain systems are aligned.
- Integrators act as the voice of reason. They filter out any of the visionary’s ideas which are unworkable and then get to work themselves eliminating hurdles and barriers.

Overall, integrators are great managers and strong leaders. A good integrator will excel at team building because invariably he or she will be a good communicator. Integrators make sure the right things happen and accordingly are very valuable team members.

The downsides of being an integrator;

- Integrators are unsung heroes. You will do all the essential behind-the-scenes work but someone else will often get the credit and the plaudits.
- You will be viewed internally as the “bad guy” or the “perpetual pessimist” because it is your job to poke holes in grand schemes. You will be the person who says “no” most often to new ideas.
- You are usually the one who gets tasked with delivering bad news; or in other words you oversee the dirty work. That means you will be the one laying off employees, having last-straw conversations and doing all the jobs nobody likes. That will make you appear callous or down right mean to everyone else in your organization.
- You will be accused of moving too slowly, because you insist on getting all the necessary background elements in place before going to market. More than anyone else, you will be keenly aware of your organization’s limited resources.
- Being an integrator is a lonely job and there will be a definite lack of appreciation. This is quite a thankless role and the better you become at doing your job, the less you will get noticed.
- It will become all too easy for you to beat yourself up mentally, because you will be frustrated by your team’s limits more than most. You will want to be doing things faster, better, and more profitably, but you will also know the reasons why things are the way they are. You will know people are counting on you and therefore you will have unreasonable expectations for yourself and others.

Unsurprisingly, many of the best integrators in the business world are little known. For example, most people have heard of Ray Kroc and know him as the visionary driving force behind the fast food powerhouse McDonalds. His inside-man and integrator was Fred Turner who was initially hired as the grill man for Kroc’s very first franchise store. Within the space of three years, Turner had become Kroc’s right-hand man and he would go on to be fanatical about executing Kroc’s franchise plan. Turner wrote the training manuals, created McDonald’s franchise training program (“Hamburger U”) and more.

Turner became McDonald’s operations manager in 1958 when the chain had 34 restaurants and retired in 2004 when McDonalds had 31,500 restaurants. Similarly, Walt Disney is well-known as the creative driving force behind what is now a highly successful company. Lesser known is the fact the co-founder of Disney was his brother Roy who looked after the business side of the enterprise. Roy was something of a financial wizard and it was his expertise which drove the company onwards as much as Walt’s creative input.

“If it had not been for my big brother, I swear I’d been in jail several times for checks bouncing. I never knew what was in the bank. He kept me on the straight and narrow.” – Walt Disney

The simple fact is integrators are the unsung heroes of the business world but what they do is absolutely of value. Integrators act as the voice of reason by injecting logic and clarity into everything that is happening. They offset the zeal of creative people and force them to face the facts and put good systems in place. Integrators execute the vision.

“Making someone else’s vision happen is a very noble calling, vocation, or purpose.” – Gino Wickman and Mark Winters

“All human beings have a God-given set of capabilities, a true skill set or genetic makeup. A Visionary is meant to be a Visionary, and an Integrator is meant to be an Integrator. You are either one or the other, rarely both. There is a need for both an entrepreneur and a manager at the top of a company. Figure out which one you are, assume that role, and excel!” – Gino Wickman and Mark Winters

Visionaries and integrators have their respective advantages and disadvantages, but it is when they team up and work together the magic sometimes happens. V/I is the perfect business combination. The dynamic tension which will exist between a great visionary and a savvy integrator can and does generate some impressive results.

V/I combinations tend to come together by one of four routes;

1. Co-founders acting together. Two people get together to start a company and it later turns out one of them is a natural visionary and the other happens to be a good integrator.
2. Partners align with their natural skillsets. A company might have several partners and two of those will split off to form a V/I duo and go off and do their own thing.
3. You might identify an existing team member who is a world-class integrator in waiting – and you promote them to that role.
4. You can headhunt an integrator from outside your organization – and deliberately and consciously hire someone to put in place the systems and structures you will require.

John Rockefeller, one of the most famous industrialists in American history, formed a V/I duo with Henry Flagler after he approached him for funding to start his own oil refinery in 1867. Flagler brought in \$100,000 and this was enough for Rockefeller to make the transition from grain commission agent to oil refinery owner. Flagler also devised a system of rebates which allowed Rockefeller's new company, Standard Oil Company, to outshine its competitors. By 1872, almost all the oil companies in Cleveland had merged with Standard Oil and by 1880 Standard Oil controlled 90% of the oil produced in the United States.

The interesting thing about any V/I partnership is tensions always exist. The two roles are opposites and therefore it's not surprising that visionaries and integrators drive each other a bit crazy when they team up. The relationship might get a bit testy at a personal level but for a company, having two strong personalities with different skillsets is a perfect storm which, if harnessed correctly, can generate incredible results.

“One point of view or a single, uncontested power is rarely a good thing. Like the visionary and the operator inside a company, Democrats and Republicans in Congress, the Soviets and Uncle Sam in geopolitics, even Mom and Dad at home, the value of two opposing forces, the tension of push and pull actually keeps things more stable. It's all about balance.” – Simon Sinek.

Another good example of the power of the V/I partnership is Henry Ford and James Couzens. Ford had made a few unsuccessful attempts at starting his own car company before he met James Couzens who was working for the Malcolmsen Coal Company. Alexander Malcolmsen was an early investor in the Ford Motor Company and his cousin James Couzens agreed to become a co-founder of the fledgling car manufacturer.

While Henry Ford obsessed over designing cars and manufacturing facilities, Couzens kept the books, watched what was happening on the shop floor, wrote advertising copy, created a dealer network for selling and servicing cars and busied himself with all the infrastructure building tasks. It was Couzens rather than Ford who instigated the pay raise for Ford's production line workers to \$5.00 a day, twice the going rate of the day, which had such a huge impact on the company's success.

“Ford by himself could not have managed a small grocery store, and Couzens could not have assembled a child's kiddie car. Yet together they built an organization that astounded the world. Couzens understood everything about the car business except how a car worked.” – Richard Snow.

As with any V/I arrangement, the tensions between Henry Ford and James Couzens were intense and

evolving all the time. In 1915, Couzens unexpectedly resigned as general manager of the Ford Motor Company. A few years later Henry Ford bought all Couzen's shares in the Ford Motor Company for \$29 million.

In talking about visionaries, it should be noted not every company needs a Steve Jobs or a Walt Disney to come onboard as a visionary. In practical terms, not all visionaries are created equal.

The type of visionary you will need will depend on at least three factors;

- The type of industry you are in
- Your company's growth aspirations
- Degree of market change or complexity.

If you are in a volatile industry where innovation reigns supreme and you are looking to grow rapidly, then you will need a standout visionary to come onboard.

At the other end of the spectrum, in an industry which changes little over the years and you have only modest growth targets, you might be better seeking a visionary with a more low-key personality. They will be easier to work with and cheaper.

"No two V/I combinations are the same. Put another way, every Visionary is not for every Integrator, and vice versa. Some Integrators have Visionary traits that could complement a Visionary's weaknesses." – Gino Wickman and Mark Winters

"For some companies, the V/I duo isn't so dynamic. Many duos are at their wits' end because the relationship is dysfunctional. Just as bad, many Visionaries do not have an Integrator at all, and many Integrators remain undiscovered by the right Visionary." – Gino Wickman and Mark Winters

"Visionaries see the future, Integrators make it happen." – Gino Wickman and Mark Winters

Formation of a V/I partnership

To get the benefits of the V/I dynamic, the first and most obvious step is you must know yourself and then find your V/I match. If you are an integrator, it's generally a matter of identifying a visionary you click with. For a visionary to find a good integrator, the process is a bit more involved and generally involves six steps.

1) How to find a good Visionary

It is usually straightforward for an experienced integrator to find a good visionary to work with.

The ways you can bring about a meeting include;

- Use LinkedIn's search function – look for owners of companies with turnovers of \$2 - \$50 million and 10 - 250 employees. You will find every major city in the United States has thousands of these companies. Identify some visionaries you admire and approach them to meet with you.
- Put the word out in your personal network – let everyone know you are interested in connecting with a visionary entrepreneur and helping make their ideas a reality.
- When you meet with someone promising, send the right signals – by asking them leading questions which show you know your role. For example;

1. “How would you like to have someone in the back office executing on all the little details so you can focus on the next big thing?”
 2. “What would it be like if you had someone you trust involved who will make things happen?”
 3. “Would you like to be able to get away sometimes and still feel confident things will run smoothly while you’re gone?”
- Indicate your availability on current listings at www.rocketfuelnow.com, where there is a category for “Visionaries Seeking Integrators.” Register yourself as an integrator who is available and see what leads you get. As a general rule-of-thumb, visionaries outnumber integrators 4:1 so there should be some healthy bidding for your services.

2) How to find a good Integrator.

If you are a visionary looking for a good integrator, start by looking inside your own organization first. See if there is a budding integrator waiting for the chance to step up.

If you cannot find anyone, then follow these steps;

1. Understand - where you are on the visionary spectrum. Whether or not your company needs lots of visionary energy to compete and excel.
2. Map your visionary profile – document how you naturally tend to operate and the patterns you generally follow. Your incoming integrator will need to work with these patterns, so you’d better clarify them first.
3. Identify the type of integrator you need – come up with your “wish list”. Figure out what areas they would have complete freedom in and their potential responsibilities and accountabilities. Think through the profile of your ideal integrator in advance so you will recognize them if you come into contact. Put your thoughts into a written job description for your future integrator.
4. Figure out your readiness to hire an integrator – in terms of;
 - Financial readiness. Can you afford to hire an integrator immediately?
 - Psychological readiness. Are you ready to let go of some control?
 - Lifestyle readiness. Are you interested in working less hours so you can do other stuff?
 - Unique ability readiness. Are you prepared to do what you do best exclusively and let someone else handle all the other stuff?
5. Initiate your search – with the aim you want to consider 150 qualified prospects to come up with 20 interesting candidates and 5-7 highly qualified candidates you shortlist. You then;
 - Hire a recruiter and let them generate a pool of potential integrators for you to look at.
 - Reach out through your personal network for people to consider.
 - Try doing some in-house training and see whether someone can step up to the plate.
 - Evaluate whether someone on your current leadership team could become the perfect integrator.
 - See if another firm has a good integrator you can hire for two or three days a week.
 - Go to listing sites like www.rocketfuelnow.com and search through their listings.
6. You then go through the interview process and hire and on-board your new integrator on the basis that the first 90 days will make or break their long-term success. Do everything you can to make their initial 90-day experience as an integrator positive by;
 - Deliberately exposing them to your most important sources of information so you accelerate their learning.
 - Securing some early wins for your integrator.
 - Making sure everyone on the management team is aligned with the aim of getting your integrator up to speed quickly.

- Establishing a foundation of trust and helping your incoming integrator feel like a valued member of the team. ° Making sure they have all the tools they need to succeed.
- Never lose sight of the fact it will take a good 6 - 18 months for your new integrator to genuinely get up to speed and start adding value. Do not take shortcuts but let this natural bedding-in period go smoothly. The payoff for doing that is if you have followed the process, in the very near future you should be in a better position to get what you want from your business. You can focus on the new and interesting ideas with confidence because you will have a solid integrator handling the business.

How to make the most of the V/I dynamic

The keys to successfully working and leveraging a great V/I relationship are;

1) Same Page.

It is vital that the visionary and the integrator stay on the same page. If you have a V/I duo who get out of sync or alignment with each other, things can get uncomfortable for everyone as mixed messages get sent out. This is so important that once a month, you should schedule a “Same Page Meeting” between your visionary and your integrator.

Use this meeting to check in with each other, to identify and work through any issues and iron out any disconnects before they get too serious. The meeting lasts as long as it takes for you to feel confident, you are on the same page with each other.

The other way you can be aligned is to map out your respective responsibilities clearly and concisely. Do this by creating an “Accountability Chart” for your business. This chart sets out who has responsibility for what and shows how things will change as your organization grows. By specifying boundaries, you give people freedom to make decisions.

For your company to grow, you must make product, market it and then have the capacity to collect what is owed. You need a strong leader in each of these business functions who reports to the integrator. You want there to be tension between your functions as they compete for resources. All the department or function heads report to the integrator who uses and blends that healthy tension to generate greater energy for the company as a whole.

In a small company, three functions usually suffice – (1) Sales and Marketing, (2) Operations and (3) Finance or Administration. As the company grows, these broad functions will split into more specialized functions. Large companies tend to have at least seven major functions: (1) Marketing, (2) Sales, (3) Operations, (4) Customer Service, (5) IT, (6) HR and (7) Finance. The Accountability Chart can be modified to suit.

Note the Integrator reports to the visionary. It is important that the visionary takes the lead and that there is no ambiguity about who reports to whom. The visionary must be in the driver’s seat and set direction. The visionary and the integrator are not equals although it may appear that way to outsiders. Visionaries add value by being free to move out-front.

The four most common issues which arise with Accountability Charts are;

1. The visionary may have problems letting some functions go – which can only be offset if the visionary comes to trust the integrator will hold those functions accountable.
2. People may need to sit in multiple seats – which is not ideal, but it is workable as long as they report to the integrator in that specific function.
3. If the visionary or the integrator wear multiple hats, they must allocate their time astutely – so they can also have some time to work at where their unique strengths lie.

4. In a start-up, the same person may have to function as both visionary and integrator – and the transition to having someone else handle the inside role may be hard to pull off.

2) Decisions

When you have got a good visionary and a strong integrator in place, sometimes there is a tendency for employees to try and make an end run. This is where an employee tries to go around their manager and appeal to the visionary or the integrator to get a different decision made. It is important not to let this happen.

The real heart of the problem is unproductive complaining. The employee wants a different decision and uses internal politics and/or access to other senior managers to try and bring about a different response. If you let that happen, you in effect neutralize the manager and leave him or her powerless to do their job in the future.

So, what is the solution? You must apply a two-step “No end runs!” rule. Here is how it works;

1. If an employee who works in a different function and reports to a different manager comes to you with a complaint about their boss or a decision, hear them out. Listen carefully to what they are saying so they feel like their grievances have been adequately aired.
2. Once you do that, you then ask “the question”: OK, thanks for that. Are you going to tell ‘em, or am I going to tell ‘em where they went wrong? Because one of us needs to tell ‘em. When you ask the question, you will find most people are not willing to take the next step. That makes sense because if they had been, they would have already approached their manager themselves. By signalling that you support your managers and back them all the way every time, you break your people out of their old habits and signal to grow to the next level, your organization has to be properly run and managed. You position your enterprise to grow.

3) Tie Breaker

When you have a strong visionary and an astute integrator working together, it is easy to foresee situations where the visionary wants to make one decision and the integrator wants to make a totally different decision.

How do you handle that?

1. Identify the real problem. Make sure the stated problem is the real issue and not something entirely different below the surface. Name the real issue in one sentence and hit the root. Keep everyone focused like a laser on the real issue.
2. Have some discussion about solution options. Let everyone debate in an open and honest environment. Get everything out on the table.
3. See if there is a solution available which everyone can agree on which generates the most gains for the greater good. If you have got a healthy team, a viable solution everyone agrees with will surface most of the time.
4. If you are still in a stalemate, the integrator makes the final decision. He or she is the tie breaker. You do what they decide. You should have the approach disagreeing is fine while a decision is being made but once the integrator has spoken, everyone on the team must commit and go forward.

The real key here is to stop the leadership team getting stuck in holding patterns. The simple fact is a good integrator tends to make decisions with the head whereas many visionaries make decisions with their heart. Good integrators will be in tune with all the issues, priorities and resources and accordingly tend to make better decisions.

As an aside, if the integrator is uncomfortable about making these decisions, that's a warning sign he or she may be out of their depth. If that continues, it may be time to find another integrator to work with. You need someone who can make the big, strategic calls when required to power your organization to move forward. You will have spoken about the issues at your Same Page meeting beforehand, so the integrator needs to be able to execute the plan.

4) Working in the business

You have got to have the mindset that when you are working in the business, you are an employee and you get treated as such. That has true even if you wear multiple hats and are also the visionary, the integrator, or the owner. If you are working in the business, you must live by the same rules as every other employee.

Admittedly, being an owner of the business is distinctly different from being an employee. Owners set the vision and strategy and then hope to benefit from a share of the profits derived. Owners also make the ultimate decisions about pretty much everything. When you are working in the business, however, you must be accountable for your role and play by the same rules as everyone else. If you fail to do this, problems will arise. Suggestions for making this work;

- Hold a quarterly owner's meeting where you analyse your business and solve all issues which arise in conjunction with your visionary and integrator.
- Attend the monthly Same Page coordination meetings.
- Make sure you engage in 50/50 dialogue where you find out what others are thinking and then communicate what you want as an owner in clear terms.
- When you are working in the business, always support your manager's decisions. Do not ask for any special entitlements or waivers from company policy.
- Do not engage in office politics. If someone tries to appeal to you directly, apply the No End Runs! rule.
- Acknowledge you can be fired if you do not perform as an employee.
- Play by the rules. Let your visionary and your integrator make decisions with your integrator having the casting vote should there be disagreements.
- Never forget ownership does not carry with it automatic rights of employment. If you are not the right person for the seat, you can and should be replaced by someone who is.

5) Respect

The best V/I duos respect each other and admire what the other person brings to the dynamic. You cannot fake this. You need mutual respect as the foundation on which trust, openness, and honesty flourish. When everyone in the management team pulls in the same direction, you have a shot at building a truly great company. Ideally, you want the visionary and the integrator to have a healthy relationship where each treats the other as an equal partner. To achieve that, make sure neither party ever makes any negative comments about the other to anyone in the organization.

Building the V/I partnership requires constant discipline and action. Keep in mind there is always going to be some tension between the visionary and the integrator. That is healthy and desirable as long as it is harnessed for the company's greater good. Mutual respect and good communication can go a long way to dissipating this friction. A joint commitment to leveraging this tension rather than letting it fester in the background is also helpful. You also must be patient and let the V/I relationship develop over time. This is generally not something visionaries are good at but building the V/I dynamic will take time. If you are just starting this journey, there are things you can do before, during and after hiring an integrator which will smooth the waters;

5.1) Before

- Be deliberate in your integrator hiring process. Accept it will take longer than normal by reminding yourself this is a major hire. Take your time and date a little before you jump into this marriage.
- Stay firmly engaged in the integrator's role while you are doing your job search. Do not take your foot off the gas assuming the new guy will do some catch-up. Keep working.

5.2) During

- Allow a 90-day window for the integrator to get up to speed. Let them spend that time observing what is going on and talking with people before they make any changes. You will need to continue acting as the integrator on a day-to-day basis during that period, so they have the freedom to acclimatize.
- At the one-year mark, have a formal evaluation session where you both step back and look at how things are going. By this stage, you will both know each other and have a working relationship. The one-year meeting should be used to fine-tune your Accountability Chart and talk about future directions. Draw up a wish list of where you want to head in the future.

5.3) After

- If your V/I relationship is working, then all you need do is – Plan, Execute, Get on the Same Page, Align and Repeat. Hold annual V/I evaluation meetings on the anniversary of hiring the integrator where you discuss expectations and make plans together.
- If your V/I relationship is not working, hold a post-mortem and figure out where you went wrong. Treat this as a great learning opportunity. Have an honest conversation with your integrator and come up with a transition plan which will be amicable for both parties. Then dust yourself off and get busy looking for a new integrator.
- Work together on developing answers to the important questions for moving forward;
 - What are our core values?
 - What is our core focus – what do we excel at?
 - What specifically are our key 10-year targets?
 - Who is our ideal customer?
 - How do we appeal to those ideal customers?
 - What will our company look like 3 years from now?
 - What is our immediate one-year plan?

Break your organization's long-term goals down into 90-day chunks which people can focus on. Specify three to seven priorities you want everyone to work on for the next 90-days and explain those to your people. Every three months get together as an entire organization and evaluate how things are going. Commit to growing and moving forward one 90-day step at a time.

Every week hold a "Level 10 Meeting" with your leadership team. At this meeting, you look at your 90-day priorities and make sure you are staying on track. You also address problems which are cropping up, communicate and motivate. Level 10 means attendees rate this meeting highly because it is practical rather than theoretical.

Set up scorecards which can be reviewed at the weekly Level 10 meetings. The scorecards should show immediately how specific people are tracking on achieving their individual 90-day priorities. Scorecards like this are great for telling you immediately how your business is doing. You give each measurable a weekly goal, specify who is accountable for achieving it and then track how they are doing week by week.

You can also make the scorecard part of your V/I infrastructure and look at it at every Level 10 and

Same Page meeting.

“We love entrepreneurs. We love Visionaries and Integrators. You are our tribe, and our life’s work is devoted to helping you get what you want from your business. We sincerely believe that the V/I duo is one of the most powerful discoveries for taking a company to greatness.” – Gino Wickman and Mark Winters

What I took from it

Visionaries have ground-breaking ideas. Integrators make those ideas a reality. This explosive combination is the key to getting everything you want out of your business. It worked for Disney. It worked for McDonald’s. It worked for Ford. It can work for you.

Without an Integrator, a Visionary is far less likely to succeed long-term, and realize the company’s ultimate goals—likewise, with no Visionary, an Integrator cannot rise to his or her full potential. When these two people come together to share their natural talents and innate skill sets, it is like rocket fuel—they have the power to reach new heights for virtually any company or organization.

The E-Myth Revisited

Michael E. Gerber

This book has become something of a commercial Bible for our company and something we refer too often. We have even arranged company away day's so that we all can listen to or read the book together.

In short, the book tells us that most small business owners work in their business rather than on their business. People who are exceptionally good in business are so because of their need to know more and that understanding the technical work of a business does not mean you understand a business that does that technical work.

The author believes that if you are unwilling to change, your business will never be capable of giving you what you want. He talks about The Entrepreneurial Seizure: the moment you decide it would be a great idea to start your own business. The technician suffering from an Entrepreneurial Seizure takes the work he loves to do and turns it into a job. Everybody who goes into business is actually three-people-in-one: The Entrepreneur, The Manager, and The Technician.”

The three most powerful points I took from the book were;

- 1) Work on your company and not in your company.
- 2) Your job is to prepare yourself and your business for growth.
- 3) Before you can determine anything you need to know what you will stand for

The Entrepreneur

- The Entrepreneur lives in the future, never in the past, rarely in the present. He is happiest when left free to construct images of 'what-if' and 'if-when.'
- The Entrepreneur is the innovator, the grand strategist, the creator of new methods for penetrating or creating new markets
- The Entrepreneur is our creative personality—always at its best dealing with the unknown, prodding the future, creating probabilities out of possibilities, engineering chaos into harmony
- The Entrepreneur has an extraordinary need for control. He needs control of people and events in the present so that he can concentrate on his dreams
- The Entrepreneur creates a great deal of havoc around him, which is predictably unsettling for those he enlists in his projects
- The Entrepreneur's worldview is a world made up both of an overabundance of opportunities and dragging feet
- To The Entrepreneur, most people are problems that get in the way of the dream

The Manager

- The Manager is pragmatic. Without him, there would be no planning, no order, no predictability.
- If The Entrepreneur lives in the future, The Manager lives in the past
- Where The Entrepreneur craves control, The Manager craves order
- Where The Entrepreneur thrives on change, The Manager compulsively clings to the status quo
- Where The Entrepreneur invariably sees the opportunity in events, The Manager invariably sees the problems
- The Manager is the one who runs after The Entrepreneur to clean up the mess
- Without The Manager, there could be no business, no society

- It is the tension between The Entrepreneur's vision and The Manager's pragmatism that creates the synthesis from which all great works are born

The Technician

- The Technician is the doer and the Technician loves to tinker
- If The Entrepreneur lives in the future and The Manager lives in the past, The Technician lives in the present. He loves the feel of things and the fact that things can get done
- As long as The Technician is working, he is happy, but only on one thing at a time. He knows that two things cannot get done simultaneously; only a fool would try. So, he works steadily and is happiest when he is in control of the workflow
- The Technician mistrusts those he works for because they are always trying to get more work done than is either possible or necessary
- To The Technician, thinking is unproductive unless it is thinking about the work that needs to be done
- Thinking is not work; it gets in the way of work
- The Technician isn't interested in ideas; he's interested in 'how to do it'
- To The Technician, all ideas need to be reduced to methodology if they are to be of any value
- The Technician knows that if it were not for him, the world would be in more trouble than it already is
- Everyone gets in The Technician's way and to The Technician, 'the system' is dehumanising, cold, antiseptic, and impersonal. It violates his individuality

The fact of the matter is that we all have an Entrepreneur, Manager, and Technician inside us. The typical small business owner is only 10 percent Entrepreneur, 20 percent Manager, and 70 percent Technician. Most businesses are operated according to what the owner wants as opposed to what the business needs.

The three phases of a business's growth: Infancy, Adolescence, and Maturity. If your business depends on you, you do not own a business—you have a job. And it is the worst job in the world because you are working for a lunatic! The purpose of going into business is to get free of a job so you can create jobs for other people. It is therefore a critical moment in every business when the owner hires his very first employee to do the work, he does not know how to do himself or does not want to do.

Your job is to prepare yourself and your business for growth

A Mature company is founded on a broader perspective, an entrepreneurial perspective, a more intelligent point of view. About building a business that works not because of you but without you. A Mature business knows how it got to be where it is, and what it must do to get where it wants to go.

The Entrepreneurial Model has less to do with what is done in a business and more to do with how it is done. The commodity is not what is important—the way it's delivered is. Your business is not your life. Once you recognise that the purpose of your life is not to serve your business, but that the primary purpose of your business is to serve your life, you can then go to work on your business, rather than in it, with a full understanding of why it is absolutely necessary for you to do so

Pretend that the business you own—or want to own—is the prototype, or will be the prototype, for 5,000 more just like it. Documentation says, 'This is how we do it here'. Documentation provides your people with the structure they need and with a written account of how to 'get the job done' in the most efficient and effective way. What you do in your model is not nearly as important as doing what you do the same way, each time. Without documentation, all routinised work turns into exceptions.

Go to work on your business rather than in it, and ask yourself the following questions:

- How can I get my business to work, but without me?
- How can I get my people to work, but without my constant interference?
- How can I systematize my business in such a way that it could be replicated 5,000 times, so the 5,000th unit would run as smoothly as the first?
- How can I own my business, and still be free of it?
- How can I spend my time doing the work I love to do rather than the work I must do?
- Innovation is the mechanism through which your business identifies itself in the mind of your customer and establishes its individuality.
- Quantification is the numbers related to the impact an Innovation makes.
- Orchestration is the elimination of discretion, or choice, at the operating level of your business
- Once you have innovated, quantified, and orchestrated something in your business, you must continue to innovate, quantify, and orchestrate it
- Your Business Development Program is the vehicle through which you can create your Franchise Prototype

The Program for Success is composed of seven distinct steps;

1. Your Primary Aim
2. Your Strategic Objective
3. Your Organisational Strategy
4. Your Management Strategy
5. Your People Strategy
6. Your Marketing Strategy
7. Your Systems Strategy

1. Your Primary Aim

Before you can determine anything, you need to know what you will stand for. You must ask yourself these questions:

- 1) What do I value most?
- 2) What kind of life do I want?
- 3) What do I want my life to look like, to feel like? Who do I wish to be?

- The author believes great people are those who know how they got where they are, and what they need to do to get where they are going
- Great people have a vision of their lives that they practice emulating each day
- The author believes that the difference between great people and everyone else is that great people create their lives actively, while everyone else is created by their lives, passively waiting to see where life takes them next
- The difference between a warrior and an ordinary man is that a warrior sees everything as a challenge, while an ordinary man sees everything as either a blessing or a curse

Before you start your business, or before you return to it tomorrow, ask yourself the following questions:

- What do I wish my life to look like?
- How do I wish my life to be on a day-to-day basis?
- What would I like to be able to say I truly know in my life, about my life?
- How would I like to be with other people in my life—my family, my friends, my business associates, my customers, my employees, my community?
- How would I like people to think about me?

- What would I like to be doing two years from now? Ten years from now? Twenty years from now? When my life ends?
- What specifically would I like to learn during my life—spiritually, physically, financially, technically, intellectually? About relationships?
- How much money will I need to do the things I wish to do? By when will I need it?

2. Your Strategic Objective

- Your Strategic Objective is a very clear statement of what your business must ultimately do for you to achieve your Primary Aim
- How big is your vision? How big will your company be when it is finally done? Will it be a \$300,000 company? A million-dollar company? A \$500-million company?
- At the beginning of your business, any standards are better than no standards
- Creating money standards is not just strategically necessary for your business; it is strategically necessary for your life, for the realisation of your Primary Aim.
- The first question you must always ask when creating standards for your Strategic Objective is: What will serve my Primary Aim?
- How much money do I need to live the way I wish? Not in income but in assets. In other words, how much money do you need in order to be independent of work, to be free?
- The ultimate reason to create a business of your own is to sell it.
- An Opportunity Worth Pursuing is a business that can fulfil the financial standards you have created for your Primary Aim and your Strategic Objective.
- How do you know whether you have an Opportunity Worth Pursuing? Look around. Ask yourself: Does the business I have in mind alleviate a frustration experienced by a large enough group of consumers to make it worth my while?
- When asked what kind of business they are in, most business owners respond with the name of the commodity they sell. Always the commodity, never the product.
- The difference is the commodity is the thing your customer walks out with in his hand. The product is what your customer feels as he walks out of your business. What he feels about your business, not what he feels about the commodity.
- Understanding the difference between the commodity and the product is what creating a great business is all about.
- What is your product? What feeling will your customer walk away with? What is he really buying when he buys from you?
- People buy feelings

3. Your Organisational Strategy

- Most companies organise around people rather than around accountability or responsibilities.”
- The result is almost always chaos.”
- Without an Organisational Chart, everything hinges on luck and good feelings, on the personalities of the people and the goodwill they share.

4. Your Management Strategy

- You need a management system to successfully implement a management strategy.
- A system is a set of things, actions, ideas, and information that interact with each other, and in so doing, alter other systems

5. Your People Strategy

- Your people want to work for a boss who is created a clearly defined structure for acting in the world. They want a structure through which they can test themselves and be tested. This structure is called a game.
- The degree to which people buy into your game depends on how well you communicate the game to them at the outset of your relationship. Your People Strategy is the way you communicate this idea.

A few rules;

1. Never figure out what you want your people to do and then try to communicate a game out of it
2. Never create a game for your people you are unwilling to play yourself
3. Make sure there are specific ways of winning the game without ending it
4. Change the game from time to time—the tactic, not the strategy
5. Never expect the game to be self-sustaining. People need to be reminded of it constantly
6. The game must make sense
7. The game needs to be fun from time to time
8. If you cannot think of a good game, steal one

6. Your Marketing Strategy

- Forget everything but your customer
- Demographics and psycho-graphics are the two essential pillars supporting a successful marketing program.”
- If you know who your customer is—demographics—you can then determine why he buys—psychographics
- If your customer does not perceive he needs something, he does not, even if he actually does

7. Your Systems Strategy

There are three kinds of systems in your business.

1. Hard Systems
2. Soft Systems
3. Information Systems.

- Hard Systems are inanimate, un-living things
- Soft Systems are either animate—living—or ideas
- Information Systems are those that provide us with information about the interaction between the other two.

What I took from it

The E-Myth Revisited is a book that I can recommend to anyone who is starting out with a new business venture and all companies who are struggling to break out of the ‘Infancy’ phase. The test is a simple one - is the running of the day to day activity dependent on the involvement of the owner. If the answer is yes; then this book is for you. I love the idea behind working on your business and not in your business. Richard Branson said many times that when he buys or starts a new company; his primary aim is to work himself out of that company. Branson must have read E-myth Revisited.

Another important point is how systems will determine your success or failure and not people. People need to run the system and the system should be so simple that you can slot people in when required. Your mindset should be to develop a system/business that can be replicated repeatedly; where customers will always have the experience no matter where in the world they are. Even if you do not intend to ever franchise your business; it needs to be set-up/systematised as if you were.

A must read for all small businesses starting out and for those small businesses that have become all-consuming and overwhelming. This book will give you the ideas needed to enable you to set up your business in the best possible way.

The Psychology Of Selling

Brian Tracey

Sales; either you are a natural or you cannot do it at all. And that is all there is to it, right? Some people are just born with total confidence, perfect communication skills and the uncanny ability to convince others to buy what they are selling. The rest of us just are not. But is this true? Of course, it is not, says Brian Tracy, a huge favourite of mine in the sales and general self-help field. Anyone can be a good salesperson, says Tracy. You just need to learn how and in his book, *The Psychology of Selling*, Tracy will give you a brief overview of the skills every sales professional needs to know, if you want to outstrip your competitors at work and increase your commissions.

What is on your to-do list right now, asks Tracy. Probably a few mundane errands, like taking out the garbage or remembering to grab toilet paper on the way home. But did you know that the list isn't just a household fixture, but a great tool for salespeople, too? To-do lists are a surefire way to harness the power of your subconscious and achieve your aims. The subconscious plays an important role in the job of a salesperson anyway – just think of how intuitive reactions to facial expressions and body language allow a salesperson to keep a prospect engaged. By writing stuff down in a simple list, you give your subconscious a framework to work with.

Start by writing a list not of your goals as a salesperson but of the reasons why you want to achieve these goals. The longer the list is, the more motivated you will be. Why? Well, each reason is a piece of ammunition for your subconscious mind. Take, for example, a sales manager with just two reasons for achieving his sales goals: saving for a new car and taking a road trip through the mountains. Meanwhile, another sales manager can name dozens of reasons, from renovating parts of his house, to getting a dog for his kids, to taking a family holiday through China, and more.

While the first salesperson will find himself easily discouraged, the second will be unstoppable. These motivational lists are just one element of a salesperson's toolbox, just one of the techniques he uses to get his subconscious working for him.

The five most powerful points I took from the book were

1. Motivational lists are one element of a salesperson's toolbox, just one of the techniques he uses to get his subconscious working for him.
2. Find your reference group – a network of people who share your values – and spend time with them. Their accomplishments will lift you up, too. By associating with top salespeople, asking for their advice, and practicing their techniques, his confidence and sales ability would surely improve massively.
3. Customers will not be interested in the product's history or any of its special features until they know what is in it for them. Great salespeople know that customers will buy if you can demonstrate to them why they personally need the product.
4. Because we trade financial safety, for a product we desire, there is another aspect of the buying experience you need to bring to the fore – emotional anticipation.
5. It does not matter how much you genuinely care about your product, service or brand – the prospect will always doubt your motives. In order to win their trust, you will need to show that you have credentials, that you are reliable and have made excellent choices in the past.

Boost your self-esteem to improve your sales performance

Here is something for you to try tomorrow morning: look in the mirror and tell yourself that you are the best sales manager in the country. Yes, this is totally cheesy. But doing it – even though you would be

embarrassed if anyone saw you – is worth the benefits it brings.

Every statement you tell yourself gives your subconscious mind a mental picture, which it will then try to make real. It is easy enough to see how this could work against you. Have you ever told yourself you are an idiot for messing up, and then found yourself making the very same mistake again and again?

But it can also work in your favour. By simply switching your self-talk from negative to positive, you can improve your mental picture of yourself. A sales manager who repeats positive affirmations – “I am calm, confident and powerful” – will soon come to see himself this way. His subconscious will then encourage him to react to stressful situations as if this were true, further confirming his positive self-image.

This is particularly useful when you are gearing up to handle an upcoming sale. Great salespeople recall the best sale they ever made, getting themselves in the zone where they can repeat that success again. Mediocre salespeople, on the other hand, dwell on their worst sales experience before an upcoming sale. He will find himself stuttering during the pitch and stressing out; the superior salesperson, in contrast, breezes through the presentation with confidence.

Surround yourself with people that share your passion and drive

Believe it or not, the learning process does not end when you graduate from college. We all begin our lives with a limited amount of practical knowledge, so it is our job to teach ourselves as much as possible. Those who fail to do so will quickly fall behind!

So, set yourself the goal of learning one new thing every day, even if it is just something you heard on the radio. Then put this new piece of knowledge to use as soon as you can. By learning new things within the area of your specialty each day, you will be one step closer to achieving excellence.

One salesperson, a client of the author, listened to an audio program every day on the way to work, which offered advice on how to boost self-esteem, organize a day, lead your career, and develop a strategy of self-presentation. Once he arrived at work, he would apply the new lessons he'd learned during his commute in practical situations. The result? He nearly doubled his sales!

You can also learn from those around you. Find your reference group – a network of people who share your values – and spend time with them. Their accomplishments will lift you up, too. Imagine a sales manager was always mediocre in his role. He might realize that his reference group was filled with other negative and unmotivated people and know that he needed to seek out different company. By associating with top salespeople, asking for their advice, and practicing their techniques, his confidence and sales ability would surely improve massively.

Ask questions to uncover your prospect's needs and tailor your pitch accordingly

Say you would like to buy a product. Yet, when you go and ask a salesperson some questions about it, they seem to be more interested in talking about everything they know about the product, rather than how the product would benefit you, the customer. Would you buy it? Probably not. Customers will not be interested in the product's history or any of its special features until they know what is in it for them. Great salespeople know that customers will buy if you can demonstrate to them why they personally need the product.

For instance, a salesperson presenting a car could talk about its colour or the great features of its engine for hours on end, but you will not feel convinced if he does not bring you into the picture, too. Only by underlining how the car's features will benefit you – how little gas it consumes, what a large trunk it has and how practical the parking warning system is – can the salesperson show you that their

product has what you want.

But what if a prospect has no idea what they want? Or what if it is not clear to you as a salesperson? Well, you have got to start asking questions. Why are they searching for a product? What do they hope to gain from it? If a family is hoping to buy a house, are they interested because of a great price? A great school nearby for their children? Or more space to start their family?

Keep asking questions, and soon enough you will uncover what your prospect is really after. This in turn allows you to perfectly tailor your presentation to them, which will lead to a convincing pitch and a successful sale.

People buy products in search of social recognition

Consumption is what happens when someone goes out and buys something, right, asks Tracy. And usually, consumers pick the cheapest product, or at least the one that gives the biggest bang for their buck. Well it is not that simple, says Tracy. In order to gain recognition – for our status, influence, power, personality, or some recent transformation – we go out and buy products. Many people are more concerned with how a product will communicate their social status than with its monetary value.

For the salesperson, it is important that you recognize what emotional value (the appeal in terms of status) a client wants – then you can offer them the best option. Imagine a salesperson working in a department store, says Tracy. A client comes in carrying an expensive Louis Vuitton bag, asking to see your watch selection. Recognizing that the prospect probably is not all that worried about the price of the watch and is rather more interested in its emotional value as a symbol of status, a good salesperson will take them over to the Rolex section. Then he or she will spend the time explaining just how special, well made, and desirable these watches truly are.

Gain the trust of customers by showing them that you care about their needs

Know that feeling right before making a big purchase when you start to get cold feet? We all feel hesitant from time to time when making decisions with our money, says Tracy. But why? Because when we buy, we give a quantified amount of our freedom and financial security away. We trade financial safety, for a product we desire. If you want your prospect to still buy despite this, there is another aspect of the buying experience you need to bring to the fore – emotional anticipation, says Tracy.

A University of Chicago study illustrated how people tend to buy because of the powerful emotional anticipation of owning and using the product. Ensuring that this feeling outweighs the customer's fear of financial loss gives the salesperson a much higher chance of success. You can also heighten a customer's sense of security by offering money-back guarantees. But whatever you do, it must be believable.

It does not matter how much you genuinely care about your product, service, or brand – the prospect will always doubt your motives. In order to win their trust, you will need to show that you have credentials, that you are reliable and have made excellent choices in the past. Say that a family wants to buy a dog. This is a big decision for any family and requires careful consideration of the type of dog that would suit the family best. An easily trainable and child-friendly dog, one that could spend time alone while kids are at school, would be the best choice.

The family hands over the challenge of choosing the right dog to the salesperson, trusting that they will do a good job. By demonstrating your trustworthiness and authenticity, you will gain their trust and gratitude, and they will doubtless seek out your services – or recommend them to friends – in the future.

What I took from it

Your subconscious and self-esteem play important roles in your sales ability. By motivating yourself and learning from others, you can start to truly understand your prospects. Demonstrating your trustworthiness and ability to meet their needs will establish trust. Do these things, and you will be well on your way to achieving top performance in sales.

Make a list! Grab a pen and paper and write down all the things you want to achieve. Include everything. You want to buy some new socks? Write it down. Want to refurbish the kitchen? Write it down. Learn Mandarin. Write it down. Buy a jet? Well, you get it. These are the things that will keep you inspired. These are the things you are working toward. They will keep you going when times get tough.

What Philosophy Can Teach You About Being A Better Leader

Alison Reynolds

Too many people today feel disempowered at work. This is true not just for entry-level positions but also all the way up to upper management. So says the authors of the book, *What Philosophy Can Teach You about Being a Better Leader*, published in 2019. They go on to say that psychology has helped us figure out some of the reasons why we feel this way, but unfortunately, many of the proposed solutions are not bringing results. Where psychology has failed, maybe philosophy can succeed.

In this book you will discover how philosophy can be a secret weapon to help reframe your thinking. You will learn how philosophical thinking can help you develop sustainable and constructive approaches to strategy, communication, and decision-making. By using philosophical principles and exercises in our personal and work lives, we can begin to thrive both as individuals and as empowered, thoughtful leaders.

The seven most powerful points I took from the book were;

1. Feeling self-actualized is very different from being self-actualized. Philosophy argues that the good life is less about feeling good and more about pursuing things that are good for us
2. We must develop our self-awareness. Self-awareness begins with examining what really drives our behaviour and beliefs. Before we can fulfil our greatest potential, we first need to understand both what drives us and what we are aiming for, beyond just feeling good today. Once we are self-aware, we can self-actualize.
3. All humans are interconnected, and therefore do best when they cooperate.
4. Successful teams experiment with strategies, learn on the fly, and adapt accordingly. It is the people and teams who are willing to examine why they were wrong and what they could do better that end up taking the day.
5. Often, leaders feel they need to assert their power visibly in order to come across as legitimate leaders. But in reality, the opposite is often true. Plutarch argued that the best way to influence others is not through control, but by example.
6. It is easy to think that authority means having all the power in the room. But real authority does the opposite; it works hard to make everyone feel empowered.
7. Freedom gives us choice. How we use that opportunity is entirely up to us.

When it comes to improving workplace satisfaction, feelings can be unreliable guides

When do you feel best at work? Chances are, you have probably talked to someone in HR about it. Smart workplaces care a lot about this issue. After all, research shows that employees work better when they feel better. The holy grail is for employees to feel self-actualized. Self-actualized is a fancy term for employees feeling that they have fulfilled their potential and used their talent. Therefore, it is become standard management strategy to gather personal feedback. Seems logical, right?

Unfortunately, such assessments are often misleading, says the authors. One of the reasons they do not offer reliable feedback is that feelings are hard to judge accurately. Imagine that a big financial firm is trying to figure out whether its new open-floor plan is promoting the cooperation and community it was hoping for. Employees are asked things like “Does using a large common space make you feel more connected?” or “Are you happy with the change?”

While the intention is good, there are a lot of problems with basing research on this approach. How people feel and how they report feeling are affected by all sorts of biases. First off, our perception

changes over time. For instance, maybe you have always worked in a private office, and so you report hating the common workspace the first month, only to change your opinion later. Your answer can also be altered by trivial factors, like being interviewed by someone to whom you are attracted.

Finally, there is no ideal timing for asking such survey questions. Say you had a great conversation with a co-worker in the common space on your way to the interview. Maybe you had felt so-so about the space before, but because you have just had such a positive experience, you report loving the new space.

The other major problem with using these kinds of assessments for devising strategy is that even if we could assess workers' feelings accurately, they alone would not tell us enough. The fact is, feeling self-actualized is very different from being self-actualized. That is because when we use the desire to feel good as our only guide, we are not aiming for anything substantial. Our feelings are important, but they are not the only important things. As we will see, philosophy argues that the good life is less about feeling good and more about pursuing things that are good for us.

Reason and self-examination are important tools for self-actualization

The authors ask; what makes life meaningful and enjoyable? For thousands of years, that is been one of the central questions of philosophy. The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle believed that the answer lies with our ability to reason. In his view, we become self-actualized human beings by making rational choices based on what we think is right and wrong. This is what makes us different from animals, who live just to survive, or slaves, who have been stripped of their freedom to make choices.

By using reason, we can find what Aristotle calls the middle way. Think of it as the path of virtue that runs in between two opposing vices. For example, the virtue of courage lies between the vice of rashness and the vice of cowardice. If you are too bold in the face of danger, you are being rash. If you are not bold enough, you are cowardly. But if you act with just the right amount of boldness, you are courageous.

Unfortunately, there's no one-size-fits-all method to finding the middle way. What is courageous in one situation might not be courageous in another. Imagine you are under attack, whether on the battlefield or in a meeting. Should you fight back, or should you try to diffuse the conflict? It all depends on the circumstances, and you must judge these yourself. And that is why you need to use your reasoning to figure out the right course of action.

But according to the nineteenth-century German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, there is more to self-actualization than just using reason. We also must develop our self-awareness. Self-awareness begins with examining what really drives our behaviour and beliefs. For example, Helen might feel that she behaves the way she does because she is a very loving and generous person. But upon self-examination, she may discover that the real reason for her behaviour is a deep fear of rejection.

Nietzsche argues that once we understand what drives us, we can free ourselves and exert our will to power. This means taking responsibility for crafting ourselves and our lives according to our values. In other words, before we can fulfil our greatest potential, we first need to understand both what drives us and what we are aiming for, beyond just feeling good today. Once we are self-aware, we can self-actualize.

Buddhist philosophy can help you develop a better long-term business strategy

How often do you hear phrases like "It's a dog-eat-dog world," or "If I do not look out for myself, no one will"? Behind these phrases is a philosophical perspective that we are all on one-person teams, competing with each other. A famous business simulation exercise illustrates how deeply ingrained this perspective is. In the experiment, participants are gathered into groups, and each group is given a

pretend fishing company to run. Members must design the ideal strategy for their company and adapt that strategy as obstacles are introduced.

If the companies were to share information and cooperate, they would all benefit and increase their profits in the long run. But what happens instead? You guessed it! As the challenges become more pressing, each group fights for dominance, assuming that if it does not gain control, someone else will become the big kid on the block and push it around.

Most business strategy today buys into this view of human nature. As a result, strategy focuses on trying to beat the competition and win at all costs. This often ends up harming others – and can harm us as well. It also undermines our long-term success. Luckily, this is not the only philosophical perspective on human nature. Buddhist philosophy, for instance, begins with a very different premise. According to Buddhism, all humans are interconnected, and therefore do best when they cooperate.

To see the benefits of putting this view of human nature into practice, just look at the “Malbec Miracle” in Argentina. For years, wine production in the Mendoza region of the country struggled because there was no trust or cooperation among growers, transporters, and distributors.

Everything changed when they decided to come together with the common goal of making the local grape varietal, Malbec, into a global brand. Their new strategy was based on the idea that what is best for the individual is best for the group. Not only have bribery, corruption, and mistrust plummeted, but Malbec has become the global success they hoped for! The Malbec Miracle is just one of many examples that show how changing your strategy from one that prioritizes competition to one that prioritizes cooperation is a win-win for everyone. By adopting a Buddhist perspective, we can create fairer, more sustainable, and more successful business strategies.

Successful strategy prioritizes experimentation and learning

There are right ways and wrong ways to do many things in life, like following a recipe, putting air in your tires, or weeding your garden, says the authors. But in competitive activities like sports and business, there is no single “right way” to play. That means that while we can learn from the mistakes and successes of others, competitive activities are not about following set steps. Instead, we should think about them as a playing field with some rules in place, and a bunch of people coming up with creative ways to try to win.

Think about a professional basketball team competing in the NBA. In one scenario, its members might focus their strategy on getting their point guard to shoot as many threes as possible. In another scenario, the best strategy might be running out the clock, or double-teaming a star player on the other team. There is no single secret to how to win.

Instead, successful teams experiment with strategies, learn on the fly, and adapt accordingly. In business, you can see this principle at work in the stock market. Sure, there are some general best practices, and there are rules for how to play, but you cannot just follow a step-by-step guide and make millions investing. If it were as easy as that, everyone would be a millionaire! Instead, the most successful investors are the ones who do not assume there is one certain path to success, but who experiment, learn, and adapt instead.

The investor George Soros is a great example of a businessman who has become successful by applying a philosophy of human fallibility to his work, says the authors. The basic idea here is that no-one is perfect and that we always have more to learn. By understanding that anything he assumes could easily be wrong, Soros stays alert and ready to change direction. Any time a strategy does not fulfil his expectations, he immediately examines what his initial assumptions were and where he might have gone wrong.

It is not easy to admit that we have made a mistake or that our initial strategy was not all that great.

But the ability to learn from our mistakes and change direction is often what leads to great success. Imagine that a basketball team refused to change its strategy when its best player fouled out, or that its assumptions about the other team's playbook were false. Refusing to change will just leave you in the dust. It is the people and teams who are willing to examine why they were wrong and what they could do better that end up taking the day.

Leadership is about trust, fairness, and leading by example

Imagine you are applying for jobs, and two firms are interested in hiring you. You meet the CEO of each of them. One CEO is late to the meeting, interrupts you, and yells at his secretary. The second CEO listens respectfully, is honest with you about the responsibilities of your position and asks for your insight into solving a problem. Which boss would you rather work for?

Chances are, you would much prefer the second boss. That is because the first boss has fallen prey to a common misconception about leadership. Often, leaders feel they need to assert their power visibly in order to come across as legitimate leaders. But the opposite is often true. This principle goes all the way back to Ancient Rome, where the philosopher Plutarch argued that the best way to influence others is not through control, but by example.

An excellent embodiment of this leadership philosophy is Max Perutz, one of the most successful scientists of the twentieth century. Perutz ran the Cavendish Laboratory, which has been awarded nine Nobel Prizes, four Orders of Merit and nine Copley Medals. The secret to his success? Perutz built a world-class lab by assuming that everyone he worked with was as ambitious, hardworking, and honest as he was. He did not care about bureaucratic rules, hierarchies, or proving himself to his co-workers. Instead, he inspired his colleagues to be the best they could be through his own brilliance and dedication.

One of the reasons Perutz's employees trusted and admired him so much was because their work environment felt fair. There are many ways to foster a sense of fairness. One of the most effective is to borrow a philosophical principle called the veil of ignorance. The veil of ignorance was developed by John Rawls, probably the most famous political philosopher of the twentieth century.

To put the exercise into practice, gather your workers together and present them with a problem that needs solving. Here is the catch, says the authors. They must develop a plan that feels fair to all of them, without knowing beforehand who will end up with which role and set of duties. In other words, each participant will be ready to do any of the jobs the team creates. Great leaders will involve themselves in the process, showing their willingness to roll up their sleeves and do any of the work that their employees normally do.

Real authority promotes empowerment at all levels of an organization

It is easy to think that authority means having all the power in the room. But real authority does the opposite; it works hard to make everyone feel empowered. One of the biggest mistakes we make is to think about empowerment as something to be "granted" rather than something to "gain." When leaders treat power as a resource to bestow in certain quantities on those below them, their workers are not actually being empowered. That is just "granting" something temporarily.

To feel truly empowered, we need to be encouraged to empower ourselves. That means asserting our ideas, taking risks, and working hard to actualize our goals. In our private lives, we are all empowered, to one extent or another; we take risks, discover, and use intuition and passion as our guides. We don't ask permission to start a new hobby, end a relationship, or move. We take charge. Good leadership encourages us to bring these qualities to work. Not only are empowered employees more productive, but they trust and respect leadership more. To understand how this works, we can look at the seventeenth-century philosopher Thomas Hobbes, who argued that authority that is simply taken and

imposed is not real or sustainable authority.

Hobbes thought that political rule would always be unstable unless subjects respected the authority of their king. In other words, the people being ruled had to give the king power, rather than the king imposing his inherent power on them. People who feel demeaned and disrespected will present their leaders, while people who feel empowered will be loyal and hardworking, says the authors.

A great example of a CEO who understood this principle is Nandu Nandkishore, who saved Nestle Philippines (NPI) from stagnant sales growth and growing competition. Instead of coming in and telling workers what to do, he asked them what should be done, and followed their advice. NPI turned around, and its growth exploded.

There are thus two important lessons about empowerment, says the authors. The first is that leaders need to stop “handing out” empowerment like its Halloween candy, and instead create a work environment in which employees can self-empower. The second is that leaders need to realize that authority is not simply theirs for the taking. Just like their employees, leaders need to earn their power.

To communicate effectively, stop trying to control the conversation

How often do you experience the feeling of going ‘round and ‘round in a discussion without getting anywhere? This can happen because we think we are listening when, often, we really are not. In reality we have entered the conversation with a set opinion and a predetermined outcome. Even if we claim we are open to new ideas, a lot of the time, we are trying to control a conversation.

As an exercise, the next time you are discussing something, try to separate the things you can control from the things you cannot. For instance, you can control how you say what you say and how you respond to another person, but you cannot control what he says or how he responds. Focusing on what is in your realm of control and letting go of what is not dates all the way back to Stoic philosophy, in the third century BCE. If you think about how complicated communication is, taking a Stoic approach makes a lot of sense. In every conversation, participants bring their intentions, past experiences, beliefs, and emotions to the table. All of those affect how we respond to information, and they certainly cannot be controlled by another person.

The authors go on to say, imagine, for example, that Sarah, a manager, is trying to get Henry to take the lead on organizing an end-of-year conference. She offers him the role in what she thinks is clear and straightforward language. Henry responds with hesitation, and Sarah gets frustrated and assigns the task to someone else. A few years later, Henry ends up organizing the conference, and it's a roaring success. Sarah asks him why he had been so resistant to the opportunity years before. He tells her that the way she asked him had made him feel as though she did not trust his judgment, and that in prior work experiences he had been discouraged from being creative.

If Sarah and Henry had talked more openly about why they initially responded to each other's communication styles the way they did, not only would the conference have benefited earlier from Henry's talent, but he would have felt encouraged and empowered. As leaders, we must realize that trying to control other people's ideas and reactions is counterproductive and, indeed, impossible. Instead, the goal should be to take responsibility for what we can control – our own thoughts, feelings, responses, and actions – and do our best to understand, rather than try to control, other people.

To promote engagement, we need to learn to treat each other not as objects, but as people

You know that feeling of excitement and inspiration when what you are working on does not even feel like work anymore? Maybe you are thinking, “Yeah, I experience that about once every five years.” Well, feeling that way is what it means to be engaged, and it turns out that being engaged is not some magic formula – it is actually a baseline human condition, says the authors.

Unfortunately, a lot of company culture has the whole idea of engagement backward. Management thinks of engagement as something that needs to be created. But if being engaged is how we naturally are, then the problem lies elsewhere. One of the issues is how we measure engagement. In business, we often equate “buy-in” culture with engagement. For example, an HR worker recently told the authors that she used an R-A-G system to track employee engagement. R-A-G stood for “red, amber, green,” and measured how closely a worker’s opinions aligned with managements. Basically, if you agreed with the higher-ups, then you were engaged.

The philosopher Martin Buber put forward a radically different approach to interacting with other people and fostering spaces for real engagement. His theory was based on the difference between an I-It relationship and an I-Thou relationship. In an I-It relationship, we treat others as a means to an end. Using a RAG system treats employees as though they are objects, stripped of the legitimacy of their own ideas and experiences.

Instead, we need to engage with people as the complex individuals they are. This is an I-Thou relationship. To do this, Buber suggests we truly learn to “encounter” people. Encountering someone cannot be squeezed into a fifteen-minute planned activity. It requires the space, presence, and desire to move beyond formal roles, open up, and learn about others. So where do you find the time? What if you cut the number of meetings you have in half, and instead proactively created more space in your schedule to “run into” colleagues and stop for an informal, open conversation?

The authors have coached many senior leaders through just such a process, with stunning results. By drastically reducing formal meetings and instead creating the space and time to “encounter” employees, brave leaders have led their companies to new heights, all while boosting company morale and worker engagement.

Ethical behaviour in the workplace means understanding the concept of moral plurality

Every day, leaders need to make dozens of decisions. One hopes that that decision-making is guided by a sense of morality and a desire to do what is right. If the world were cleanly divided between “right” and “wrong,” that would not be so hard. Unfortunately, that is not how the world works. What makes ethical decision-making so difficult is that the real dilemma is not about choosing between right and wrong, but about choosing between two competing “rights.”

Take the following story, which occurred at the height of World War Two. An Allied officer received word that there had been a leak of very important information by a member of his staff. He tried his best to find out which of his secretaries had leaked it, but to no avail. Eventually, he had to choose between two “rights.” If he fired all the secretaries, he would ensure there would be no more leaks, which would protect the lives of soldiers. If he fired no one, he would ensure no innocent secretary would be punished for the wrongdoing of another. There was not a clear right or wrong. Instead, he had to weigh the relative value of each “right” against the other.

There is a philosophical term for the situation the officer found himself in. It is called moral plurality, the idea that there is not one single right or wrong, but a number of competing rights. The twentieth-century philosopher Isaiah Berlin was a big believer in moral plurality. He thought the idea of a perfect world where all values were harmoniously combined was impossible. In the case of the officer’s situation, for instance, there was no way for him to uphold the ethic of protecting his soldiers’ lives while also upholding the ethic of fair workplace conditions.

By understanding the complexity of competing ethics, leaders can create work environments in which people take the time to weigh both sides of an argument before acting. While moral dilemmas are always going to be challenging, treating them as the need to make a choice among multiple rights versus a choice between one right and one wrong is a big step in the right direction.

We also need to understand the responsibility that comes with freedom

It is easy to think about freedom as power, says the authors. By that logic, when we are free, we are free to do whatever we want. But in actuality, freedom involves a lot of responsibility. Think about the following scenario, says the authors. Mario has been tasked with designing the new website for his company, and he has been given instructions for every single component, from the colours to the banner design. His job is that of a designer, but in reality, he does not actually have any freedom to design. Without freedom, Mario probably feels held back, bored, and disempowered.

Now let us think about the opposite situation. Mario has been given total freedom to develop the website however he wants. At first, the opportunity probably feels exciting. But then fears and doubts might creep in. If he builds a website no one likes, he has no one to blame but himself. With the freedom to create comes total responsibility for what he creates. The lesson from this story is that freedom both allows us to feel empowered and forces us to take responsibility for our thoughts and actions, and to prepare for the possibility of being wrong or rejected. What freedom gives us is choice. How we use that opportunity is entirely up to us. One of the most important schools of philosophy to discuss the idea of choice is existentialism.

The existentialists believed that “existence precedes essence.” The idea here, says the authors, is that we come into the world as a blank page. To live is to determine who we are entirely. We cannot blame the past, our genetics, or anything outside of ourselves. As a philosophical position, it is optimistic in the sense that we get to choose who we are. But it has also challenging, because we are then given the responsibility to shape who and what we are entirely. If we succeed, that is on us. But if we fail, that is also on us.

Whether you are navigating the freedom and responsibility of actualizing a milestone at work or making the difficult ethical decision about whether to fire an employee, remember that with the freedom to choose comes a lot of responsibility. Great leaders do not treat freedom as power. They treat it as an enormous responsibility.

What I took from it

Many of the problems we face both on a personal level and a business level could be solved if we explored them through a different lens. Philosophy is a useful tool in the quest to understand why we act the way we do and how we could alter our thinking to achieve better results and be better leaders. So, if you want to be a better leader, or a more rounded person, look to philosophy for possible answers.

Strengthen your argumentative skills. The next time you think you are certain about something, run a thought experiment. Try to locate the basis of your certainty and figure out whether it is actually a solid foundation. Next, try to build up the logic of the counterargument as much as you can. What have you learned by the end that you did not know at the beginning?

Success

“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence then is not an act but a habit.”
– Aristotle

Be Obsessed Or Be Average

Grant Cardone

Many of us grew up with the impression that our reward for years of hard work and loyalty would be a nice retirement package that allows us to while away our golden years in a peaceful slumber. In this scenario, the most exciting moments are likely to involve games of bingo. But it does not have to be this way. So says Grant Cardone in his new book - Be Obsessed Or Be Average.

The only thing that is preventing your wildest dreams from coming true is fear of failure or rejection – and a lack of ambition. But once you begin to tap into the great powers and passion that come with obsession, you can use your fears to your advantage. Then you will be on your way to unlocking the limitless rewards that come with grand ambitions.

The four most powerful points I took from the book were;

1. It is important to always aim high and make promises that will make you rise to the challenge.
2. Embracing fear is all about having the right mind-set, and it is one that can give you a psychological advantage
3. Success is always going to be measured in growth. This means the smart thing to do is to put your profits and excess energy into expansion. The only money that matters is money that is helping you grow.
4. With great success comes opposition. It is just the way business works. The more haters you have, the more successful you are

Become obsessed, and you can have energy and balance in your life

Occasionally, there comes a time when you are on the job and feeling depleted of energy. When you are on the verge of burnout, you have two options: you can either take some time off or become obsessed. The average person will likely take the first option above, but this is not going to help you get where you want to go. If you want to reach the next level, you need to get obsessed and always push toward your goals. When this happens, you will find that you are generating energy, not depleting it. However, if you do feel exhausted, check in with yourself and reaffirm your purpose. Maybe you have gotten off track?

When the author hit 40, he began feeling tired and stressed. He realized he was constantly crisscrossing the United States to give one talk after another. On days when there was a US holiday, he would book a talk in Canada, and it was not unusual for him to wake up and not know which city he was in. It dawned on Cardone that all the travel and speaking engagements had distracted him from his real obsession. He did not start out to be a public speaker; he wanted to be the greatest salesman on earth.

After writing down his purpose and reasserting his goals in life, he immediately felt rejuvenated. Many people think that being obsessed leads to an imbalanced life, but the author has found that obsession is the key to both unlocking your energy and achieving real balance.

A balanced life is not about taking lots of time off to relax and hang out. It is about having the career and money you desire as well as good health, a happy family life and strong faith, says Cardone. And for this, you need to work hard each moment, which means you need the passion that comes with obsession.

With this energy, you can make the most of every second, like combining family time with fitness and taking the kids to the gym with you in the morning, something the author likes to do.

By keeping your obsessions fresh, you will find new motivation

Let us say you know what you are passionate about, but it took you a lot less time than expected to reach the goals you set for yourself. In this case, the question is not about getting started, but about keeping going and resisting the urge to spend each day kicking back in your hammock. And this is also where obsession comes in handy.

An exceptional career is not one that is satisfied by achieving one goal and calling it quits; instead, it involves a whole series of goals, each more audacious than the last. Having a passionate obsession means you are not one of those people whose goal is to retire so they will have plenty of time for playing golf. Your goals need to be grand, driving you toward a limitless future. This is a purpose that you feel is part of your very being and makes you excited to get out of bed each morning.

For example, at one point, the author owned 100 apartments, and then his goal immediately became more ambitious: to own 500. Now, as of 2016, he owns 4,500 units. Once you earn a million dollars, why not set a new goal of a billion? Start thinking of all the charitable organizations you could fund and the safety net you could provide for future generations. With endless ambitions, you can give every day the fuel that will carry you to a truly exceptional life.

Now, if you imagine your post-retirement life on a golf course, your goal might be to achieve that low handicap, but then what? Before long, you might end up spending most of the day watching TV, and then depression sets in. If you do not want to be miserable, you need to give yourself a grand purpose that will grow along with your career. So never settle. Stay active and keep reaching for new heights.

Aim high and worry about the details later

No one can predict exactly how things are going to work out. Even billionaires do not know exactly how they are going to make their fortune. Instead, they do what you should do, which is promise ten times more than they think is possible and then force themselves and their team to find a way to deliver on that promise. So, it is important to always aim high and make promises that will make you rise to the challenge. All the major events in your life, like getting married, having a child, or starting your first business require you to dive in and figure out how to swim as you go.

The same principle should hold true for the goals you set for yourself and your business. You can even release products before they are ready, especially if it means being the first on the market. Often being first is more important than being perfect, as Apple has proven time and again. Nearly every Apple product has had its fair share of flaws, but the company knows that being big, bold, and innovative is more important than being delayed in beta testing. That is why Apple is considered one of the best brands ever.

Another organization you should take cues from is the New England Patriots football team. When Robert Kraft took over as owner of the Patriots in 1995, they were struggling. But that did not stop Kraft from making bold promises to win the Super Bowl. This inspired the players to give 110 percent each season and each game, and now they have won five Super Bowls since Kraft came on board.

Not only that, the Patriots franchise is worth \$3.2 billion, and some of the best seats sell for \$500 and corporate boxes for \$500,000. Just like the players, the fans are inspired to believe their team is going to go far every year. As these examples show, it is good business practice to promise the moon and have the confidence that a plan will fall into place.

Embracing your fears will help you succeed

While pushing the envelope can be a driving force for success, it is also guaranteed to create some fear. But do not let this stop you. Fear needs to be understood and embraced since it goes hand in

hand with success. Fear comes in two main flavours: fear of rejection and fear of failure, and both must be dealt with if you want to succeed.

In 2008, J.K. Rowling addressed the graduating class at Harvard University. She said what makes you great in life is being brave enough to fail. So, if you never fail, you will never live. Rowling speaks from experience. She received 12 rejection letters before the first Harry Potter book was finally accepted by a publisher. And it went on to sell around twelve million copies. If she had let the fear of failure stop her, Harry Potter might not exist today, which is unthinkable!

So, go ahead and let yourself feel afraid, and know that it is OK because it means you are pushing yourself and moving forward. If you do not feel fear from time to time, it might mean you are getting comfortable and becoming a big fish in a small pond, which should be avoided since it means you are not growing.

If you feel you are stagnating, it might mean you need to move to a bigger pond. Perhaps it is time to open a new branch in another city or explore new business partnerships that will expose you to a new market?

When it comes to beating the competition, fear can also be useful. Embracing fear is all about having the right mind-set, and it is one that can give you a psychological advantage. For the author, the biggest breakthrough came following the 2008 economic collapse. At the time, everyone was scared about the future, so he decided to use this fear as an incentive to be more aggressive in making sales and more public appearances. So, while others were running scared, he began to expand into more markets, which paid off rather nicely.

Stop saving and use that money to grow

Whatever your fears may be, success is always going to be measured in growth. This means the smart thing to do is to put your profits and excess energy into expansion. With this strategy, you will have the best chance of cornering the market. This strategy also means you should view spending as much more important than saving. Think of it this way; money that is not being used is not very useful, is it? The only money that matters is money that is helping you grow.

This also makes good tax sense. While profits are always taxed, money that is re-invested in your company is usually not taxed, making these dollars more valuable at the end of the day. So, it's wise to always be on the lookout for growth and investment opportunities, including new markets to expand into and new avenues to explore.

The author recommends spending 30 to 40 percent of your profits on expansion opportunities. But if those expansion opportunities are proving hard to find, then the next best thing is to spend that money on publicity. Generally speaking, money spent on marketing, advertising and social media is never wasted. When publicity works and you become a household name, those previously elusive expansion opportunities will soon be knocking at your door.

Whatever you do, do not try to be a "one-man show." Being a leader means guiding your team to success, and often this means having a very big team, such as Amazon's staff of over 200,000, or Apple and Microsoft, with their 100,000-strong teams. Currently, around 75 percent of US companies are what the author would call a one-man show, and when you average out their annual profit, it is a meagre \$44,000.

The author learned the limits of this approach the hard way, spending ten years trying to do it all himself until he realized that being in charge means knowing how to delegate and hire people who help you earn money. That is when Cardone started employing a lot of people, and the company really began to grow.

Use haters as allies to fuel your obsession

With great success comes opposition. It is just the way business works. But since you can anticipate competitors and critics you can also prepare yourself. Today's social media landscape offers haters plenty of avenues to pick on you, but the best way to deal with their presence is not to try and shut them up – it is to be thankful for the attention.

Think of it this way: the more haters you have, the more successful you are. There is an old saying that “there's no such thing as bad publicity,” and in this case, haters can indeed be used as free publicity. When someone criticises you, they see you as a leading force in the market. No one picks on an insignificant business. Only those who are important are worthy of trolls and vehement criticism.

To put it another way: If you have millions of Twitter users hating on you, there is a chance you could become the next president! Haters also have the added benefit of making us more resilient. Think back to all those bullies over the years. For better or worse, they did play a role in making you the person you are today.

Whether it was the jocks or mean girls who picked on you in high school, the bank manager who didn't approve your loan, or the anonymous troll who's calling you a capitalist pig, they might be a pain in the ass but they can also help you to form a thicker skin and fuel your passion to prove them wrong. If used wisely, the words of haters can even result in you making some adjustments and creating a better product. However, it is not just haters that can stand between you and your obsession. Sometimes, members of your own team can be the ones holding you back.

Be obsessive about having the best team possible

Which would you consider more important for generating profits, being nice or being effective? Hopefully, you chose the second option since it is a fact of business that, from time to time, you need to make unpopular decisions in order to maintain leadership and ensure that everyone is staying on track. The best way to maintain control of your staff and business is to control the conversation – literally.

Everyone on your team should be aware that you are always both listening and observing them. This means listening in on their sales calls to make sure your team is as aggressive and passionate about moving product as you would be if you were making the calls yourself. If someone is not up to your standards, or if the client is not properly advised, it is perfectly acceptable to enter the conversation and set things straight.

There are other ways to make your team aware that you recognize good work and are personally engaged in every aspect of the business. The author makes a habit of sending personal messages of gratitude to the individual workers who put all their effort into their work. Even if he is thousands of miles from the office, he will record a video on his phone and send it to the team. Honest, personal touches like this will ensure total commitment. But your control really starts by being ruthless when it comes to hiring and firing.

Remember, when you hire someone an agreement is made you pay them and treat them fairly, while they perform a certain standard of work. So, when an employee fails to hold up their part of the deal and becomes dead weight, you should not feel bad about letting them go and replacing them with someone who will do the job.

These days we no longer expect to work the same job for 50 years. Most people expect to have several full-time jobs over the course of their career. Millennials are especially aware of how to take advantage of short-term contracts in order to build a varied career. It is your job to build a team that is as obsessive and passionate about your business as you are. With this in place, success is sure to follow.

What I took from it

Being exceptional means having a growth mind-set. To truly succeed, you need to set high expectations for yourself and your company that may seem impossible. But these big goals are key to motivating a tireless workforce and propelling you toward truly exceptional results.

Do not waste time on tasks that are not fuelling your obsession. Do not let household chores eat into valuable time which would be better spent pursuing your dreams. Do not hesitate to pay someone else to clean your car, mow your lawn or vacuum your apartment. Surely there are more important things that both suit your skill set and move your plans forward.

Black Box Thinking

Matthew Syed

Whether you failed to pass an exam, failed to woo someone you found attractive or failed to whip up a great meal for your friends, failure is failure. And it is one of the most annoying and scary things out there. But maybe failure is not just annoying and scary and counterproductive. Maybe it is also the opposite of those things. This book will show how failure can be used to your advantage – how it is in fact key to progress and success.

The three most powerful points I took from the book were;

1. People are highly averse to admitting that they have made a mistake. In fact, we hate admitting that we have made an error more than we hate making mistakes themselves.
2. Failure can be annoying. But it can also inspire you to see problems in a different light. And with this new perspective comes new solutions.
3. If you cannot handle failure – if you run from it instead – then you will end up failing more than is necessary.

People are afraid of failure because it compromises their self-esteem

Children have a hard time admitting their mistakes. It is practically automatic for them to deny doing things like drawing all over the walls, even when the evidence – the marker in their hand and the ink on their fingers – is indisputable. But are we that much different when we are all grown up? Not really. In general, people are highly averse to admitting that they have made a mistake. In fact, we hate admitting that we have made an error more than we hate making mistakes themselves! A look at the criminal justice system makes this very clear.

In 1984, the advent of DNA testing enabled prosecutors to prove guilt beyond doubt. You would think that this fool-proof technology would work the other way around, too – helping wrongfully convicted people prove their innocence. Unfortunately, it usually did not work that way. In most cases law enforcement simply would not admit that they had made a mistake.

Take the case of Juan Rivera, a 19-year-old with a history of mental illness. In 1992, he was accused of raping and murdering an eleven-year-old girl and sentenced to life in prison. Thirteen years later, a DNA test proved Juan's innocence. But prosecutors would not budge, and it took another six years for his release. So why is it so hard to admit mistakes? Well, admitting error compromises our self-esteem, especially when it is about something important. Those prosecutors from the Rivera case were not necessarily bad people. They may have simply wanted to cover up their mistakes. Perhaps the hardest part of admitting mistakes is the first part – admitting to yourself that you have made one.

This is especially true when the mistake is a big one, like sending an innocent person to spend 13 years in prison. Admitting such a horrible mistake instantly compromises your self-esteem, making it difficult to even live with yourself? So, in all likelihood, the prosecutors truly believed that Rivera was guilty, and that there was some explanation for the negative DNA test that did not rule out guilt.

Failure certainly hurts, but it is a necessary precursor to improvement

As you saw above (and no doubt learned from some experience in your own life), it is extremely difficult to admit mistakes. But failing face and understand failure has consequences: it hinders our ability to succeed.

Failure is more than personal shame; rather, it is an indication that something is wrong. And when you know that something is wrong – be it your personal attitude or the way a company is organized – then you have an opportunity to fix it. Think about it like this; when playing basketball, every missed basket is, technically, a failure. You obviously made a miscalculation, a mistake. Maybe you are holding the ball incorrectly, using too much force or jumping awkwardly. Each time you miss the basket, you know that you have somehow failed to shoot a perfect shot.

It is by adjusting your behaviour according to the feedback you get from failure that you improve, and ultimately succeed. All those missed shots provide you with crucial information about how to get things right next time – how to hold the ball, how to jump – so that you can eventually score. Nature works in the same way. Species evolve over the course of hundreds of thousands of years, with each generation passing on the mutations that made survival easier. It has as if each species makes a record of the things that almost got it killed in order to ensure that future generations are better prepared for danger.

A team of Unilever biologists employed a similar method when attempting to design a nozzle that would not get clogged. In total, they produced 449 designs, taking the best design from each series until they eventually developed the most effective nozzle.

If you cannot admit your mistakes, then you will never progress

Imagine a world in which no one admitted to or learned from their failures. In such a world, mistakes would be repeated, with drastic consequences. It is often obvious whether someone succeeded or failed: a patient either lives or dies, a plane either lands or crashes. The subtlety lies in the explanation: was this failure due to a mistake, or not?

But it is not always obvious that a change in action would lead to a change in outcome. Would the patient have lived if treated differently? Would the plane have crashed if landed elsewhere? It is precisely this vagueness that makes it so easy to shirk responsibility for mistakes. But if you cannot admit mistakes, how will you learn to do better next time?

In the medical profession, mistakes are so unacceptable that doctors and nurses rarely admit to making them. As a result, mistakes are repeated, ultimately at the expense of the patient's health. Studies estimate that at least 40,000 people die per year in the United States due to medical mistakes.

In some fields, however, failure is simply impossible. As a result, these fields make virtually no progress. For example, pseudo-sciences like astrology have not progressed at all in centuries. The assumptions underpinning astrological predictions are simply too vague to be falsified. Another great example is bloodletting, which was a common medical practice before clinical trials became standard in the nineteenth century.

Doctors would drain blood from patients, in an attempt to cure or prevent diseases. Although this only weakened the patients when they most needed their strength, doctors nonetheless employed this practice for over 1700 years. They had no idea they were literally killing patients, as they had never bothered to test the practice.

To learn and develop, you must subject your theories to failure

We tend to see the world as simple, and easily understandable. As a result, we rarely feel the need to test our theories. But this deprives us of the opportunity to see if these theories are true or false! The world is big and scary, so it makes sense that we would look for simple explanations wherever we can find them. Think back to the practice of bloodletting: medieval doctors thought that patients who died were simply doomed from the beginning. Such patients were so far gone that even bloodletting could not save them. Though it may be hard to admit, the world is not simple. Difficult situations often stem

from numerous causes. Simplifying things only prevents you from making sense of the world by testing your theories.

The medieval doctors never tested the validity of bloodletting because they had no reason to. They already “knew” why the patients died – at least, they thought they did. But giving ideas an opportunity to fail makes room for new ideas and progress. No matter how reasonable an idea may seem, you can never be certain of its validity if you do not put it to the test.

One way to test a theory is to perform a randomized control test (RCT), in which you test something against a control group that helps make the cause of failure clearer. For example, if you wanted to test the efficacy of bloodletting, you could gather ten patients, each suffering from the same illness, and split them into two groups: the bloodletting group and the control group. The bloodletting group gets a bloodletting procedure; the other group gets no treatment.

If everyone in each group dies, then you do not have enough information to make an informed judgment about bloodletting. However, if everyone in the bloodletting group dies, but half of the control group survives, then you must admit that bloodletting is not only ineffective, but downright harmful.

Failure inspires great solutions and helps fine-tune a complicated process

Failure can be annoying. But it can also inspire you to see problems in a different light. And with this new perspective comes new solutions. Often, great ideas arise when there is a specific problem – that is, when something has failed. The failure itself is what drives you to find a solution, and in this way, failure can function as a driver of progress. Think about the ATM, for example, conceived one day when John Shephard-Barron forgot to go to the bank to pick up some cash. In other words, he failed at having cash when he needed it. But through his failure, a new solution arose: a money-dispensing machine that is open when banks are closed.

In addition to catalysing novel solutions, failure is also a way to fine-tune complicated processes, as it helps us discern a problem’s component parts. The more complicated the process, the harder it is to fine-tune. Complexity makes it harder to see exactly where things went wrong. Say you want to help improve education throughout the African continent. How do you know if your aid is making a difference? Looking at grades alone does not tell you much, because the problem is simply too large to know what causes a certain change.

However, by allowing yourself to fail on a small scale, it becomes easier to discern which strategies are working, and then apply them on a larger scale. For example, in Kenya, a group of economists wanted to improve the quality of local schools. They started by recording the grades at different schools, and trying out various things, to see if they improved scores.

Their first idea was to deliver free textbooks. However, they soon discovered that schools without this aid performed just as well. So, they tried several other approaches. Finally, they stumbled upon a solution that helped improve grades: de-worming medicine. Once a small-scale solution like this is developed, it can be tested on a wider scale.

Reaching your full potential requires embracing failure

If you want to take full advantage of failure, it is not enough to understand intellectually that failure is helpful. You also need to build a positive relationship with it. If you cannot handle failure – if you run from it instead – then you will end up failing more than is necessary. In fact, a fear of failure can cause people to create unnecessary barriers to success. For instance, the author recalls some of his classmates, the “cool kids,” who used to go out partying the night before exams. These students were so afraid of not living up to expectations that they decided to do things to take the edge off potential failure. If they did fine on the exam, then all was well. But if they ended up failing, they could blame it on the night of drinking.

Obviously, this is a terrible way to improve. You must be willing to fail, and take responsibility for that failure, in order to develop – because failure is a valuable teacher. But no teacher in the world can help you if you are not willing to listen. Learning from failure means spending time and effort thinking about your mistakes. Unfortunately, people would rather bury their heads in the sand than face their failures. This is a major problem because our attitude toward failure often determines our success.

We see evidence for this in an experiment performed by a team of psychologists at Michigan State University. The experiment divided children in two groups: those who believed they were born intelligent, and those who thought they could get smarter with practice. Each group was assigned tasks with increasing difficulty, designed so that children would eventually fail. The experiment revealed that children who believed they could improve were able to use these failures to progress in subsequent tests. The other children, the ones who believed their intelligence was fixed, simply gave up.

What I took from it

It is hard to admit to mistakes. But if you want to meet your full potential, then you not only have to recognize that you make mistakes but embrace them as part of your path to success. Indeed, without failure, there is no progress.

Deep Work

Cal Newport

Be honest, over the course of reading this summary, how many notifications, emails and texts do you think you will get? Chances are there might be quite a few. In an age where technology is evolving at a pace we could have once only dreamed of, we must acquire the skills and ability to focus on one task at a time in our daily work without interruption. We must learn to practice deep work. What does that mean and how can it be achieved? For starters, you'd better turn off your notifications and then you will find out.

The three most powerful points I took from the book were;

1. Deep work is intentional and desired, which makes it essential to have rituals that prepare your mind for it.
2. The problem is that our brains are wired to be easily distracted.
3. By scheduling everything you do, you will free up time for being mindful of how you spend it.

Multitasking and distraction are the enemies of productivity

A lot of people think that doing tons of things at once is the most productive use of their time, but this logic is dead wrong. That is because multitasking does not equal productivity. Sophie Leroy, a business professor at the University of Minnesota who conducted research on this phenomenon in 2009, shows why.

She demonstrates that when switching from task A to task B, our attention stays attached to the first activity, which means we can only half-focus on the second, which hurts our performance. Her experiments utilized two groups: group A worked on word puzzles until she interrupted them to go on to reading resumes and making hypothetical hiring decisions; Group B got to finish their puzzles before moving on to the resumes. In between the two tasks, Leroy would give a quick test to see how many keywords from the puzzles were still stuck in the participants' minds. The result?

Group A was much more focused on the puzzle and therefore less focused on the important task of hiring the right person. The long and short of it? Multitasking is no good for productivity. Neither is being electronically connected all the time. In fact, while it might seem harmless to keep social media and email tabs open in your web browser, the mere fact of seeing things pop up on your screen is enough to derail your focus, even if you're not immediately addressing notifications.

For instance, a 2012 study by the consulting firm McKinsey found that the average worker spends over 60 percent of the workweek using online communication tools and surfing the internet with just 30 percent devoted to reading and answering emails. Despite this data, workers feel like they are working more than ever. That is because completing small tasks and moving information around makes us feel busy and accomplished – but it is just preventing us from truly focusing.

There are different strategies for achieving deep work – all of which require intention

So now you know some of the roadblocks that get in the way of deep work, but how can you overcome them? While there is no universal strategy, here are a few you might find helpful. The first is the monastic approach. This strategy works by eliminating all sources of distraction and secluding yourself like a monk.

The second is called the bimodal approach, which involves setting a clearly defined, long period of seclusion for work and leaving the rest of your time free for everything else. The third is the rhythmic approach. The idea here is to form a habit of doing deep work for blocks of, say, 90 minutes and using a calendar to track your accomplishments. And finally, the journalistic strategy is to take any unexpected free time in your daily routine to do deep work. But regardless of which technique you employ, it is key to remember that they are methodical, not random.

In fact, that is exactly the difference between being in the zone and deep work. After all, you get in the zone by chance and often only after hours of procrastination. On the other hand, deep work is intentional and desired, which makes it essential to have rituals that prepare your mind for it. One ritual might be to define your space. It can be as simple as placing a “do not disturb” sign on your office door or going to a library or coffee shop. The latter is especially helpful if you work in an open office.

Just take J.K. Rowling, who, while finishing her last Harry Potter book, stayed at a five-star hotel just to escape her hectic home environment and cope with the pressure so she could get into deep work. Another ritual is to define boundaries, for example, by disconnecting the internet or turning off your phone. And finally, make your deep work sustainable. Because, whether it's light exercise, food, or a caffeine pick-me-up, it's essential to give your body what it needs if you want to focus. If you don't, you'll never have the mental energy you need to stay in deep work.

Focus your brain and be selective about your use of technology

In the modern world, our brains have grown accustomed to craving distraction. After all, everywhere we look, people are glued to their screens, playing games, messaging, or refreshing their Facebook pages on repeat. The problem is that our brains are wired to be easily distracted. That is because, evolutionarily speaking, these distractions could pose risks or opportunities. As a result, it's hard for us to deeply focus on one task. But do not worry, productive meditation can rewire your brain and help you focus. Here is how it works:

Use moments that would otherwise be unproductive – like walking your dog, taking a shower, or commuting to work – to consider a problem you need to take care of without letting your mind change subjects. To get started, ask yourself questions that identify different issues in solving a given problem. Then, once you have landed a specific target, ask yourself action questions like, “What do I need to accomplish my goal?”

Think of it as a hardcore workout routine for your brain that will help build your focus! It is also key to be mindful of your intentions when using social media and the internet. For instance, if you use Facebook to keep in touch with friends, then use it to communicate with them, but also try, when possible, to spend more time with them in person.

And, if you cannot manage to do that, try going cold turkey: quit social media for 30 days and afterward, ask yourself: Would the past month have been that much better with social media in my life? Did anyone care that I stopped using it? If you answer no to both, give it up for good. But if you answer yes, then it is probably for the best to return to it.

Scheduling both work and free time is essential to restoring energy

When you get home from work or running errands all day, often all you want to do is, well, nothing. And for lots of us, that means having no fixed time slots where we must complete tasks. But ironically enough, we end up stuck in the same routine every night: we watch TV, scroll through our phones or stare at our computers. Then, when it is finally time to go to bed, we feel more tired than when we got home, leaving us depleted of energy for the next day.

How can you avoid that situation? By scheduling everything you do, you will free up time for being

mindful of how you spend it. At the start of every workday, create a schedule that is divided into blocks of at least 30 minutes. In this schedule you should set both work and personal tasks like time to relax, eat or catch up on email.

It is inevitable that your schedule will change during the day, but if this happens, just rearrange your blocks. The idea is not to strictly abide by your itinerary, but to cultivate awareness about how you spend your time. That means it is also key to plan your evenings and weekends ahead so you can take actions toward specific goals. So, try to leave your work at the office, for instance, by imposing limitations and not checking your email after a certain time. By doing so, you will give your mind the space it needs to shut down.

Finally, planning your evenings and weekends around activities other than those involving the internet can help you revitalize your mind and body. Maybe it is reading, exercise or just some quality time with loved ones.

What I took from it

Distractions are everywhere in the modern world where multitasking has become our default state and is killing our productivity. The good news is we can take back control of our time by eliminating distractions and letting our brains focus on one task at a time.

The next time you feel completely exhausted at the end of an unproductive day, consider taking an “internet sabbath.” Just take a notepad to work in which you write specific time slots when you are allowed to use the internet and avoid using it outside these time blocks. This will increase your productivity because you will unconsciously want to take more advantage of the time you have allowed yourself to use the internet. You will be amazed at how your focus skyrockets, merely by being present when browsing the web instead of in a half-conscious state where time slips by.

Grit

Angela Duckworth

Doing a quick online search brings up many synonyms for the word 'grit'. Words like courage, courageousness, bravery, backbone, spirit, strength of character, strength of will, toughness, determination, stamina, doggedness, tenacity, perseverance, and endurance. All powerful words describing what Angela Duckworth captures in one word – grit. In her latest book *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*, Duckworth brings our attention to this psychological trait. Grit has two components, she says: passion and perseverance.

Passion means having enduring interest in the job you are doing. Perseverance means being persistent and never giving up. Angela shows anyone striving to succeed - be it parents, students, educators, athletes, or businesspeople - that the secret to outstanding achievement is not talent but a special blend of passion and persistence. She discusses how effort is often ignored, outshone by 'talent'.

She goes on to say that the highly accomplished are paragons of perseverance. For most people, there is no realistic expectation of ever catching up to their ambitions. In their own eyes, they are never good enough. These highly accomplished are the opposite of complacent. They are satisfied being unsatisfied. Chasing something of unparalleled interest and importance, and it is the chase - as much as the achievement - that is gratifying to them. Even if it is boring, or frustrating, or even painful, they do not dream of giving up. Their passion is enduring.

The three most powerful points I took from the book were;

1. Interest. Passion begins with enjoying what you do. Remember that interests must be triggered again and again and again. Find ways to make that happen. And have patience. The development of interests takes time.
2. The capacity to practice. One form of perseverance is the daily discipline of trying to do things better than we did yesterday.
3. Purpose. What ripens passion is the conviction that your work matters.

Culture, hard work and talent

Whether we realize it or not, the culture in which we live, and with which we identify, powerfully shapes just about every aspect of our being. At its core, a culture is defined by the shared norms and values of a group of people. The bottom line on culture and grit is if you want to be grittier, find a gritty culture and join it. If you are a leader, and you want the people in your organization to be grittier, create a gritty culture

Effort is twice as valuable as talent

It comes out in the book that several nation-wide surveys in the United States have asked the question, which quality is more important for success: talent or hard work? Around 66% of respondents favoured hard work, grit, and determination. Hard work was the quality they claimed to look for when searching for a prospective employee.

Talent is how quickly your skills improve when you invest effort. Achievement is what happens when you take your acquired skills and use them. The effort builds skill. At the very same time, effort makes skill productive. It seems that when anyone accomplishes a feat worth writing about, we rush to anoint

that individual as extraordinarily “talented.” If we overemphasize talent, we underemphasize everything else. If we think of genius as something magical, we are not obliged to compare ourselves and find ourselves lacking. Duckworth states that you can look at it like an equation; to determine your level of skill, you take your talent in each field and multiply it by the amount of effort you put in. So, $Talent \times Effort = Skill$.

But when it comes to getting results, you must put that skill back into the equation. And, once again, the results are going to depend on the amount of effort you put in. So, this time, $Skill \times Effort = Achievement$. You can also look at it in terms of athletics. Even if you are naturally talented, you still must put in the effort to practice and develop your skill. If you want to win Olympic gold, for instance, it is almost completely pure effort that is going to get you there. The remarkable power of effort is often discovered by people who fight to overcome a lack of talent.

Different levels of goals

Conventional wisdom says that we should do what we love. But, more importantly, you need to stay committed to doing what you love. Giving yourself small daily chores is a good way to keep up your levels of effort. Low-level goals like these can serve as a path to meeting your goals. Many people will set high-level goals, like becoming a doctor, lawyer, or a professional athlete. Having a life goal like this is inspirational, but it can also lead you into forgetting to set all the small goals you need to accomplish in order to make it happen.

An example from the book mentions, in order to become a doctor, there are a series of low-level goals that should first be set, like studying and passing your pre-med exams. Once this happens, there are more small goals, like getting to your classes on time and making sure you get good grades. Without incorporating these small goals into your everyday life, the big goal will remain frustratingly out of reach. However, having a larger dream and vision in place is important for providing meaning and inspiration in your day-to-day life.

After all, sticking to a disciplined regime is a whole lot easier when you have a clear picture of what you are working toward. And it also helps when these passions are straightforward.

Grit is about holding the same top-level goal for a very long time. It is so interesting and important that it makes up a great deal of your waking activity. In very gritty people, most mid-level and low-level goals are, in some way or another, related to that ultimate goal.

Practice makes perfect

Do you ever have trouble getting motivated during your workday? If so, you are not alone. A 2014 Gallup poll revealed that two-thirds of US workers do not feel motivated by their job, with most people finding their job boring. In fact, only 13 percent of workers said they feel engaged with their work. These statistics highlight a simple fact. No matter how much grit you have, if you want to stay motivated, it is important to do something that interests you.

People who practice or show grit always have more success at mastering a new skill than people who put in no effort at all. That said, cognitive psychologist Anders Ericsson has discovered that the key to this success is intelligent practice. An example in the book notes considering athletics. Successful runners do not practice with vague goals in mind; they are precise and keep a close eye on every detail of their runs, including keeping track of how their body is responding and the distance they are covering.

Their goals are also precise; they attempt to run 100 meters further than last time, to reach a specific speed by the end of the month or to ease the tension in their shoulders during practice. The benefits of deliberate practice are threefold it will get you off autopilot, help you avoid repetition and bring great results.

Find your true calling

There is no getting around the fact that sometimes we must do things we do not like. And chances are we have all procrastinated and postponed doing a task that seemed like a hassle. The best way to avoid procrastination is to get motivated by finding the purpose in your work. Motivation can be easy to find if you are doing something you love. But realizing how your work contributes to the well-being of others can be just as motivating. If you have not found your true calling yet, do not worry. It can take time and you might even find it while you are doing something else.

Lead by example

If you want to bring forth grit in your child, first ask how much passion and perseverance you have for your own life goals. Then ask yourself how likely it is that your approach to parenting encourages your child to emulate you. If the answer to the first question is “a great deal,” and your answer to the second is “very likely,” you are already parenting for grit.

Unfortunately, children get exposed to all sorts of bad advice, especially when they are told that they will never be smart enough and that hard work is a waste of time. This can lead to people never realizing their full potential, so to prevent this from happening it is important to recognize and encourage hard work instead of just rewarding talent.

Rather than crushing someone’s hopes, remind children that skill can be achieved through hard work and that grit and determination bring rewards. Unfortunately, schools routinely reward children for talent rather than hard work, and sadly, it is all too common for a parent, as well, to think that bad grades reflect a lack of intelligence rather than a lack of effort. This can instill a belief in the child that he is stupid and that he should give up.

If the parents and teachers simply tell children that they need to work harder, they will get motivated and achieve better results.

What I took from it

It is true that you should do something you love, but the fact is that you will always hit rough patches. Hard work can lead to procrastination and doubt, and that’s where grit comes in. With determination and resolve, you can motivate yourself to keep working toward your goals and persevere through the toughest of times.

Give yourself a challenge and practice your grit. What we accomplish in the marathon of life depends tremendously on our grit - our passion and perseverance for long-term goals. An obsession with talent distracts us from that simple truth. On your own, you can cultivate your own grit from the inside out. You can cultivate interests, develop a habit of daily practice and work on a purpose beyond yourself. You can also grow your grit “from the outside in.” Parents, coaches, teachers, bosses, mentors, friends - developing your personal grit depends critically on other people.

To be gritty is to keep putting one foot in front of the other. To be gritty is to hold fast to an interesting and purposeful goal. To be gritty is to invest, day after week after year, in challenging practice. To be gritty is to fall seven times and rise eight.

How Successful People Think

John C. Maxwell.

The world's most successful people have one thing in common; they are not afraid to think outside the box and carve out their own path. So says John C. Maxwell in his book *How Successful People Think*, published in 2003. But the journey along that road can be lonely. After all, we are a sociable species by nature. We like fitting in, and the price of social acceptance is falling in with accepted ideas. Going against the grain, questioning common notions, and striking out on your own is not likely to win you many friends.

Yet just think where we would be if everyone had always kept their brilliant ideas to themselves! To claim, as Copernicus did, that the earth was not at the centre of the universe must have struck his contemporaries as some form of madness. But he was right, and we are forever in his debt for having stuck to his guns. That goes to show just how important creative thinking and tenacity are when it comes to success. But, as Maxwell shows, you do not have to be an Einstein or Galileo to have great ideas. In fact, everyone can learn to think creatively – all it takes is knowing the right techniques and a bit of practice!

The three most powerful points I took from the book were;

1. Big picture thinkers are always looking for opportunities to learn. They are constantly on the go, visiting new places, meeting new people, and honing new skills.
2. Einstein once said that “imagination is more important than knowledge.” He was right. Your ideas are far more important than your role in a company or your job title.
3. It is always better to be part of something fantastic than aiming to be fantastic yourself.
Collaboration is the mother of innovation – shared thinking trumps solo thinking every time

Big picture thinkers are constantly learning

General Electric CEO Jack Welch regularly told his employees that existing relationships with clients are more important than individual sales. Why? Because he knows that, when it comes to being successful in the long run, it is sometimes necessary to leave the nitty-gritty behind for a moment and consider the bigger picture. But how can you start cultivating big picture thinking, asks Maxwell. By making sure you are always learning. Big picture thinkers are always looking for opportunities to learn. They are constantly on the go, visiting new places, meeting new people, and honing new skills.

The author has a handy technique that puts him in the right mindset to do that. He starts his day by looking at his schedule and asking himself what learning opportunities are likely to present themselves. Once he noted down the activities that are most likely to teach him something, he mentally primes himself to be on high alert. That means he is much more likely to be receptive to what is going on around him. So, when he once had dinner with National Football League (NFL) coach Dave Wannstedt, for instance, he was well prepared. He used the time to ask him all sorts of questions about teamwork and left the restaurant brimming with new insights.

That is something you can take up too; spend a couple of minutes each morning looking over your itinerary and ask yourself what opportunities to learn new things you are likely to encounter. Trying to become a big picture thinker is important because it gives you a window into how other people see the world. In other words, it makes you more empathetic. And that is good for your relationships; whether it is your clients, husband or wife, children or friends, empathizing with those around you will help you understand what they want and need. Seeing the big picture ultimately helps you think beyond your own narrow interests and take those of others into account.

Set and achieve clear targets by thinking realistically and making sure you do your homework

What is reality? Do not worry, this is not a philosophy lecture, says Maxwell. In fact, there is a pretty simple answer; reality is the difference between your desires and how the world is. If you want to succeed in the real world, you must leave your daydreams behind and start thinking realistically. That means setting targets and drawing up a game plan that will put you in a position to hit them.

Consider a businessman who is not a realistic thinker. He is positive and full of hope about the company's future. That is a great attitude to have, but there is a problem – he does not have a strategy. And without a strategy, his company's likely to fail. In the end, he is a bad leader. Realistic thinking, by contrast, promotes excellent leadership. That is because facing up to the way things really are forces you to clearly define your aims and formulate a plan of action that will get you there. Realistic thinking also helps simplify things. Stripping away all the unnecessary details and vague hopes and dreams makes you more efficient.

But what if you are an optimist, rather than a realist, by nature, asks Maxwell. Then you should start by doing your homework. That means getting to know the facts. Say you are a business leader mulling over your next move; ask yourself what you would do if your revenue dried up, a customer did not pay, or the bottom fell out of the market you are in.

Spend time researching these scenarios – after all, your realistic thinking will not amount to much if you are basing it on insufficient information. It is important to clear your mind of all preconceptions, prejudices, and second-hand opinions when you are doing this kind of background work. Instead of making assumptions, get to know the facts yourself. Chances are, you are not the only person facing this situation. Your thinking needs to be solid; it does not have to be original. You can learn a lot by looking at what other people have done in similar circumstances. As the author puts it, some of his best thinking was done by others.

Increase your options and make yourself more attractive by embracing creative thinking

Whatever line of work you are in, creativity is pure professional gold. Einstein once said that “imagination is more important than knowledge.” He was right. Your ideas are far more important than your role in a company or your job title. That said, Einstein was a genius – creative thinking was second nature to him. That might not apply to everyone, but there are techniques you can use to jumpstart your creativity. The first point to remember is that creativity does not just mean having lots of original ideas – you can start thinking creatively by simply considering a greater number of options.

That is one hallmark of creatives; they take as many possibilities into account as they can, which in turn gets the creative juices flowing and stimulates the imagination. So, if you have got a great idea, ask yourself what changes you could make to improve it. Think of it like a fishing net – the wider you cast it, the more fish you are likely to catch, says Maxwell.

The reason that is so important is that the best thinkers are not looking for the only answer – they are looking for the best answer out of many. The added bonus? It will help you craft a backup plan in case your preferred solution does not work out. Creative thinking also makes you and your ideas more attractive to other people. No wonder! Creativity is your intelligence having fun. People admire intelligence and are attracted to fun – it is an irresistible combination. Leonardo da Vinci is one example of someone who had fun with their brilliant mind.

The diversity of his ideas and interests is truly breath-taking; painter, architect, musician, engineer – he was the very definition of the Renaissance man. That does not mean you have to paint the Mona Lisa and design helicopters in your spare time, however. Set your mind free and explore your creativity in your own field and you will find that people will be irresistibly drawn to you!

Think unselfishly and you will make yourself part of something bigger

Adopting new modes of thinking boosts your chances of success, but there is also a way of thinking about the world that can change your entire life; unselfish thinking. Taking that up might just redefine your concept of success itself. That is because helping others is hugely rewarding. In fact, few things are anywhere near as fulfilling. Spend a day serving others unselfishly and you are pretty much guaranteed a sound night's sleep.

Take it from Alfred Nobel, who learned that the hard way. As he was reading the newspaper one day, he was shocked to find his own obituary. It was a mistake, of course, but it was an illuminating experience. So, what did it say? The paper mainly talked about how the inventor's most famous brainchild – dynamite – had been responsible for so many deaths.

Nobel was appalled at the idea that this was how people would regard his legacy. Wracked by guilt, he decided to make a more positive contribution to the world by supporting peace. The idea of the Nobel prize – an award given in recognition of noteworthy achievements in various fields – was born in 1895. It just goes to show that even if you have pursued selfish ends your whole life, you can always turn things around!

But the best thing about unselfish thinking is that it lets you become part of something much bigger than yourself. That is something the pharmaceutical corporation Merck and Company showed in the mid-1980s. The company decided it wanted to achieve more than rack up ever-greater profits. After successfully developing a cure for river blindness – a disease afflicting millions in the developing world – the firm decided to give the drug away for free. After all, those who needed it the most were the least able to afford it. It became the cornerstone of the company's credo that people are more important than profits. The lesson here is that it is always better to be part of something fantastic than aiming to be fantastic yourself.

Popular thinking is often wrongheaded. Disregard it if you want to get the best outcomes

It is easy to get caught up in the crowd and thoughtlessly accept other people's ideas about the world. That applies as much to business leaders falling in line with a company's traditions as it does to new parents acting on the old wives' tales their parents told them. Thinking for yourself can be a risky business. Stray too far from the herd, and you are unlikely to make many friends. If everybody accepts something as true, then it must be, right? Well, no. Think of the belief that the earth was the centre of the universe. Pretty much everyone thought you would have to be mad to question that idea. Then along came the astronomer Copernicus in the sixteenth century and mathematically proved that our solar system revolves around the sun.

Conventional wisdom is often downright deadly too. Before Joseph Lister pioneered antiseptic procedures in the nineteenth century, surgeons were convinced that there was not any point in washing medical instruments. Humans often seek safety in numbers, but history shows that is not the best way of determining what is true. But how do you break your habit of relying on others' assumptions? A good place to start is cultivating the habit of thinking things through for yourself before following others. Once you start considering what is best rather than what is popular, you will already be well on the way to success.

Take the weeks immediately following the 9/11 terror attacks; there was a widespread perception that it was not safe to fly or visit New York. The author saw things differently. Flights to the city were dirt cheap, security was at an all-time high and the price of hotels and theatre tickets had plummeted because of low demand. It was actually a fantastic time to take a city break! So, a month after the tragedy he boarded a plane with his family and flew to New York. They enjoyed a wonderful experience that they would never have been able to afford otherwise – all because they had avoided the trap of popular thinking.

Boost your thinking process by collaborating with others, whoever they are

Say you need to pick up a new skill – how would you go about it? Spend some time figuring it out by yourself or ask someone already in the know to teach you the ins and outs? If you are likely to go with the former, it might be time to reconsider. Whether learning a new recipe, putting the finishing touches on that golf swing, or mastering a new piece of software, you have got a much better chance of getting the hang of things if you learn from someone with experience.

Collaboration is the mother of innovation – shared thinking trumps solo thinking every time. That might sound slightly counterintuitive. After all, brilliant thinkers are often depicted as brooding soloists going it alone. But that is not the case – innovative breakthroughs rarely happen in a vacuum. More often than not, they are the result of people working together.

Einstein often said that his achievements were founded in the labours of other men. Or think of the work of brilliant duos like scientists Pierre and Marie Curie or musical wunderkinds Paul McCartney and John Lennon. When people combine their unique talents and ideas, the results can be incredible. But before you can start working with others, you need to adopt the right mindset.

So, what is that all about? Well, as the author of *How to Become a CEO*, Jeffrey J. Fox puts it, you have to be on constant high alert for good ideas, regardless of how likely or unlikely the source is. That means dropping prejudices and really listening to people. The next great idea might come from your taxi driver or your children. The point is that you will never know unless you are receptive.

Just as important is striving to adopt a mentality based on collaboration rather than competition. Cooperation happens when your aim is to complete the ideas of others, rather than one-up on them. So next time you are in a meeting with colleagues, do not focus on selfishly getting ahead – work toward achieving the team's goals.

What I took from it

Success is all about attitude. You have probably heard about the benefits of positive thinking, but there is more to it than that. Leading a happy, fulfilled life is about learning to think collaboratively and unselfishly. It is about asking what you can do for and with others rather than simply trying to get ahead yourself. That means opening your mind to creativity and avoiding following the crowd. Once you start doing that, you will be mentally prepared for success.

Plan your life, not your day. Lots of people do not think further than the day ahead. They wake up and go through their mental checklists of what they have to get done that day. What they will be doing a month or year from now rarely crosses their mind. But long-term planning is vital to success. So, take a cue from the author and begin the month by reviewing your calendar. Think about what you want to accomplish over the next thirty days; what projects you want to complete, what your objectives are and how much time to set aside for family and friends? This perspective will help you find the time you need to get the things that matter most done and make you happier and more successful!

Primary Greatness

Stephen R. Covey

We often mistake symbols for success. That man is driving a Maserati: he must have found success. That woman is wearing Louboutin's; she must have found success. But this take is entirely superficial. As you will learn from Stephen Covey's book; Primary Greatness, actual success cannot be seen or measured in material trappings. It is an inner quality, something that anyone can build – no fancy cars or red-soled shoes necessary.

So how can you build up these vital internal qualities? You must listen to the advice of self-development guru, Steven Covey, and concentrate on working on the 12 levers of success. The book will explain what these levers are and how you can utilize them yourself. Follow this advice and it will not be long before you are enjoying a fulfilling and peace-filled life that is driven by primary greatness, says Covey

The five most powerful points I took from the book were;

1. True success cannot be seen. It comes from within and is generated by primary greatness, which naturally comes to those who embody admirable qualities such as integrity, honour, persistence, selflessness, and a commitment to a purpose that transcends the personal.
2. There are 12 levers of success, a set of principles that will serve as the foundation for your primary greatness. These levers are integrity, contribution, priority, personal sacrifice, service, reciprocity, diversity, responsibility, loyalty, learning, teaching and renewal.
3. Instead of obsessing about scarcity, you have got to start focusing on abundance.
4. By aligning your actions with your beliefs and values, you will shed all hidden motives and secret agendas, and walking your talk will simply become second nature.
5. When there is no diversity of opinion within a team, there is essentially only one opinion – and that is bad for creativity and innovation

Inner character is the driver of true success, and it can be developed

What does success look like? Is it Armani suits, Rolex watches, cherry-red Ferraris, and a daily glass of champagne on the deck of a Long Island beach house? Sure, these might be some of the symbols of wealth – but they are certainly not signing of success. True success cannot be seen. It comes from within and is generated by what the author calls primary greatness, which naturally comes to those who embody admirable qualities such as integrity, honour, persistence, selflessness, and a commitment to a purpose that transcends the personal.

Secondary greatness, in contrast, can be seen. It is the appearance of success – the money and the fame and all the attendant status symbols, from cars to suits to houses. However, whereas primary greatness leads to fulfilment and inner peace, secondary greatness dead-ends at fleeting pleasures and financial security.

Now, if you have not spent your life fostering stalwart inner attributes like honour and selflessness, do not fret, says Covey. It is been scientifically proven that such traits can be developed. In Michigan, back in 1965, the Perry Preschool Project began following the lives of 123 inner-city pre-schoolers. They were divided into two groups – test and control – and the test group learned, at an early age, to delay gratification by engaging in boring and low-reward tasks.

Fast-forward 50 years, and those in the test group were much more successful. Compared with those in the control group, more of the test-group members had graduated and found employment, and fewer

had been arrested. All this because, in preschool, they had built some primary greatness by developing attributes like integrity and persistence. So, what can you do to develop your character? Well, as you will soon learn, there are 12 levers of success, a set of principles that will serve as the foundation for your primary greatness. These levers are integrity, contribution, priority, personal sacrifice, service, reciprocity, diversity, responsibility, loyalty, learning, teaching and renewal. These 12 levers are the result of the author's extensive research. He is taught and learned from thousands of people worldwide and distilled his findings into the essentials for primary greatness.

Self-affirmations and an abundance mind-set will set the stage for primary greatness

Inner peace, a sense of fulfillment, long-lasting prosperity – the benefits of primary greatness are myriad and magnificent. But how exactly do you move toward acquiring it, asks Covey. Well, there are a few handy techniques that will prep your brain and make it more receptive. The first is to use self-affirmations. Self-affirmations are positive messages delivered in the first person and the present tense from yourself, to yourself. They affirm the life you want to live and nudge you toward making your aspirations into a reality.

Let us say you are a procrastinator, and you want to get better at taking the reins and getting things done. Your self-affirmation might be something like, "It's gratifying to take control and guide my own life by proactively planning my time and following through on my plans." Once you have cooked up some suitable self-affirmations, you can improve their efficacy by doing two things:

First, relax. When you are relaxed, your brain waves slow down, making you more receptive to sensory input – and you want to be as receptive as possible when reciting your affirmations. Second, recite your affirmations every day. The more you say them, the more likely they are to manifest.

The next technique is about your general outlook on life, and it requires you to shift your mind-set entirely. Instead of obsessing about scarcity, you have got to start focusing on abundance. Most of us have a scarcity mind-set – that is, we view the world through a win-lose lens, believing that more for others means less for us, and neglecting opportunities for cooperation and shared benefit.

Integrity, the foundation of primary greatness, aligns your values, beliefs, and actions

Integrity. It is a word that gets thrown around a lot, but, if asked, would you be able to define it succinctly? Well, since it is the first of the 12 levers of success and the foundation of primary greatness, it is important to have a clear definition. So, Covey broke it down into its component parts, and he found that integrity is a combination of two traits: humility and courage. If you are humble enough to recognize where you can improve and courageous enough to undertake the work of improvement, you will be well on your way to becoming a person of integrity.

To get a sense of what integrity looks like in action, let us take a look at a situation from the author's life. Once, a close friend of the author's hurt him deeply – but this friend realized what he had done and gave a heartfelt apology. The author, impressed, asked him how he'd managed it, and the friend said that, after an in-depth conversation with himself, he'd realized he had two options; listen to his ego and give a lukewarm apology or listen to his conscience and give a meaningful one.

It took humility to recognize that he should be penitent and show courage to act on this recognition – and it was this combination that resulted in the friend's displaying true integrity. This act of integrity had a very powerful effect, inspiring the author not only to accept the apology, but to forgive the initial trespass. So, having integrity will positively affect those around you; but it will also shape you in beneficial ways – namely, by aligning your values, beliefs, and actions.

This alignment is called congruence. If you have got congruence, you will find it much easier to gain the trust of others. This is, in part, because you will simply seem more authentic. By aligning your

actions with your beliefs and values, you will shed all hidden motives and secret agendas, and walking your talk will simply become second nature.

Foster the levers of contribution and prioritization by finding your purpose

People need purpose. Whether it is writing novels or raising a family, a purpose imbues life with meaning, giving its possessor a sense of direction and duty. And yet only between five and ten percent of people take the time to define their purpose. Purpose is crucial because, without it, you will not know how to contribute to the world, and contribution is the second lever of success. To identify your purpose, start by asking yourself three questions: What is the world lacking? What do I excel at? And how could I contribute by doing something I like?

Keep in mind that your purpose might be right in front of your nose. Often, we aim too high and fail to notice how we can contribute right here, right now. For example, consider the protagonist of the film *Mr. Holland's Opus*. He dreams of becoming a brilliant composer, but he is forced to work as a music teacher, a job he initially dislikes. But the years go by and he begins to love his students. In the end, he does not become a famous composer. Instead, he pours his passion into teaching and contributes by helping thousands of students.

So, remain open to the possibility that, without realizing it, you may have already found your purpose – all you have to do is identify it. Once you have figured out how to contribute to the world, you can focus on the third lever of success: prioritization. Prioritizing is largely a matter of differentiating between important but non-urgent tasks and urgent but non-important tasks. Important, non-urgent tasks take the bigger picture into account, and they should always be prioritized.

Imagine you are a doctor and, while performing heart surgery, a nurse runs in and says there is an urgent call for you. Well, it does not matter how urgent the call is, because, in the big picture, the patient's survival is of the utmost importance. Importance always trumps urgency, so you would not take the call. This example also demonstrates how a higher purpose – in this case, the purpose of saving the patient's life – naturally leads to prioritization of what is most important.

Sacrifice and service encourage personal connections, which are essential to success

Maybe you left some dishes in the sink, assuming your partner would wash them. Maybe you "accidentally" cut someone off in traffic. Or maybe you just did not take the time to call your mother. Yes, being selfish is normal, says Covey. However, if you want to form meaningful and productive relationships, you have got to fight those selfish tendencies and nourish the fourth lever of success – sacrifice.

Sacrifice means putting aside your ego and focusing on the greater good. It is about emphasizing the outcome of collaborative work, as opposed to claiming credit for contributing the most, and, like integrity, it requires humility. For example, a company's president and vice president once took a business trip together. On the second day of the trip, the vice president awoke to a surprising sight: the president was shining his shoes.

He was startled to find the president engaged in this humble activity; it seemed the opposite of presidential. However, it also helped the vice president see the president's human side, and, in the end, it brought the two men closer together. Sacrificing your ego is not terribly difficult – and it can go a long way toward creating a lasting bond. In that regard, it is similar to service, which is the fifth lever of success. Service is about doing things for other people, and it is the perfect way to strengthen the relationships that sacrifice helped you create.

One way to serve is to speak as though you are only addressing one person, regardless of how large your audience is. This will show others that you are engaged with them, that you are doing them the

service of being present, and, in turn, it will help them engage with you, as the following anecdote demonstrates:

The star of a play was once having trouble capturing the attention of his audience. Luckily, a friend of his had the presence of mind to abandon his seat, approach the stage and mouth the words “talk to me.” The actor understood and began addressing the audience as though it were a pal, a person with real feelings and thoughts. Just like that, the audience recognized this service and reengaged.

Reciprocity and diversity result in productive relationships

Now that you have got an idea how to establish and strengthen relationships, let us take a look at how to make them productive. Interestingly enough, one of the best ways to build a beneficial relationship with others is to improve how secure you feel about yourself. A self-assured character is, in fact, the foundation of the next two levers of success – reciprocity and diversity. Self-assurance – that is, a deep feeling of inner security – enables you to remain open to unfamiliar ideas and new opinions. And this openness will imbue you with empathy, something without which reciprocal relationships cannot exist.

If you are insecure, you will be closed off. Different ideas and new perspectives will feel threatening, because to those who lack self-assurance, a threat to a belief system feels like a threat to personal identity. Only after establishing some solid self-assurance should you start focusing on reciprocity, the sixth lever of success.

But, when you do activate this lever, there are two things to focus on. First, concentrate on bonding. The firmer the social bond between two people, the less likely they will be to act selfishly. Second, keep communication channels open. Sharing and collaborating on problems, and discussing possible solutions, will increase the reciprocity of any relationship. Self-assurance is also the foundation of the seventh lever of success, diversity, which is all about encouraging a range of opinions, skills, personalities, and ideas. These things drive innovation and positivity – but they will be under threat if you and your team are not self-assured.

Remember, insecure people think differences are threatening, so, in order to oust limited thinking, you have got to encourage people to embrace differences and openly express themselves. In other words, you have got to help them feel self-assured. The author points out that, when there is no diversity of opinion within a team, there is essentially only one opinion – and that is bad for creativity and innovation. New and diverse ideas will breed new and diverse projects and products; if you welcome difference, you are bound to make one.

Stay accountable through loyalty and responsibility

We have all experienced it. There you are, at the bar with friends or eating lunch with colleagues, and somebody starts bad-mouthing an absent friend or co-worker. Such behaviour is common, but it is also horribly toxic.

The eighth lever, loyalty, combats such toxicity by holding you back from ever disrespecting other people, regardless of whether they are present or absent. Loyalty and respect are important because they remove the negative interactions that often lead to negative labelling, which has a very tangible and toxic effect.

Let us say a colleague of yours insults you and, in consequence, you label her in your mind as “hateful.” Even if you never let on that you find her hateful, she will, on some level of consciousness, pick up on how you actually feel, and her actions will begin to align with your expectations.

Just as you should avoid labelling people, you should never say anything about anyone that you would not want to say to their face. Further, if you are ever present when people are talking negatively about

someone else, you should combat the negative labelling by mentioning a few positive things about the absent person. Speaking up for the voiceless is loyalty at its finest. Of course, we cannot always be perfect. Whether it is gossiping or some other slip up, people make mistakes. And that is where the ninth lever, responsibility, comes in.

Truly taking responsibility entails fully acknowledging your mistakes and offering an apology that is not hedged around with excuses, defensiveness, or explanations. If you really want to move past a mistake, you have got to take the full blame; that is the only way to remove negative labels and receive forgiveness. And remember once you are forgiven, be sure that your actions chime with the apology you made. This will show that you were sincere, and that your apology was not merely an empty expedient.

Teaching complements and reinforces the lever of learning

Imagine that, for the next ten years, you learn nothing new. Well, the truth is that, if you stopped learning, you had become irrelevant: your skills and knowledge would get you nowhere in the world of ten years hence. So how can you keep growing and stay up to date? The best way is to keep learning, which is the tenth lever of success.

Horst Schulze, the cofounder of the Ritz-Carlton hotel chain, knows this well. Despite the cost, Schulze provides a daily training program for employees, because he firmly believes in the importance of learning. By helping his employees grow, Schulze also grows his company – because a skilled workforce is the backbone of his chain.

On a more personal level, there are many things you can do to keep learning. You could, for instance, design a personal curriculum. If you are interested in business, read Harvard Business Review or Fortune magazine. There are academic journals for every field, so just identify your interests and dive in. And, to broaden your horizons and make you wiser, do not neglect the classics. A little Shakespeare before bed can only do good, says Covey.

You could also attend your very own online university. Watch TED talks; enrol in one of the many massive open online courses (MOOCs); make use of Khan Academy. And if you really want to learn something, be sure to use the eleventh lever of success – teaching.

As the author learned from Dr. Walter Gong, a San Jose State University professor, teaching is the best way to learn. During dinner, Dr. Gong always had his children teach him what they had learned that day in school – and all three of them went on to earn PhDs from a top university. Teaching works so well because, when you know you will have to make someone else understand the material, you are forced to really learn it. That is why every student should learn like a teacher!

Balance your physical, mental, and social health to achieve ‘renewal’

So, we have been focusing a lot on the component parts of primary greatness. But if you really want to serve a higher purpose, and live a fulfilled and peaceful life, you have got to take care of yourself. And that is where the twelfth lever, renewal, comes in. Self-care is a matter of balancing your mental, physical, and social health.

One way to inspire physical care habits is to imagine you have already had a major health setback – that, say, you have had a heart attack or undergone surgery for cancer. Just imagining such a health crisis should motivate you to break any unhealthy habits you might have; be it overwork or smoking cigarettes.

To improve your mental health, imagine that, in three years’ time, all your professional knowledge will have been made obsolete by technological advances. This should spur you to prioritize learning and

the advancement of your skills.

To keep yourself socially healthy, imagine that everyone in your life is always listening to the things you say about them. This should keep you from saying regrettable things and being judgmental. This does not mean you should be uncritical – just that you should be kind in your criticism, and not say things about someone that you would not say to them.

If you regularly engage with these hypothetical situations, you will be able to adjust your mind-set. It is much more effective to put energy toward your physical, mental and social health than to try to pinpoint and alter every single negative behaviour, since a more general approach influences multiple behaviours at the same time. Physical, mental, and social health are also closely connected, and focusing on all of them is the best, most holistic, form of self-care.

For instance, if you neglect your skills and knowledge, you may get fired from your job, which might lead to your feeling like a victim and blaming others. This would affect your social relationships, leading to stress, which would compromise your physical health. A holistic approach to self-care is the best defence against burnout and the negative chain reaction that neglect of one area can cause.

What I took from it

Stephen R. Covey believed there were only two ways to live life: a life of primary greatness or a life of secondary greatness. Through his books and speaking, he taught that the intrinsic rewards of primary greatness - integrity, responsibility, and contribution - far outweighed the extrinsic rewards of secondary greatness - money, popularity, and the self-absorbed, pleasure-ridden life that some people consider 'success'.

A life centred on making connections with and in the service of others is far more rewarding than a life spent hunting for self-serving pleasures such as status and money. And the best way to find real fulfilment and inner peace is to establish your primary greatness. You can do this with the help of the 12 levers of success: integrity, contribution, priority, personal sacrifice, service, reciprocity, diversity, responsibility, loyalty, learning, teaching and renewal.

Keep a "journey to primary greatness" journal. Keep a journal to track your progress toward primary greatness and use it to collect your learnings along the way. Jot down your higher purpose and all of your self-affirmations. Use it to record all the situations where you have chosen secondary over primary greatness. This will help grow your self-awareness as you travel towards your ultimate goal.

Rich Dad, Poor Dad

Robert Kiyosaki

I often picture myself as a rat joining the crazy rat race at when entering the first busy street in the morning at 7am, coming out of our housing estate. Most of us know what the phrase rat race refers to, but if asked, how would we define it? One definition is “The endless routine of working for everyone but yourself.” This means you do all the work, while others – the government, bill collectors and your bosses – take the majority of the reward. We usually talk about the rat race as something we are all a part of. At the same time, we also talk about it as something we hate. So why do we keep racing?

Because most people’s lives are dominated by their fear of society’s disapproval. For example, consider the mantra “Go to school, study hard, get a good job.” We still teach this mantra, even though its outdated advice founded on the ideas of our parent’s past. Back then, you were likely to land a job right out of college, work for the same company for decades, and retire with a cushy pension. Today, this is no longer a guaranteed recipe for a life free of financial struggles or poverty.

The truth is that you can study hard, get into a good school and graduate into a high-paying job without ever seeing financial growth, because you are still stuck in the “rat race.” Your bosses – not you – are getting rich from all your hard work. Nevertheless, we still believe in and follow the above mantra out of fear of violating the expectations that have been drilled into us since birth. The result? We may be avoiding poverty, but we are certainly not growing any wealthier. Fear of society’s disapproval prevents us from leaving the “rat race” and growing wealthy.

The three most powerful points I took from the book was;

1. When it comes to money, everyone experiences two basic emotions: greed and fear. You need to overcome both.
2. Most people think that to become rich, it is enough to be talented and capable. But in fact, the world is full of such people, and most of them are poor. What they are missing is financial intelligence.
3. Insanity is defined as doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. By this logic, if you are looking to change your current financial state, you will need to start handling your finances differently.

Fear and greed can drive financially ignorant people to make irrational decisions

When it comes to money, everyone – wealthy or not – experiences two basic emotions: greed and fear. If you have money, you are likely to focus on all the new things it can buy (greed). If you do not have it, you worry you might never have enough (fear). People who are ignorant about how to manage their finances are especially prone to letting these emotions drive their decision-making. For example, let us say you just received a promotion and a hefty pay raise.

You could invest the extra money into something like stocks or bonds, which would earn you money over time, or you could gratify yourself with new purchases, like a car or house. If you are a financially ignorant person, this is where emotion takes the wheel. The fear of losing money is so powerful it prevents you from investing in stocks or other assets because of the perceived risks, even though such investments would bring you wealth in the long-term.

At the same time, greed inspires you to spend your increased salary on a better lifestyle, for example by buying a bigger house, which seems a much more real and safer option than buying shares in a company. However, this upgrade also means a bigger mortgage and higher utility bills, which effectively negates your raise. This is how fear and greed hinder the financially ignorant from becoming

wealthy in the long term.

So how can you counter these powerful emotions? By building up your financial knowledge about things like investments, risk, and debt. This will place you in a better position to make rational decisions – even in the face of greed and fear. Fear and greed can drive financially ignorant people to make irrational decisions.

We receive no training in financial intelligence

Most people think that to become rich, it is enough to be talented and capable. But in fact, the world is full of such people, and most of them are poor. What they are missing is financial intelligence, a comprehensive aptitude for financial subjects like accounting, investing and so forth. Unfortunately, we are raised without this intelligence. Our school systems are set up to train people in a variety of useful subjects, but financial intelligence is not one of them.

Children are not taught about subjects like saving or investing, and as a consequence are clueless about topics like compound interest – as clearly evidenced by the fact that, today, even high schoolers often max out their credit cards. This lack of training in financial intelligence is a problem not only for today's youth but also for highly educated adults, many of whom make poor decisions with their money.

For example, politicians are generally regarded as the brightest, most well-educated people in a society, but there is a reason why countries end up in staggering national debt: most of the governing politicians have little or no financial intelligence.

Ordinary people, too, can be astonishingly bad at handling their money matters, as evidenced by their lack of retirement planning. For instance, in the United States 50 percent of the workforce are without pensions and, of the rest, nearly 75 to 80 percent have ineffective pensions. Clearly, society has left us poorly equipped in terms of financial knowledge, and so it is up to the individual to educate him- or herself.

When we find ourselves seeking wealth in times of great economical change, it becomes even more necessary to independently pursue a good financial education. Despite being vital for both personal and societal prosperity, we receive no training in financial intelligence.

Financial self-education are the building blocks of growing wealthy

You can start the journey toward personal wealth at any point in your life, but the earlier you get going the better – if you begin at 20, you're far more likely to become rich than if you begin at 30. Regardless of age, the best way to get started is by appraising your finances, setting yourself goals, and then acquiring the education necessary to reach them.

First, take an honest look at your current financial state. With your current job, what kind of income can you realistically expect now and in the future, and what kind of expenses can you sustainably handle? You may find, for example, that the new Mercedes you have been drooling over simply is not affordable. After this, you will be able to set realistic financial goals. You could say, for example, that you want that Mercedes to be within your reach in five years' time.

The next step is to then start building your financial intelligence. Consider this an investment into the greatest asset available to you: your mind. You can do this in any number of ways, but one good approach is to shift focus: work for what you learn, not what you earn. For example, if you are afraid of rejection, try a short spell working for a network marketing company.

While you might not get an amazing salary, you will gain a lot of sales skills and self-confidence, which

will be very useful in the future. You can also improve your finance education in your spare time. Enrol in finance classes and seminars, read books on the topic, and try to network with experts. If you base your financial foundation on these building blocks, there is a good chance you will become wealthy one day. Financial self-education and a realistic appraisal of your finances are the building blocks of growing wealthy.

To become wealthy, you must learn to take risks

Insanity is defined as doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. By this logic, if you are looking to change your current financial state, you will need to start handling your finances differently. The biggest change you most likely need to make is learning to take risks. All financially successful people have taken risks to get where they are, and they are successful because they manage rather than fear these risks.

Taking risks means not always being balanced and safe with your money, which is what you are doing when you put it in basic checking and savings accounts at the bank. Instead of playing it safe, try investing your money in stocks or bonds. While these are considered more risky than typical bank accounts, they have the chance of generating much, much more wealth – sometimes (as with stocks) in a very short period of time.

Or, if you do not want to commit yourself to the stock market, there are a variety of other investments that will help grow your wealth in the long run, like real estate or so-called tax lien certificates. With tax lien certificates, interest rates range between 8 percent and 30 percent – much higher than 0.21 percent, the average savings account interest rate for America in 2013.

Of course, the higher the potential for return, the higher the risk. With stocks, for example, there is always the slight chance you could lose your entire investment. But if you do not take the risk in the first place, you are guaranteed not to make any big returns. So, you see that taking those bigger chances and handling the bigger risks they present is necessary in order to start making a bigger income. To become wealthy, you must learn to take risks.

The road to wealth is long, so you must keep yourself motivated

The journey to wealth is long and trying. It is easy to lose heart when you hit a hurdle such as seeing the price of a stock you invested in suddenly tumble. In order to achieve your financial goals, you will need to find ways to stay motivated even in the face of setbacks. One method to boost motivation is to create a list of “wants” and “don’t wants” for your personal reference. For example: “I do not want to end up like my parents” and “I want to be free of my debts within three years.”

Pull out these lists any time you need a reminder of why you must persevere on your journey to wealth. Another good way to stay motivated is to spend money on yourself before paying your bills. Though somewhat counterintuitive, this way you’ll see exactly how much extra money you need each month to satisfy both of your objectives: fulfilling desires like buying that vintage guitar you’ve had your eye on, and meeting your bill collectors’ demands.

This doesn’t mean you should rack up lots of credit card debt, but do keep “paying” yourself first; the extra pressure of paying off your bills afterward will inspire you to find creative ways to make enough money to satisfy both. This method will also sharpen and develop your financial self-discipline, which is a key trait of all financially successful people.

For outside inspiration, research the life stories of wealthy people like Warren Buffett or Donald Trump. Reading about how they overcame struggles to achieve triumphs will help keep you ambitious. Put these tips into practice and you will be sure to find that staying motivated on the road to wealth is not that difficult. The road to wealth is long, so you must keep yourself motivated.

Laziness and arrogance can drive even financially knowledgeable people to poverty

Even after strengthening your financial intelligence, personality pitfalls may still threaten you and your money. Laziness and arrogance are two such pitfalls, because they can work against you in less-than-obvious ways. We often think of laziness as slouching around and doing nothing, but in fact laziness does not necessarily mean inactivity; it can also be avoiding things that should be done.

For example, imagine a businessman who works over 60 hours a week. To the outside observer, he is not lazy at all. However, by working such late nights, he has alienated his family. He has already seen the signs of trouble at home, but, rather than addressing them, he buries himself in work. In short, he is being lazy; he is avoiding what he should be doing and will likely suffer the consequences in the form of a costly divorce.

Similarly, arrogance can be a devastating weakness. Contrary to the usual definition, in the case of financial ruin it can be defined as “ignorance plus ego”; a combination of poor financial knowledge and an ego too proud to admit it. Arrogance is a particularly dangerous flaw when you make investments. For example, some stockbrokers will try to feed the arrogant side of you to sell you more shares and maximize their own commission. They are like dishonest used-car salesmen; they boost your ego with the positives of an investment while keeping you ignorant about its negatives.

So even if you become a financial genius, keep these personality pitfalls in check. This way, you are much more likely to avoid financial ruin. Laziness and arrogance can drive even financially knowledgeable people to poverty.

Invest in assets, which put money in your pocket; and avoid liabilities, which take money out

Knowing the difference between an asset and a liability is necessary to ensure you are making strong investment decisions. Quite simply, an asset is something that makes you money, while a liability costs you money. Clearly, then, it is more likely you will become wealthy if you mostly invest in assets. Assets include businesses, stocks, bonds, mutual funds, income-generating real estate, IOU notes, royalties from intellectual property, and anything else with value that produces income, appreciates over time, and can be sold readily.

When you invest in assets, your Dollars become employees working to create income for you. The more “employees” you commit, the better. The goal is to get your income as high above your expenses as possible, and then to reinvest the excess income into your assets, employing even more Dollars to work for you. Unfortunately, many investors continually mistake certain liabilities for assets. For example, a house is often considered an asset, but it is actually one of the biggest liabilities you can have. Buying a house often means working your entire life to pay off a 30-year mortgage and property taxes.

This works against you in two ways. First, you are guaranteed to have a massive expense taken away from your income every month (a tell-tale sign of a liability) for the next 360 months. Second, those 360 payments could have been invested in potentially more lucrative assets, like stocks or real estate you rent to tenants. Ensuring that you know the difference between an asset and a liability means you will be able to soundly judge what to invest your money in and what to avoid. Only invest in assets, which put money in your pocket; and avoid liabilities, which take money out.

Your profession pays the bills, but your business is what will make you wealthy

Most people consider their profession and their business to be one and the same thing. When it comes to personal finances, though, there is a difference. Your profession is whatever you do 40 hours a week to pay the bills, buy groceries, and cover other living costs. Usually, it gives you a specific title such as “restaurant owner” or “salesman.”

Your business, on the other hand, is what you invest time and money in to help grow your assets. Because a profession only covers your expenses, it is unlikely that this alone will make you wealthy. To achieve wealth, you must build a business while working at your profession. Take, for example, a chef who is gone to culinary arts school and knows all the tricks of the trade. Although her profession – cooking – provides enough money to pay rent and feed her family, she is still not growing wealthy.

So, she invests in a business: real estate. Whatever extra money she has each month, she puts towards buying income-producing assets – apartments and condos she can rent to tenants. Alternatively, consider a car salesman who invests each month’s leftover income into stock trading.

In both cases, the professions provided enough income to survive on a monthly basis. However, by putting their extra income into their businesses, these people are also growing their assets and making strides toward wealth. Your profession often funds your business initially; therefore, it’s wise to keep your day job until your business starts to show sustainable growth. When that starts to happen, your assets – and not your profession – become your main source of income. And that, indeed, is the sign of true financial independence. Your profession pays the bills, but your business is what will make you wealthy.

Understand the tax code to help you minimize your taxes

Everyone knows that taxes detract from personal wealth, but most people do not bother to find out how they can minimize the taxes they pay. There are many ways this can be legally achieved. One way to reduce taxation is to invest your money through the coverage of a corporation.

If you invest through your own corporation, the money you make is taxed much more leniently than if you invest in your own name. In the United States, corporations come with other benefits, too. For example, debts and liabilities are placed in the corporation’s, not the owner’s, name, which insures against limited losses on investments gone awry.

When you are an employee, you earn, get taxed, and then try to live on what is left. When you are protected by a corporation, you earn, invest, or spend as much as you can, and then get taxed on what is left. It is no surprise, then, that corporations can help people get rich very quickly.

There are other ways you can minimize your taxes, too; it is just a matter of educating yourself on the many loopholes and benefits of the tax system. For example, because of Section 1031 of the Internal Revenue Code of the United States tax system, if you sell your current real estate assets in order to buy more expensive ones, the government delays taxing your new real estate until you liquidate the property.

This means your capital gain increases, while the government refrains from taking anything from you until later. By becoming aware of how the “system” works in your country, you may be able to legally reduce how much money the government takes from you. Understand the tax code to help you minimize your taxes.

What I took from it

Because we are not trained in financial intelligence in school, it's up to us as individuals to develop this trait by ourselves. We are only likely to become rich or financially independent once we have both a strong financial IQ and a firm, ambitious mindset to support it. In the end, what you invest in your mind is what brings you success, because your mind is your most important asset in any financial situation.

If you want to see results, start right now. This means researching to find the best books on your area of interest (e.g. real estate, or the stock market). Although this book lays out the paths to financial independence and wealth, these ambitions can only be fully realised if you start moving toward them now. Where can you pick them up locally? Which ones are best for beginners? Also, try to discover the "who's who" of the markets you want to join. Do they have websites you can follow? When is their next publication coming out? Other general websites, like Investopedia.com, have great information for beginners who are not sure where they should start putting their money. In any case, staying actively informed will help keep you afloat and give you a better understanding of your markets.

Make a column sheet that tracks your monthly expenses and income, as well as your current assets and liabilities. One of Kiyosaki's main points throughout the book is to ensure you have an income greater than your expenses.

The only way to do this is to keep an eye on your money. Use a program like Microsoft Excel to create a worksheet you can update on a monthly basis. Chart your income, which includes any money coming your way each month, and compare it with your expenses, which include bills, rent, lifestyle expenses and taxes taken out of your paycheck, as well as any other costs. Also, start keeping track of how much your current assets are generating for you each month as well as how much your liabilities are taking away. This will help you gauge what you can afford to cut out from your life in order to start widening the gap (in a good way) between your income and expenses.

Introduce yourself to people who do what you want to do. By networking with people who are already active in the markets you are interested in, you can form valuable connections that will benefit you in the long run. For example, find someone in a local tax office who knows a lot about tax lien certificates. Offer to take them out to lunch – your treat. Make sure, though, that they understand you want to learn from their experience and knowledge, and that you are not just asking for help to get rich. If you are honest about your intentions and willing to listen, chances are most experts will be glad to give you a few pointers.

Shortness Of Life

Seneca

Have you ever had the feeling that life is passing you by? Or that, despite your best intentions, you are wasting your time? Well, you are not alone. In fact, a man named Seneca the Younger, who died almost two thousand years ago, had the same feeling. But he wrote down his ideas on how to combat that feeling and how to make sure one does something useful with one's life.

A tutor to Nero, the infamous Roman emperor who – according to legend – played violin while Rome burned to the ground, Seneca was one of his age's most prominent thinkers and playwrights. Adhering to the Stoic tradition of accepting one's place in the world, many of his thoughts ring as true today as they did back then. Indeed, the questions that plagued the Stoics continue to trouble us today. And many of the answers they offered still make good sense.

The four most powerful points I took from the book were;

1. People spend their life preparing for life. For some, by the time they feel that the moment is right, they are too old or too weak to change their habits. For others, even if they could prolong their lives threefold, they still would not change.
2. It is pointless working for someone whose aims and convictions do not agree with your own. Doing so is the surest path to a short life. When this happens, your obsessions and worries will not even be your own
3. Life is long enough to devote yourself to self-knowledge and true wisdom and a wise person is self-reliant and independent. The loss of status or money is no real setback to him since his sense of self is not founded on external circumstances.
4. Remember; self-worth comes from within. Only you can determine how satisfied you are with the world around you. Material objects and external pursuits should not define your happiness.

Life is short if you waste it on trivialities

People have always been good at wasting time. Most people spend the majority of their time engaged in trivial activities – even if these activities do not seem trivial to them. But the thing about trivial activities is that they make life seem short. For instance, life will seem especially short if you only pursue status or power. You will always have your eye on some future goal and will not be able to enjoy your current situation, says Seneca.

People tend to think that, once they have achieved all their goals, they will have time to enjoy life. But it rarely works out this way. What usually happens is this; people spend their life preparing for life. The Emperor Augustus is a case in point. He spoke endlessly of quietude, of the calm and rest he would enjoy upon retirement from his public duties. But this longed-for day never came. The Roman Empire depended on him, and he could never pull himself away.

Life will also seem short to those who pursue a life of luxury. These people cannot even enjoy their indulgences. They will always be thinking of how their current thrill will soon end, or where their next one will come from. But worst of all are those who seek glory after death.

These people get wrapped up in planning for a posterity that is not even theirs. They will be thinking of that pithy remark in their obituary. Or they will draw up plans for giant tombs. But funerals ought to be simple symbolic affairs. In fact, there is nothing more suitable than a single burning candle, an apt symbol for the shortness of human life, says Seneca.

Busyness does not equal fulfilment

Say a ship left port and spent the next year being thrown about by a mighty storm. It would be inaccurate to claim that, during this time, it had steered a successful and purposeful course, even if it did make it safely back to harbour. Well, the same can be said of life.

Pitching, rolling, and yawing are not substituting for living. Of course, it is important to plot a course and then stick to it, but it is also worth remembering that not every path should be pursued. Some people are happy to spend their lives tacking and jibing through the wind, constantly changing direction. They worry they are not headed in the right direction and they pine for what they have left behind.

Other people, through sheer apathy, are happy to be buffeted about by the waves. They only stop drifting when they are too tired or too old to carry on. And then there are those who devote their prime years to lust, greed, and gluttony. They keep telling themselves that, someday, they will amend their ways – but they never do.

For some, by the time they feel that the moment is right, they are too old or too weak to change their habits. For others, even if they could prolong their lives threefold, they still would not change. Worst of all, however, is to be borne away on the winds of somebody else's preoccupations. It is pointless working for someone whose aims and convictions do not agree with your own. Doing so is the surest path to a short life. When this happens, your obsessions and worries will not even be your own, and you are destined to run aground. When stuck in such a situation, people moan that their boss or supervisor does not listen to their wishes or opinions. But if these people cannot find the time to listen to themselves and pursue their own courses, why should anybody else?

You can choose to be educated by the world's greatest minds

While you have little power to change who raised you or who you were raised with, the fact remains that you can forge your own path in education and self-improvement. It is astonishingly easy to acquire wisdom from great thinkers and, in time, to train yourself to be a better person. You can, for example, engage with the works of Plato or Hegel, Derrida or Arendt, and come to a better understanding of people, power, society and culture.

Pick your philosopher, and discover new ways to tackle life, from the everyday trifles to universal preoccupations. A great thinker can be both a solace and a companion. What is even better is that they are always available. You can engage with such thinkers on a daily basis, and they will speak truth every time, pointing out your attributes, both negative and positive, without sugar-coating things.

And when you are done, you can just set them back on the shelf. They are not going to sap your energy as real people might. Furthermore, because this mental engagement will only have positive effects, these thinkers will prolong your life rather than shorten it. And even if you are nearing the end of life, reading is still a boon, for by reading you can learn not only how to live but how to face death unflinchingly.

However, you have to be careful when selecting which great minds to read and what you will glean from them. There is no point reading just to compile trivial facts; you have to educate yourself purposefully. Life is long enough to devote yourself to self-knowledge and true wisdom. The great minds are your torchbearers in this task.

True satisfaction springs from within

In life, we often experience ephemeral sensations that may temporarily perk us up, but they are not within our control, and the pleasure they engender often vanishes as quickly as it appears. A wise

person is self-reliant and independent. The loss of status or money is no real setback to him since his sense of self is not founded on external circumstances. Once you find yourself motivated by greed instead of necessity, you will remain forever impoverished. The surest path to true satisfaction is to conduct yourself within your means and to appreciate your lot in life. This way, you will never feel that you are lacking anything. The instant you start to covet unnecessary material items, however, you will feel that you are stuck in a sort of poverty.

To use an analogy; if you crave water not because you are thirsty but because you are feverish, your craving will never be satisfied. Such a craving is not necessity; it is sickness. This holds just as true for possessions and power as it does for water and food, or pretty much any desire you can think of.

It all boils down to this; the important things in life cannot be removed or diminished by others. It is simply not within the capacity of a mere mortal to rob you of your critical faculties or to eradicate your ability to appreciate the beauty of the mountains or the sea. No matter where you are or what you are doing, whether in exile or in your homeland, whether ill or well, know this, says Seneca; you may always survey the heavens and contemplate the most profound aspects of existence. So, remember; self-worth comes from within. Only you can determine how satisfied you are with the world around you.

To ensure a tranquil mind, tailor your career to your personality.

There is no point whatsoever in having what appears to be an enviable life when you are actually fractured inside. A life filled with doubts and regrets is no life at all. So, what should you do? The first thing to realize is that there is no one path that will ensure tranquillity. We must each forge our own. For instance, some people are more suited to a life of study and reflection. Others might need sustained physical exertion to be contented.

But no matter how you conduct your life, be sure to serve mankind with actions, writing or your intellect – at least, to the best of your abilities. You will not gain anything by taking on tasks to which you are ill suited. Accept only those enterprises that you are sure you will finish.

Have faith in yourself. Trust your instincts. And do not be too harsh on yourself once you have selected your course. You will enjoy the journey all the more if you have confidence in yourself and your actions. The second thing to remember is that overexertion will smother your faculties and sap your spirit. In short, do not overdo it. You would not incessantly till the soil and expect a cornucopia every time. So, do not always work your fingers to the bone. Ultimately, it is just counterproductive.

Instead, set aside some time for yourself. Relax. Even Cato, the famous Roman, used to drink a glass of wine when he returned home from a long day of statesmanly activity. And Socrates, when he was not philosophizing, enjoyed playing with the local children. So, do not forget the value of pleasure, and do not think you should not enjoy yourself. Moderation is the best policy. Some possessions and leisure pursuits may help you relax, but do not overindulge. Material objects and external pursuits should not define your happiness.

What I took from it.

To live a fulfilling life, you should not seek immediate validation or base your worth upon the judgments of others. Instead, draw on the knowledge and wisdom of those who have gone before you. This will help you find your place in the world and allow you to contribute to the greater good. Mental tranquillity should not be underestimated.

Select a mentor from history to learn from. Choose a thinker, any thinker. It does not matter when this person lived or where he or she was from. It can be a philosopher, writer, mathematician, politician – anyone that you think may have a valuable lesson to teach. Once you have selected this person, settle in with a book he or she wrote, and see what you can learn today.

The 4 Hour Workweek

Tim Ferris

Do you want to work eight hours a day, five days a week, until you are 70 and almost too old to enjoy your hard-earned retirement? Or would you rather just work four hours a week, from anywhere in the world, and earn as much in a month as you currently do in a year? That is a question asked by Tim Ferris in his book; The 4 - Hour Workweek, first published in 2007. Well, as wild as it may seem, whittling your workweek down to near nothingness is not a pipe dream, says Ferris.

In 2004, the author worked so much that he suffered burnout and was forced to take a break, which proved to be a boon. During his time off, he travelled around the world and realized that he could run a profitable business from wherever he was with minimal effort. And with this realization, he joined the ranks of the New Rich. A subculture characterized by mobility and financial freedom; the New Rich are not limited by their work. Unlike the Old Rich, otherwise known as the landed gentry, who were often tied to a specific location by property and palaces, the New Rich are wealthy jetsetters who are in total control of their time. They were not born into money but achieved wealth by automating their income and developing a popular product.

The three most powerful points I took from the book were;

1. Instead of toiling away for the rest of your days in an office, waiting for retirement, start enjoying life today by joining the New Rich and going on periodic mini retirements in the here and now.
2. Roughly 80 percent of your work output results from a mere 20 percent of your effort.
3. Create a dream plan. List everything you want to achieve in the next six months – all the things you want to do and be. Now calculate how much you think this would cost per month

Living in the here and now

Many people sacrifice their lives to the idea of retirement. They go to work every morning and toil behind a desk for eight hours, dreaming of that far-off day when they will have done their time and can finally kick back with a margarita on a sun-drenched beach. The author calls such people deferrers because they postpone life. Instead of living life today, they work themselves to the bone and put aside money for tomorrow. Sure, they may save up a hefty sum – but no amount of money is worth a lifetime of work, says Ferris.

Just consider Mark, whom the author met on a flight from Las Vegas. Mark seemed the quintessential success; a man who had managed casinos and gas station and convenience stores, and who now wore a massive diamond ring and regularly spent over \$500,000 on trips to Vegas. But Mark was dead inside. He had enjoyed none of his jobs, and his two ex-wives had brought him as little joy as his current spouse.

Instead of living an enjoyable life, he had deferred, suffering through 30 years of hateful employment so that he could live like a big shot. But here is the thing. One does not have to be a millionaire in order to live like one. The New Rich (NR) have realized that the right moment to realize one's dreams is now. They know that the things most people associate with millionaires – extensive travels, extravagant hobbies, maybe a butler – essentially add up to two things; more freedom and more free time. Yet it is possible to have those things without a million-dollar bank account, says Ferris. In fact, he says, both can be attained with relative ease.

Flexibility and mobility are crucial to a life of luxury. They are the prerequisites for the ability to do

whatever you want to do, whenever you want to do it – and neither can be achieved by working a standard 40-hour week.

Define your own rules and think positively

The NR reject the conventions of the working world. Instead of toiling away in an office, they increase the money they make and reduce the hours they work by using the DEAL formula, which stands for

- Definition
- Elimination
- Automation
- Liberation

First, to join the NR, you have got to redefine your approach to work. This means giving new definition to your goals. In all likelihood, your current goals are more closely aligned with common deferrer goals – but if you want to join the NR, you will have to change this, says Ferris.

Let us start with retirement. For most, retirement is the light at the end of the tunnel, the promised day of freedom. The NR reject this idea; instead, they switch between intense phases of work and mini-retirements – brief vacations, between two weeks and two months long, during which they either completely relax or do something fun, such as learning how to fence.

Another mistake deferrers make when setting goals is that they start small, instead of setting big, “unrealistic” goals. Since everyone starts small, the competition is fiercest at ground level. Up at the top, however, it has sparsely populated; few people dare to think big, which is why it is sometimes easier to achieve the “unrealistic” than the “realistic.” For example, you’ll have an easier time raising \$1,000,000 for your business than you will \$100,000 because there are more competitors aiming for the “realistic” sum. Does this sound like an exaggeration – or simply nonsense, asks Ferris.

Well, the author once challenged a classroom of students at Princeton University to undertake a seemingly impossible task. Whoever came up with the most ingenious way to contact a very famous person – someone like Beyoncé or Barack Obama – and have them answer three questions would win a free trip around the world.

Twenty students, all capable and intelligent, expressed interest. And they all failed. But here is the thing, says Ferris, they failed because they did not even try. They were all so intimidated by the task that they did nothing. If one of them had sent the author a scrap of paper with some scribbles on it, he would have had to give that student the prize, because those were the rules he had set.

This “unrealistic” goal was, therefore, surprisingly easy to achieve due to the lack of competition, and the same is true for many other such goals. And last but not least, do not wait for the perfect moment to quit your job and join the ranks of the NR – it will never come. To wait is to fear taking a leap into the unknown, to be afraid of the seemingly impossible. But if you want to live the unhindered lifestyle of a millionaire, you will have to trust yourself and take the plunge, says Ferris.

Less is more

In the late nineteenth century, an Italian economist named Vilfredo Pareto noticed something about the pea plants in his garden: about 80 percent of the peas were produced by 20 percent of the pods. He had noticed this ratio elsewhere, too. About 80 percent of the land in Italy was owned by 20 percent of the population – the same 20 percent who owned about 80 percent of the country’s wealth.

What does this have to do with you, asks Ferris. Well, if you are anything like the author once was, then roughly 80 percent of your work output results from a mere 20 percent of your effort.

This fact is hidden by the standard eight-hour workday. Most employees have to work for eight hours, and so, instead of focusing on productivity, they emphasize activity. They organize their inbox; they play around with their phone; they walk self-importantly from cubicle to cubicle. And the person who looks the busiest often gets the raise because, at most companies, time spent at work is the only yardstick for performance.

But about 80 percent of this daily bustle is virtually useless. In general, people favour efficiency – that is, the most economical completion of all work, no matter how unimportant – over effectivity, the efficient completion of crucial tasks. A door-to-door salesman may be efficient, but he will never be effective; he could be peddling his wares by other means, such as mail or email, and focusing on other, more important tasks.

Keep in mind, says Ferris, that spending a lot of time on work does not necessarily mean that you are addressing the right tasks, nor that you are doing them well. Quite the contrary; as Parkinson's law teaches us, the more time we have to complete a task, the more time we will spend on it. So, if we have an hour to turn in our project's final report, we will finish it in an hour. If we have the entire afternoon, it will take us four hours.

The NR pinpoint and prioritize the 20 percent of tasks that will yield 80 percent of results, and they complete these tasks in as little time as possible. This way, they maximize effectivity, reduce useless activity and, more often than not, increase revenue to boot.

Take a break from information and interruptions

After you have applied the Pareto principle and started focusing on that crucial 20 percent of tasks, it is time to move to the next part of the DEAL formula: elimination. One way to narrow things down is to weigh the importance of each activity by asking yourself, "Would I be happy if this task ends up being the only one, I complete today?"

This will help you eliminate time-consuming interruptions that prevent you from completing a task without pause. Perhaps the costliest kind of interruptions are time wasters, or tasks that you can ignore without negative ramifications. The most common ones are surfing the web, responding to unimportant emails and conducting phone calls and meetings.

Let us take meetings. Holding a meeting really only makes sense when there is an important decision to be made, and even then, there should be an agenda and a concrete time limit, says Ferris. Further, if you feel your presence would be superfluous, simply skip the meeting. In the same spirit, business-related conversations should not deteriorate into pointless blathering; rather, they should turn, as quickly as possible, to the subject at hand. To do this, it helps to replace "How are you doing?" with "What can I do for you?" or to open a conversation with "Unfortunately, I only have two minutes to spare."

Another way to prioritize crucial tasks is to go on a strict information diet. Consuming media can be extremely distracting, so try practicing selective ignorance – that is, not consuming any information that does not pertain to your work or well-being. The best way to start is to go on a week-long "media fast," during which you read absolutely no newspapers or magazines, and also abstain from surfing the internet. Instead, have a well-informed co-worker give you a five-minute briefing on world events during your lunch break or, come evening, ask your partner to fill you in on the day's news.

You also do not need to read every book on specialized subjects. Rather, seek out an expert who can present complex content in the course of a short workshop and answer your questions quickly. That will save a lot of time and also give you better results, because the knowledge will be distilled and presented concisely.

Controlling your environment

How do you start your typical workday? If you are anything like most people, you probably check your inbox. As it turns out, this is actually a big mistake, because most emails are time wasters. So, what should you do instead, asks Ferris? As you have learned, being productive means doing as much as possible in as little time as possible, and only tackling projects that are important – that is, projects that bring you closer to your personal goals. After eliminating all time wasters, you should only be left with tasks that fulfil this criterion.

And, of course, because they are so important, these tasks should get top priority; you should turn to them first thing every morning, without even glancing at your email. On an ideal workday, all the important tasks should be finished before midday.

A good way to start weaning yourself off email is to read and answer messages twice a day, once in the afternoon and once in the evening. If you manage that, try to go a step or two further and you may soon find yourself only dealing with emails once a week.

Inform your friends, family and co-workers about this new habit by setting up an auto-response explaining that you're limiting the time you spend on email in order to serve them better and that it may be a while before you respond. Those around you will adapt and learn that most messages can simply wait in your email inbox or your voicemail while you tackle truly important things. Genuinely urgent requests can always be conveyed on the phone or in a face-to-face conversation.

By letting many small questions and tasks accumulate in your inbox, you will be able to deal with them all at once, which will both save you time and liberate you from the interruptions that interfere with more important work.

Okay, now you know how to work more productively. But this does not exactly add up to a four-hour workweek yet. If you want your daily routine to include more lounging in a hammock on a remote island, cocktail in hand, then you will also have to free yourself from the location your work binds you to.

You can also do it

So, you have applied half of the DEAL formula to your work life; you have defined your goals and eliminated time-consuming activities. But if you are an employee, you cannot jump straight to automation; rather, you have to liberate yourself from the office first, so that the formula becomes DELA.

Here is why; says Ferris - by defining your goals and eliminating all interruptions, you will greatly increase your effectivity, to the point where you may be able to accomplish in ten hours what your co-workers get done in 40. But remember; most workplaces encourage activity, not effectivity, which means that no matter how little time it takes you to complete your work, you will always have to put in 40 hours per week.

The solution is to escape the office. Not only will this allow you to work less, it will enable you to work from anywhere you want.

There are five steps to vanishing from the office;

1. Increase your value to the company
2. Prove increased output when working remotely
3. Quantify the business benefit
4. Propose a trial period
5. Expand the time you work remotely

Let us take a look at how Sherwood, someone who wants to dedicate more time to his side business of selling sailor shirts on eBay, pulls off this “vanishing act.” He starts by making himself indispensable. He talks to his boss about additional training that would help him better serve the company’s clients, the goal being to increase his value to his employer.

In the meantime, he conducts a little test: he calls in sick on Tuesday and Wednesday and says he will work from home. He chooses these days so that it will not look like an excuse for a three-day weekend, and also so he can test his productivity without the carrot of the weekend dangling before him.

On these days, he keeps track of how much work he does with quantifiable records and an email trail – and he purposely doubles his work output, which is easy due to the lack of distractions at the office. Sherwood then creates a proposal detailing how his working from home will benefit his boss and why he is more productive out of the office, since he does not have to worry about commuting or office-related distractions.

At this point, he suggests a revocable trial period; he will work from home one day per week for two weeks. The suggestion is accepted, and on these at-home days, Sherwood again ensures that his productivity doubles compared to being at the office, which gives him further proof that his working from home is beneficial to the company. Now all he has to do is increase those away days to five, which should be easy considering the added productivity his boss is seeing, and Sherwood will effectively be able to work from anywhere in the world.

Build something that runs without you

It is finally time to discuss automation, the A from the DEAL formula, which is crucial if you wish to decouple the time you spend working from the money you make. By establishing automated sources of income that can be maintained from anywhere in the world, you – just like today’s New Rich – can lead whatever kind of life you desire, because you’ll generate income without spending all your time at work.

Now, if you want to establish an automated revenue stream, you have got to create a business that works without any effort on your part – that is, it should basically run itself. For instance, instead of personally managing the distribution of your product, partner with a company that can do it and hire an agency to maintain your website, so you do not have to. You personally should barely play any part in this setup; rather, you should aim to read the reports of your service providers and step in only when necessary.

So how can you ensure that work runs smoothly in your absence? First, everyone involved should have the freedom to communicate independently with one another, so that you do not need to relay messages. Second, you should give as much responsibility as possible to those you have entrusted with your tasks. This way, people can solve problems without needing your input or approval, which will save you tons of time and give you far more freedom. But who exactly should be doing all this work? One option is to hire virtual assistants, or VAs. You can contract VAs from almost anywhere, from Canada to India, and who you choose depends entirely on your needs. If a task requires proficient English, then you might choose a native English speaker.

And if you are worried about the cost, remember to factor in the value of the time you save. Let us say you currently earn \$25 per hour, while such an assistant would probably cost around \$30 per hour. This means that for every hour of work the assistant takes over, the effective cost to you is just \$5, meaning that you could take an entire Friday off for a cost of just \$40. That does not sound too bad, does it, says Ferris. Indian VA’s are much cheaper and, in the author’s experience, often as good as, if not better than, their counterparts from the English-speaking West. Finding a suitable VA is largely a matter of trial and error, so be sure to ask other people about their experiences and do not get discouraged if your first one is not a perfect fit. Ideal VAs does exist and finding them is well worth the effort.

You need a muse for your automated income

Of course, if you want to create an automated income stream and construct the architecture to support it, you have got to have a product to sell. This could, for example, be an existing product that you decide to redistribute. Remember Sherwood, who wanted to spend less time in the office in order to focus on his side business, reselling sailor shirts on eBay?

The only problem with this approach is that reselling an existing product comes with smaller profit margins. So, it is better to design your own product, something that will bring in as much money as possible with minimal effort from you. To get started, look at the markets you are most familiar with and brainstorm product ideas based on your findings.

To differentiate your business from a classic start-up, which is not what you are trying to create, let us call your best idea your muse. Unlike a start-up, your muse does not have to be run by you. After all, you do not really want to be an entrepreneur, because you are not looking to spend all your time on strategy meetings, leadership and management.

Look for your muse in a niche that does not require you to invest much time or money up front to get started. Sherwood's idea is a case in point: without investing any money, he figured out that he could resell sailor shirts at a profit. Or take the author, who founded an internet company in 2001 for the dietary supplement BrainQUICKEN® and made a fortune with minimal time investment.

On a practical note, no matter what your muse looks like, it is important that you outperform the competition and demonstrate to prospective customers that you are the best person to buy from. This can be done by attaining indicators of credibility, such as a PhD. Alternatively, you can use other means to establish your expertise – for instance, by attending seminars and conducting thorough research with the help of relevant textbooks and websites. It does not take a degree in fashion design to create a funny T-shirt; all you need is more expertise than your potential customers.

Focus on focus groups.

Did you know that, of the 195,000 books published each year, fewer than 10,000 sell more than 5,000 copies? More often than not, experienced editors and publishers fail to move their products. Or have you ever heard of WebVan? It was a grocery delivery company that the founder of the bookstore franchise Borders poured more than \$375 million into before it went bankrupt.

The lesson is that neither experience nor business savvy are guarantees of success. In fact, there is only one way to know whether your product is likely to succeed; you have to ask people to buy it. Offer the hypothetical product to actual customers and see how they react.

Maybe you are wondering how Sherwood figured out that his idea was profitable? Well, before he even purchased his first sailor shirt, he began offering them on eBay. Anyone who clicked on his offer was told that it was only possible to “back order” the product – a lie, yes, but also a way for Sherwood to get a sense of actual demand.

Once he knew how many shirts were likely to sell, he made his first order. After selling 12 shirts in five days, Sherwood ordered 24 shirts and sold them in 12 days. He kept a close eye on demand, and his sales continued to increase until he began considering leaving his other job altogether. Or consider Johanna, a yoga teacher who came up with a great idea for a muse. She had noticed that more and more climbing enthusiasts had started coming to her class, and after looking into whether such a thing already existed (and finding that it didn't), she decided to create a DVD with a special yoga course for climbers.

She set up a website with testimonials from her students and ran multiple ads through Google AdWords. By analysing the click and conversion rates, she could better gauge the demand and

determine which search terms worked best. Once she had collected all this information and was relatively sure that her muse would be a success, she produced the DVD and started distributing it – and sales were better than expected. During the first week, she made back the initial production costs, as well as the \$250 she had spent on testing. Now she is selling a solid ten DVDs per week, at a profit of \$750. Not too bad for a first muse!

Think big and make bold promises

Now that you have confirmed that there's demand for your product, there are a few things to keep in mind when designing it to help make it successful. First, you should be able to summarize the product's purpose in one sentence. When Apple released the iPod in 2001, everyone instantly knew what it was for thanks to the accompanying slogan: "1,000 songs in your pocket."

Second, you should make it as easy as possible for customers to decide to purchase your product. Do not make them choose between a ton of options, says Ferris. The more colours and designs your customers have to choose between, the more likely they will be not to buy your product, because comparing all the options is exhausting.

Third, to attract the right customers, you should give your product a high price point: somewhere between \$50 and \$200, says Ferris. This will not only give your product a premium image, it will also increase your profit margins and decrease the likelihood of complaints. After all, anyone prepared to pay such a high price will be less likely to complain if the product does not live up to expectations, because they'll likely have money to spare and usually can't be bothered to make a fuss about small problems.

And finally, your product should make a big promise and deliver on it. Take Domino's Pizza, which promises to deliver in 30 minutes or less. If they do not, your pizza is free. Or consider the author's promise for the product BodyQUICK. He guaranteed that, within 60 minutes of the first dose, it was 110-percent guaranteed to work – that is, if you didn't see results within an hour after taking your first dose, he'd refund the product price and send you a check for 10 percent of that price. Such bold promises show your customers how serious you are about your product and give them the added confidence they need to make a purchase.

What I took from it

"The question you should be asking isn't, "What do I want?" or "What are my goals?" but "What would excite me?" Instead of toiling away for the rest of your days in an office, waiting for retirement, start enjoying life today by joining the New Rich and going on periodic mini retirements in the here and now.

Begin by defining bold goals for yourself, then focus your efforts on the 20 percent of tasks that are most impactful. Next, liberate yourself from the office by showing that you are more effective working at home, stop going to pointless meetings and quit the habit of constantly checking your inbox.

Finally, automate your income by identifying and testing "muses." With these habits in place, you will be well on your way to the lifestyle you've always desired. Create a dream plan. List everything you want to achieve in the next six months – all the things you want to do and be. Now calculate how much you think this would cost per month. Whether you want a sports car or a personal assistant, the ability to speak fluent Greek or to cook the perfect meal, make a monthly estimate of what you are likely to spend on it. Then, based on this number, calculate a monthly target income. You now have a concrete figure to aim for to attain your dream life.

The Richest Man In Babylon

George S. Clason

If you Google any list of the top rated books in personal development; George S. Clason's, The Richest Man in Babylon will feature in it nine out of ten times. It is a book that gives financial advice through a collection of parables set in ancient Babylon. Through their experiences in business and managing household finance, the characters in the parables learn simple lessons in financial wisdom.

The three most powerful points I took from the book were;

1. Save at least 10 percent of everything you earn and do not confuse your necessary expenses with your desires.
2. Work hard to improve your skills and ensure a future income because wealth is the result of a reliable income stream.
3. You cannot arrive at the fullest measure of success until you crush the spirit of procrastination within you.

The Richest Man in Babylon

Bansir and Kobbi meet with Arkad, asking him why fate has favoured him so much that Arkad has grown rich while they remain poor, even though they have worked harder than Arkad has. Arkad replies that he was once a hard-working scribe who made a deal with a very rich man, Algamish, for the secret to wealth in return for a much-needed copy of a law immediately scribed into the clay. The rich man agreed and the next day when Arkad delivered the carving, the rich man delivered in return the secret of wealth.

"I found the road to wealth," he said, "When I decided that only a part of all I earned was mine to keep. And so, will you." Arkad then relates that he asked the same question that is undoubtedly on Bansir and Kobbi's minds, "Isn't all that I make mine to keep?" Algamish then said no, that a man had to pay for his clothes, for his food, etc., but that if he regularly saved at least a tenth of his income (and as much more as he could afford to save) and put that money to work earning interest, he would become wealthy.

A part of all you earn is yours to keep

Arkad relates that he did as advised, saving a tenth of his income for a year, then investing that money with a brick-maker who went on a journey to buy jewels to trade. He related this to Algamish, who castrates Arkad for this foolishness. "Every fool must learn," he said, "But why trust the knowledge of a brick-maker about jewels? Would you go to the bread-maker to inquire about the stars?" Algamish then said, "He who takes advice about his savings from one who is inexperienced in such matters, will pay with his savings for proving the falsity of their opinions."

Arkad then saved his money for another year, and he invested it with Agger the shield maker who used it to buy materials; every fourth month Agger paid Arkad rent for the use of these funds. Arkad spent these dividends on fine clothing and regularly scheduled feasts. Algamish comments that Arkad is "eating the children of his savings" by not investing them. Arkad adjusts his behaviour and when he finally meets with Algamesh two years later, Algamish is so pleased with how Arkad has taken his lessons to heart, he hires Arkad as a manager of his estate. By continuing to save and invest wisely, Arkad relates that he became the wealthy man that he is now.

Seven Cures for a lean purse

Sargon of Akkad; the King of Babylon, is told by his Royal Chancellor that the kingdom is poor. There are not enough jobs for everyone, people do not have enough money to buy what they want to buy, and farmers cannot make enough selling their produce to continue farming. All of the gold has found its way into the possession of a few very rich men of Babylon.

The King asks why so few men would be able to acquire all of the gold and the Chancellor says because they know how to, that one may not condemn a man for succeeding because he knows how, neither may one with justice take away from a man what he has fairly earned, to give to men of less ability. But why, the King demands to know, should not all the people learn how to accumulate gold and therefore become themselves rich and prosperous?

After further consultation with the Chancellor, the King summons Arkad to teach people how to become wealthy. Arkad then delivers a series of lectures to a class of one hundred men, teaching them the seven cures for a lean purse.

1) Start thy purse to fattening - Arkad instructs the men to begin by continuing to work hard at their current occupations, but for every ten coins placed in their purse to take out for use but nine. Their purses will start to fatten at once and their increasing weight will feel good in their hands and bring satisfaction to their souls. "Deride not what I say because of its simplicity," Arkad says, "Truth is always simple."

2) Control thy expenditures - "How," some of the men ask, "Can a man keep one-tenth of all he earns in his purse when all the coins he earns are not enough for his necessary expenditures?" "How many of you have lean purses," Arkad asks. All of the men say that they have lean purses, that they have no money. "Yet," Arkad responds, "Thou do not all earn the same. Some earn much more than others.

Some have much larger families to support. Yet, all purses are equally lean. Now I will tell them an unusual truth about men and the sons of men. It is this: That what each of us calls our necessary expenses' will always grow to equal our incomes unless we protest to the contrary. Arkad tells the men not to confuse necessary expenses with their desires, that all men are burdened with more desires than they can gratify. "Budget thy expenses that thou mayest have coins to pay for thy necessities, to pay for thy enjoyments and to gratify thy worthwhile desires without spending more than nine-tenths of thy earnings."

3) Make thy gold multiply - This simply explained that, once you have started saving at least one-tenth of what you earn, you must put that money to work earning interest. "Put each coin to labouring that it may reproduce its kind even as the flocks of the field and help bring to the income, a stream of wealth that shall flow constantly into thy purse."

4) Guard thy treasures against loss - "Everyone is tempted," Arkad relates, "By opportunities whereby it would seem that a man could make large sums by investing his money in most plausible projects. Often friends and relatives are eagerly entering such investment and urge him to follow." The first sound principle of investment is security—what is a person who wants a loan from you offering as collateral?

Arkad relates again his decision to invest his money with a brick-maker who was going to buy jewels to trade. Some Phoenicians took advantage of the brick-maker's naivety concerning jewels and sold him bits of coloured glass. "Guard thy treasure against loss by investing only where thy principal is safe, where it may be reclaimed if desirable, and where thou will not fail to collect a fair rental. Consult with wise men. Secure the advice of those experienced in the profitable handling of gold. Let their wisdom

protect thy treasure from unsafe investments.”

5) Make of thy dwelling a profitable investment - If you pay rent to a landlord all your life, at the end of your life you will have nothing to show for it. If you can instead pay a mortgage on a house, at the end of your life you will have a house to show for it. “Own thy own home.” This is very important for those that aim high in reality.

6) Ensure a future income - Arkad instructs the class to prepare for retirement and to buy insurance so that their family will be provided for if they die. “No man can afford not to ensure a treasure for his old age and the protection of his family, no matter how prosperous his business and his investments may be.” Arkad then foretells the future creation of life insurance companies. “Provide in advance for the needs of thy growing age and the protection of thy family.”

7) Increase thy ability to earn - A man must set concrete goals and work to achieve them. These goals should not only be to advance in one’s career or one’s position, but also to become wiser and more knowledgeable. Further, if a man respects himself, he must do the following:

- Pay his debts promptly and not stay in debt.
- Take care of his family.
- Make a will
- Have compassion upon those who are injured and smitten by misfortune and aid them within reasonable limits; do deeds of thoughtfulness to those dear to him.

“Cultivate thy own powers, to study and become wiser, to become more skilful, to so act as to respect thyself. Thereby shalt thou acquire confidence in thyself to achieve thy carefully considered desires.”

Meet the Goddess of Luck

This section begins with a Babylonian proverb about luck. “If a man is lucky, there is no foretelling the possible extent of his good fortune. Pitch him into the Euphrates and like as not he will swim out with a pearl in his hand.” Arkad chats with another group of men and tells them that the Goddess of Good Luck smiles upon those who work hard, save their money, and invest well.

She does not really patronise professional gamblers, who always seem to end up poor. A person must not procrastinate but must strike while the opportunity is ripe. “Good luck can be enticed by accepting the opportunity. (Good luck can be earned when one is aware of the opportunity and prepared for them.) Men of action are favoured by the Goddess of Good Luck.”

The Gold Lender of Babylon - The book tells the story of Rodan, a spear-maker, who received fifty pieces of gold from the king as a gift for making such excellent spears. Rodan seeks out Mathon, a money lender, to ask for monetary advice - what he should do with the money. Rodan relates that his sister wishes Rodan to give the gold to her husband, Araman so that Araman might become a merchant.

If you desire to help thy friend, do so in a way that will not bring thy friend’s burdens upon thyself. Mathon relates the story of a farmer who could understand what animals could say. One evening as the farmer passed by outside the stable, the farmer’s ox complained to the farmer’s donkey about how much more work the ox had to do in ploughing the field instead of just carrying the farmer around. The donkey laughed and told the ox to try to claim a sick day. The next morning, when the ox proclaimed that he was sick and could not work, the farmer ordered that the donkey is used to plough the field.

At the end of the day, the ox thanked the donkey for giving him a day of rest and the donkey proclaimed that he was “like many another simplehearted one who starts to help a friend and ends up

by doing his task for him. Hereafter you draw your own plough, for I did hear the master tell the slave to send for the butcher were you sick again. I wish he would, for you are a lazy fellow.” This ended the friendship between the donkey and the ox.

Better a little caution than a great regret - Mathon then asks Rodan whether a loan would be well made if the borrower could not repay. “Must not the lender be wise and judge carefully whether his gold can perform a useful purpose to the borrower and return to him once more, or whether it will be wasted by one unable to use it wisely and leave him without his treasures, and leave the borrower with a debt he cannot repay?” Mathon then relates that there are three classes of borrowers, those who promise more financial security than they borrow and who are thus always safe to lend to, those who borrow based on their capacity to earn and ability to repay the loan and thus are safe to loan to, and those who have neither property nor assured earning capacity, who will likely never pay a loan back.

He pulls out his box of security tokens and relates some short stories including that of a woman who borrowed money to make her son a merchant. Mathon knew that her son was not ready to be entrusted with such money but to suggest otherwise to the woman was to infuriate her. Since she offered jewels as security, Mathon could not refuse her. Mathon shows that one of the tokens of security is a simple knot tied in a piece of rope, given by a person that Mathon has long lent money to, who always promptly pays his loans back, and uses the loans wisely to become richer.

Mathon has had such a good experience with this borrower that Mathon no longer requires the man to give a “real” security to borrow money. Mathon states that he does not discourage borrowing gold, he encourages it, if it is for a wise purpose. Mathon ends by telling Rodan to read what is carved beneath the lid of the token box, which saying applies equally to the borrower and the lender. “Better a little caution than a great regret.”

The Walls of Babylon

The authors go on to tell the story of Old Banzar, a soldier who guarded the gates of the wall of Babylon. For four weeks, battle rages in front of the walls but ultimately the height and breadth of the impenetrable walls repulse the invaders.

We cannot afford to be without adequate protection - The story concludes with the unnamed narrator saying that “The walls of Babylon were an outstanding example of man’s need and desire for protection. This desire is inherent in the human race. It is just as strong today as it ever was, but we have developed broader and better plans to accomplish the same purpose. In this day, behind the impregnable walls of insurance, savings accounts and dependable investments, we can guard ourselves against the unexpected tragedies that may enter any door and seat themselves before any fireside.”

The Camel Trader of Babylon - A new character named Tarkad is introduced as a man who has had nothing to eat for two days (except for two figs that he stole before being chased away). He encounters Dabasir, a camel trader, a man that Tarkad owes money to. Dabasir invites Tarkad into the eating house where he orders food for himself and water for Tarkad. Dabasir relates that he was once a slave in Syria.

As a young married man, Dabasir had worked for his father, making saddles, but had lived an extravagant lifestyle, beyond his means. Eventually, due to the constant hounding of creditors, his wife left him and he ran away from Babylon, falling in with some caravan robbers. Eventually, he was captured and taken to Damascus, Syria, where he was sold as a slave. At first, Dabasir thought it was all a great adventure until his new master offered Dabasir as a eunuch to his master’s wives.

Where the determination is, the way can be found - Luckily for Dabasir, his master’s oldest wife said that they had enough eunuchs but needed a camel tender. When Dabasir later tells the oldest wife that he’s not really a slave but a free man, she protests that he cannot call himself a free man when his

financial weakness has brought him to such ruin, that he must have the soul of a slave within him.

Dabasir protests and begins to live apart from the other slaves, to demonstrate that he wants to right what he did wrong, that he has the soul of a free man. The oldest wife eventually helps Dabasir to escape back to Babylon, where Dabasir faces his creditors and eventually repays everything he owes for “where the determination is, the way can be found.”

The Clay Tablets from Babylon

The story of Dabasir is continued in more depth, examining how Dabasir was able to repay his creditors. The story is now set as a translation of ancient Babylonian stone tablets as authored by a professor of archaeology, Alfred H. Shrewsbury.

Tablet No I

Dabasir, under the advice of his friend Mathon the money lender, is recording his financial journey back to solvency. He vows to save one-tenth of all he earns, that he will support and clothe his wife (who returned to him when he returned to Babylon) and pay for their house, their food, etc., with seven-tenths of his income, and use the remaining two-tenths of his income to repay his creditors.

Tablet No II

Every month, Dabasir will take the two-tenths that he has saved and split it amongst his creditors. He then gives a list of who he owes money to and how much money he owes them.

Tablet No III

Dabasir acknowledges that he was a fool when he left Babylon the first time and states that he has spoken to his creditors. Some cursed him for his inability to pay immediately, while others begged to be paid first. Dabasir states that he is determined to repay them all and that he will deal impartially with them all.

Tablet No IV

Dabasir relates what has happened in the last three months, that he did indeed save one-tenth of his income for his retirement and to invest and that he saved two-tenths of his income to repay his creditors. He states that he and his wife are happy and that this plan has made an honourable man of an ex-slave.

Tablet No V

Dabasir says that it has now been a further twelve months since he last made a tablet, but that he just finished repaying his creditors and some are impressed enough that they are even willing to lend him money again, should he want it.

What I took from it

I loved this book. It is a classic first published in 1926. Almost a century later, its lessons are still simple and effective. The secret to becoming wealthy does not have to be a complicated algorithm. In fact, it is actually pretty simple and lessons I wished I learned a long time ago. Part of it is about living below your means. Then about saving one-tenth of your income in interested earning assets. You then have nine-tenths to live off with. If you are in debt, you should only live of seven-tenths of your income; one-tenth going towards savings and two tenths towards paying off your debt.

You must also understand that you can earn yourself luck by working hard and seizing opportunities bravely. Never take on debt to buy some luxury item, because once you find yourself in such unnecessary debt, it is very hard to get out of it. If you desperately want the item in question, but cannot afford it, save up to buy it. Invest part of what you earn – wisely.

Whatever you earn, always ensure you do not spend all of it on things you want. There is a difference between needing something and wanting something. Do not trust a novice or an amateur with your hard-earned savings; no matter how attractive an opportunity seems. If the person you are entrusting with your money is inexperienced in the field, chances are they will fail. Therefore, you should only invest in people who have proven they know what they are doing

Self Help

“What the mind of man can conceive and believe, it can achieve.” – Napoleon Hill

Awaken The Giant Within

Tony Robbins

It is coming to that time of the year again when you reflect on the past 12 months and plan for the next 12 months. Is it a coincidence that gym membership rockets in January but by March 2/3 of new members go less than once a week; if at all.

Have you thought about changing your life? Perhaps it was last New Year's Eve and you resolved to quit some bad habit. Maybe, like me you wanted to lose weight and seriously considered going on a new diet. But did you actually manage to bring about those changes to your life? If you did not, like me, the problem was likely in how we framed our desire to change; "I'd like to stop eating junk food" instead of "I will start eating more healthily." To change anything about your life, you first have to make a clear decision, says Tony. Then, no matter what challenges you may face, you have to stick to that decision.

Tony Robbins has been a favourite of mine for many years. He sets the bar to whom I measure everyone else when it comes to 'life coaching'. I have been fortunate enough to see him live a few times in the UK and US. The energy from his events are electric and you leave them ready to tackle any situation that comes your way. What I love about his message is that it is all about 'standards'. Why be good; when you can be excellent!

The three most powerful points I took from the book were;

1. Any time you sincerely want to make a change, the first thing you must do is to raise your standards and believe you can meet them. Good is the enemy of great.
2. If you develop the absolute sense of certainty that powerful beliefs provide, then you can get yourself to accomplish virtually anything
3. People with an impoverished vocabulary live an impoverished emotional life. Simply by changing your habitual vocabulary, you can instantaneously change how you think, how you feel, and how you live.

Good is the enemy of great!

As with all these things; one needs to be reminded constantly. That energy you have after listening to his audio books, going to his events or reading his books, do wain and therefore I make it a point of repeating his message many times a year.

Awaken the Giant Within is one of his original and early works. I would recommend listening to the audiobook while following in your book, as the passion from Tony's delivery in audio really makes the message so much more powerful.

In short, the message from the book is that if at any time you sincerely want to make a change, the first thing you must do is to raise your standards and believe you can meet them. We must change our belief system and develop a sense of certainty that we can and will meet the new standards before we actually do. It is not what we do once in a while that shapes our lives, but what we do consistently. Your habits are what will drive your success or failure in life.

Tony describes three decisions that control your destiny. They are;

1. Your decisions about what to focus on
2. Your decisions about what things mean to you
3. Your decisions about what to do to create the results you desire.

Everything you and I do; we do either out of our need to avoid pain or our desire to gain pleasure. It is not the events of our lives that shape us, but our beliefs as to what those events mean. Focus on where you want to go, not on what you fear.

Setting higher standards and making better decisions

- Any time you sincerely want to make a change, the first thing you must do is to raise your standards and believe you can meet them
- We must change our belief system and develop a sense of certainty that we can and will meet the new standards before we actually do
- In life, lots of people know what to do, but few people actually do what they know they should do
- If we want to direct our lives, we must take control of our consistent actions. It is not what we do once in a while that shapes our lives, but what we do consistently
- It is in your moments of decision that your destiny is shaped
- Not only do you have to decide what results you are committed to, but also the kind of person that you are committed to becoming
- If you truly decide to, you can do almost anything
- It is likely that whatever challenges you have in your life currently could have been avoided by some better decisions upstream
- Success truly is the result of good judgement. Good judgement is the result of experience, and experience is often the result of bad judgement!
- Know that it is your decisions, and not your conditions, that determine your destiny

Pain or pleasure

- Everything we do, we do either out of our need to avoid pain or our desire to gain pleasure
- For most people, the fear of loss is much greater than the desire for gain
- Why is it that people can experience pain yet fail to change? It is because they have not experienced enough pain yet; they have not hit what Tony calls the emotional threshold
- If we link massive pain to any behaviour or emotional pattern, we will avoid indulging in it at all costs
- Anything you want that is valuable requires that you break through some short-term pain in order to gain long-term pleasure
- Whenever something happens in your life, your brain asks two questions. One; will this mean pain or pleasure. Two, what must I do now to avoid pain and/or gain pleasure?

Reality & your beliefs

- We are not driven by the reality, but by our perception of reality
- It is not the events of our lives that shape us, but our beliefs as to what those events mean
- It is never the environment; it is never the events of our lives, but the meaning we attach to the events - how we interpret them - that shapes who we are today and who we will become tomorrow
- If you develop the absolute sense of certainty that powerful beliefs provide, then you can get yourself to accomplish virtually anything, including those things that other people are certain are impossible
- New experiences trigger change only if they cause us to question our beliefs. Remember, whenever we believe something, we no longer question it in any way
- The way to expand our lives is to model the lives of those people who are already succeeding. It's just a matter of asking questions: 'what do you believe makes you different? What are the beliefs you have that separate you from others?'
- We all want to change either 1) how we feel about things or 2) our behaviours
- There are three specific beliefs about responsibility that a person must have if they are going to create long-term change. First, we must believe, 'Something must change' - not that it should

change, not that it could or ought to, but that it absolutely must. Second, we must not only believe that things must change, but we must believe, 'I must change it'. Third, we have to believe, 'I can change it'

- The only way for us to have long-term happiness is to live by our highest ideals, to consistently act in accordance with what we believe our life is truly about

Your state and focus

- The difference between acting badly or brilliantly is not based on your ability, but on the state of your mind and/or body in any given moment
- Focus on where you want to go, not on what you fear
- You have got to be in a determined state in order to succeed
- Quality questions create a quality life
- A genuine quality of life comes from consistent, quality questions
- We can change how we feel in an instant, just by changing our focus
- One of the ways that I have discovered to increase the quality of my life is to model the habitual questions of people I really respect

Words are powerful

- The words you habitually choose also affect how you communicate with yourself and therefore what you experience
- People with an impoverished vocabulary live an impoverished emotional life; people with rich vocabularies have a multi-hued palette of colours with which to paint their experience, not only for others, but for themselves as well
- Simply by changing your habitual vocabulary - the words you consistently use to describe the emotions of your life - you can instantaneously change how you think, how you feel, and how you live
- If we want to change our lives and shape our destiny, we need to consciously select the words we are going to use, and we need to constantly strive to expand our level of choice

Setting goals

- Setting goals is the first step in turning the invisible into the visible - the foundation for all success in life
- All goal setting must be immediately followed by both the development of a plan, and massive and consistent action toward its fulfilment
- It is not just getting a goal that matters, but the quality of life you experience along the way
- Remember, our goal is not to ignore the problems of life, but to put ourselves in better mental and emotional states where we can not only come up with solutions, but act upon them
- Many people know what they want to have, but have no idea of who they want to be

Your values

- Remember that your values - whatever they are - are the compass that is guiding you to your ultimate destiny
- Anytime you have difficulty making an important decision, you can be sure that it's the result of being unclear about your values
- To value something means to place importance upon it; anything that you hold dear can be called a 'value'
- If you ever feel angry or upset with someone, remember, it is your rules that are upsetting you, not their behaviour

The ultimate success formula

1. Decide what you want
2. Act
3. Notice what is working or not
4. Change your approach until you achieve what you want

What I took from it

Tony Robbins is still one of the best 'Life Mastery' gurus out there, and this was one of his original programs. By reading this book, you have an edge over most people who listen to their own negative inner voice. In this program, he covers 'pattern interrupts' and how to erase those old 'mental tapes' many people play on a loop to themselves. Break old patterns and learn new ones.

It's a short book to motivate people to think about their goals, be committed to them (not just hope they will happen), take actions, assess the results (to measure the effectiveness of those actions), and adjust their plans until their goals are achieved. There is nothing new about this approach and many people interested in 'self-help' would have heard these messages before. For me it's more like listening to an artist on stage. You like the 'song' and therefore you will listen to it often in years to come; and sooner or later you will be able to 'sing' along. It's that stage we should all strive to achieve. Let the message become part of your sub-consciousness.

How To Be A Stoic

Massimo Pigliucci

The question of how to live has been necessary for every culture, religion and society in history. How should we tackle life's challenges? What is the best way to behave and conduct ourselves toward others? And how should we face up to the ultimate challenge; our own demise?

Stoicism, a philosophy developed in the ancient world, has a lot to tell us about how we can live today. So says Massimo Pigliucci in his book, *How To Be A Stoic*, published in 2017. Stoic philosophers were interested in the practicalities of living a good, virtuous life, from how to foreground your friendships to dealing with daily frustrations.

In this book you'll discover how to lead a life based on Stoic principles, how to prioritize what is important and what you have the power to change, and how to worry less about the things that are unimportant and out of your control. You will get practical tips from ancient philosophers and see how role models can inspire you to a better life.

The five most powerful points I took from the book were;

1. Stoicism is not at all passive, and it is not about suppressing emotion. It is about what we can do to lead a good life
2. Stoicism concerns itself with three disciplines. Firstly, that of desire, or what we should and should not aim for; secondly, action, or how we should behave; and thirdly, assent – how we should react to situations.
3. Stoics do not believe that wealth is to be avoided. Indeed, given the choice, being wealthy is more preferred than not being wealthy. But Stoics recognized that things such as wealth, despite being preferred, were indifferent to the goal of a moral, virtuous life.
4. What exactly did they mean when they talked of a virtuous life? Stoicism identified four aspects of virtue – temperance, courage, justice, and, most importantly, wisdom.
5. We should, according to Stoics, take mortality seriously. But instead of finding stress in anticipation of death, we should find care and appreciation in life.

A practical guide to life's problems

Throughout history, religious leaders, scientists and philosophers have tried to answer the question; how can we live a good life? How should we deal with life's problems, treat our friends and neighbours, react to adversity and prepare for death? One philosophy that can provide some answers is Stoicism, so called because its first followers met beneath the Stoa Poikile, meaning "painted porch," in ancient Athens.

Stoicism started in Athens around 300 BCE. It thrived, and in 155 BCE spread to Rome when key Stoic philosophers were sent there as ambassadors. It developed in Rome to such an extent that Marcus Aurelius, a Roman emperor in the second century CE, was himself a Stoic philosopher. Stoicism, however, is often misunderstood. When we say someone is stoical, we imply they are rather passive, tolerating what comes to them without question or emotion.

But in reality, Stoicism is not at all passive, and it is not about suppressing emotion. It is about what we can do to lead a good life. It concerns itself with three disciplines. Firstly, that of desire, or what we should and should not aim for; secondly, action, or how we should behave; and thirdly, assent – how we should react to situations. This might sound a little theoretical. But for the ancient Stoics, their philosophy was explicitly practical. Marcus Aurelius, the emperor-philosopher, wrote his most famous

work, *Meditations*, as a personal guide for his own self-improvement. One of the most influential of the Stoic philosophers, was Epictetus. A freed former Roman slave with a crippled leg, Epictetus became a teacher of philosophy in the first century.

His thinking is recorded in the work called *Enchiridion*, meaning “Handbook,” which gives us a clue about his practical outlook. As we will see, Epictetus’ discourses were focused not just on the theory of what makes for a good life, but on practical considerations for the day-to-day. Let us dive in and take a look at one of the key Stoic principles.

Focus only on what you can control

From the nervous flyer fretting about turbulence to dieters unable to shift those stubborn last few pounds, many of us expend energy on things we cannot change. Thankfully, Stoicism has advice for us.

A central principle of Stoicism is the dichotomy of control. That means, as Epictetus taught, that we must make the most of what we can control and accept what is not in our power to change. This sentiment is widely known, but less widely followed. What is in the power, or control, of the nervous flyer? What can he do to prevent an in-air catastrophe? Very little.

He can choose whether his trip is necessary, and if so, which airline to choose. What he cannot do is control or influence anything once in the air. By now, he must accept the circumstances he is given, in this case, relying on his pilots, air traffic controllers, the weather and other factors outside his control. To fret further is a waste of energy.

So, this central tenet of Stoicism should not be seen as encouraging passivity. Rather it provides powerful instruction to focus on the things you can influence. Take the author’s struggles with his weight. Long irritated by his chubbiness, he eventually chose to take control over his choices – exercising moderately, eating well and in smaller quantities.

He achieved a better physique, but not the slim, muscular body many desires. Factors beyond his control, such as his genes, rendered that goal unachievable. But with the attitude of a Stoic, he has derived satisfaction from knowing that he has successfully tackled the factors under his control and can accept the outcome of his efforts with equanimity.

Following the author’s lead can help reduce worry in your life. Consider someone who is in line for a possible promotion. She thinks she may get it – she has performed well over several years and done all she can to ensure success. But she continues to agonize about the office politics that could get in the way or colleagues who may provide competition. A better approach would be to think like a Stoic. Satisfied that she has done what is in her power to do, she could wait and accept the news calmly, whether good or bad.

Moral virtue above all else

Many ancient philosophers, Stoics included, argued that we should pursue moral virtue over material benefits like wealth and comfort. The philosopher Socrates, who heavily influenced the Stoics and most of Western thinking, provided a model, albeit an extreme one.

When a political opponent accused Socrates of impiety and eventually had him condemned to death, Socrates could have escaped thanks to helpful and loyal friends. But he refused to do so, telling his upset friends that he had to uphold his moral duty to accept the law and the justice system, despite its blatant misuse. We do not get to bend the rules on the occasions when they do not favour us, he argued. He accepted his death to maintain his integrity, to the cost of his friends and family.

Most Stoic philosophy is a little more pragmatic than this unbending approach. But Stoics, like Socrates, regard friends, family, wealth, health and everything else pleasant and enjoyable in life as preferred indifferent. Stoics do not believe that wealth, for example, is to be avoided. Indeed, given the choice, being wealthy is more preferred than not being wealthy. But Stoics recognized that things such as wealth, despite being preferred, were indifferent to the goal of a moral, virtuous life.

So how can we apply moral virtue over preferred indifferent in our own lives? We can start by recognizing that everything has a moral element. For instance, one day, while getting cash out of an ATM, the author froze. He remembered suddenly that his bank had been involved in morally dubious investment and working practices.

He realized that his preferred indifferent of being able to get cash out quickly sat in opposition to his virtue or his desire to support good behaviour. He strolled into the bank, told a confused staff member he wanted to close his account on moral grounds, and later signed up with a bank that – while not impeccable in its behaviour – was more virtuous than his original choice.

Few of us can, or will need to, live up to Socrates' extreme example of prioritizing moral virtue. But all of us can consider whether more of our decisions in life could be guided by a commitment to moral virtue. Now let us consider what virtue really means.

Virtue, based on wisdom, courage, and justice, have always been important

We have seen that living with virtue was important to the Stoics. But what exactly did they mean when they talked of a virtuous life? Well, Stoicism identified four aspects of virtue – temperance, courage, justice, and, most importantly, wisdom.

Temperance allows us to control our instinctive desires, like avoiding flirting with a married person, says Pigliucci. Courage gives us the mental strength to act well under difficult circumstances, like standing up to a bully. Justice meant – for the Stoics – treating others fairly and with dignity. But according to Socrates, wisdom was the “chief good.” Why? Simply because it is the only human ability that is good in all circumstances. For example, it is better to be rich than poor. But to know how to deal with either situation, we need wisdom.

These concepts of virtue have been fairly consistent throughout philosophical and religious history. The influential Christian theologian Thomas Aquinas's system of “heavenly virtues” kept the four Stoic ones and added faith, hope and charity. Other cultures, including Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism and Taoism also incorporate the four, adding humanity – meaning love and kindness – and transcendence, which covers concepts of connection and meaning like hope or spirituality. The Stoic approach seems to have got something right.

If we look around us, we can see people who exemplify these virtues today. Consider Malala Yousafzai. At the age of 11, living in Pakistan, she began writing an anonymous blog detailing the local Taliban's approach to girls' education. Over time, she rose to some fame. On 9 October 2012, a man – exemplifying the opposite of these values – got on her school bus, and after asking for her by name, shot her.

Malala survived. And amazingly, she continued to advocate for girls' education, helping to bring about the passing of Pakistan's first legislation creating a right to education. Malala demonstrated virtue and made a difference in the world. She is truly leading a virtuous life, defined by temperance, courage, justice and wisdom. Epictetus would have recognized Malala as an example to us all. And as we will see, he and others believed strongly in the power of role models.

Observing and imitating role models is an effective way to lead a good life

Concerned as they were about the practicalities of how to live life, Stoics were fans of using role models to illustrate optimal behaviour. The Roman Stoic philosopher Seneca wrote an essay on the nature of the wise person or the ideal Stoic role model, and held up one such man, Marcus Cato, as a prime example. Cato was a senator in Rome and unusually committed to moral virtue. When he became a military commander, he marched, ate and slept alongside his men, who loved him for this. He was also incorruptible. As administrator and tax collector for the island of Cyprus, he refused opportunities to enrich himself, as was normal at the time. Instead, he dutifully and honestly collected taxes to be sent back to Rome.

When Julius Caesar declared war on the Roman Republic and attempted to secure dictatorial power for himself, Cato fought him to defend the Republic, its institutions and values. Eventually, facing defeat, he killed himself rather than be captured, which would have handed Caesar a propaganda victory.

As the historian Plutarch describes it, Cato stabbed himself but did not immediately die. He lay bleeding, his bowels hanging out of his body. His doctor tried to save him, but Cato – seeing his physician's intentions – tore out his own bowels and died. In death as in life, Cato was a model of virtue. Sacrificing himself to avoid giving his morally contemptible opponent any political advantage.

Cato's example may feel a little extreme, but for Stoics, that was part of the point. Inspired by the gruelling experiences of people like him, we can surely conjure up the courage to rise to the challenges in our own lives. Set against the context of committing suicide to preserve your honour, how hard can it really be to, for instance, stand up to a bullying boss, avoid using morally corrupt banks, or make a small step toward a better life? Reflecting on the example of role models can help us all lead our lives with just a little more virtue.

Stoicism can empower your attitude toward death

Few of us are as willing to face death as Cato. Indeed, many of us have a nagging fear of death. It is understandably troubling to consider the reality that one day, your consciousness will no longer exist. Epictetus did not share these fears. He said, "I must die, must I? ... if soon, I dine now, as it is time for dinner, and afterward when the time comes, I will die."

We can learn from the calm and considered way in which Stoics thought about death. Epictetus asked us to consider wheat. Why does wheat grow, he asked? Is it not simply so that it can ripen and later be harvested? He was saying that, just like wheat and all living things, we humans grow, ripen – or mature – and eventually die. To pray for a man not to die is, Epictetus said, to pray for them not to ripen. We regard it as normal that wheat is harvested or dies and give it barely another thought.

The only difference between us and wheat is that we are capable of reflecting on our own mortality. But this does not change the reality; just because we have consciousness, and wheat does not, why should we waste time and energy fearing our deaths? Stoics argued that you should constantly remind yourself of the impermanence of things, including humans. This way, you will better accept death and better appreciate life.

Epictetus said that, when it comes to things and people to whom you are attached, you should remind yourself of their nature. When you kiss your wife or child, he said, tell yourself you are kissing a mortal. You will not be so upset if they are taken from you. This seems a little shocking at first. But what Epictetus is teaching is not that we should be indifferent toward humans.

Rather, he is suggesting two things. Firstly, we face the reality that our loved ones are impermanent. And secondly, for this very reason – that our partners or children may die – we should regularly remind

ourselves that they are precious. We should, according to Stoics, take mortality seriously. But instead of finding stress in anticipation of death, we should find care and appreciation in life.

Pause and reflect; put yourself in the shoes of others

In modern life, it is easy to be provoked to anger or frustration by any number of day-to-day irritations, from an insulting colleague to the inconsiderate subway passenger eating smelly food on a crowded train. Stoicism teaches us not to react impulsively to these provocations. An insult or an elbow in the back on a crowded subway train is in itself harmless. To be harmed in such a situation requires your mind to react to it and believe you are being harmed. But if we practice avoiding an immediate reaction to such provocations, then we can reduce our impulse to anger, frustration or other forms of passion.

Epictetus said we should “take a moment before reacting” to such situations. Were he alive today we might imagine him recommending us when provoked to breathe deeply for a moment and take a walk around the block. Only then could we consider the provocation dispassionately. Another useful lesson is to otherize, says Pigliucci. When something irritating happens to you, consider how we would regard this event if it happened to someone else.

For example, if you break a glass, perhaps one you are a little fond of, you might react with some small sadness or irritation at your clumsiness. But were you to see a friend breaking a glass, you might quickly say “bad luck, never mind” and then think nothing more of it. There is a lesson in the way we react to others’ small misfortunes; we should accept our own misfortunes with greater equanimity.

So next time someone is rude to you, and anger starts to rise inside you, stop for a minute. Reflect on your situation, and put it in the context of others’ misfortunes, and you may find you can remain calmer amid the misfortunes of life.

Invest in good friendships and in good conversation for a better life

How many true friends do you have? In an age of social media connectedness, it can seem that the word “friend” is somewhat vague. Ancient Greeks were lucky enough to have a richer vocabulary than we do, and the philosopher Aristotle talked of three types of friends, only one of which the Stoics regarded as important.

Firstly, friendships of utility, which means relationships based on mutual advantage. Think of yourself and your favourite hairdresser, says Pigliucci. They are not a friend as such, but you get along, chat about your lives, and, of course, you both benefit from the relationship.

Secondly, friendship of pleasure. Consider your drinking friends, the girls you play soccer with. We would call them friends, but the relationship does not have to be particularly deep, it just has to bring some pleasure in the here-and-now.

Thirdly, friendship of the good. Today, we might call friends in this category our true or closest friends – the people with whom we find an affinity in personality that does not require a business relationship or a mutual hobby for support.

Stoics would argue that only the friendships of the good deserve to be really called friendships. They would not deny the importance of the others but class them as preferred indifferent; perfectly reasonable things to have, but less important than the virtuous aspects of your life.

Stoics also had advice for being with your friends. You should, Epictetus argued, speak less about gladiators, sports and foods, and more about the important things in life. Well, we do not talk much about gladiators today, but we do spend a lot of time talking about sports stars, actors and other celebrities. For Epictetus, such subjects were banal and empty. It may be easier to chat about Beyoncé’s latest

album than, say, the pursuit of a good life. But Stoics were not much concerned with what was easy, preferring what was rewarding and virtuous. So, give it a try. Occasionally, over dinner or drinks, strike up a conversation about a more challenging topic, perhaps based on something you have read that might interest your friends. Over time you might find your dinner parties and friendships more rewarding.

What I took from it

Stoicism can guide us toward a better life. It is not necessarily easy – nothing that prioritizes moral virtue is. But in accepting what we can and cannot control, focusing on behaving with virtue, and by reflecting carefully on our emotions and experiences, we can make better decisions and live a more virtuous life.

Reflect on the day before you sleep. Find a quiet place at home before you sleep and reflect on the day. Consider important occurrences – a difficult interaction with a colleague, or a moment of helpfulness toward your partner. What have you learned from these moments? Have you fallen into bad habits or vice? Could you have handled a situation better, with more consideration? Honest reflection, every day, will help guide you toward a good life.

How To Win Friends And Influence People

Dale Carnegie

I heard about this book a long time ago and how it changed people's lives. I always wanted to read it but something in the title of the book always made me put it back on the shelf. I mean, what would people think if they see me read a book with this title. Poor man has no friends or wants to manipulate people. How many people would boast of 'winning' a friend and influencing them for their own personal gain? In this case, judging a book by its cover would seem a very reasonable thing to do. Yet we should consider some points in the book's defence.

First, there is a strange inconsistency between the title and much of what is in the book. When read carefully, it is not at all a manual for manipulation. Carnegie genuinely despised 'winning friends' for a purpose. The energy which makes the book a great read comes from a love of people.

Second, Carnegie wrote it in the America of the 1930's. The country was still clawing itself out of the Great Depression, and opportunities, particularly for people with limited education, were scarce. Carnegie offered a way to get ahead, taking advantage of the one thing you truly owned outright - your personality.

By modern standards, the claims made in How To Win Friends do not seem too wild - motivational psychology is now well established. But try to imagine its impact in 1937, before the great prosperity of the post-World War Two period. To many people it would have seemed liked gold.

But the book, initially no doubt due to the title alone, caused a sensation. It is one of the biggest selling books ever, and still the biggest overall seller in the self-improvement field.

The three most powerful points I took from the book were;

1. The ability to handle people well is far more valuable than all other skill sets put together
2. The deepest urge in human nature is the desire to be important. The person who really understands this craving for appreciation, will also know how to make people happy
3. Giving suggestions instead of giving orders saves a person's pride and gives him a sense of importance. It encourages cooperation instead of rebellion

Education, not manipulation

The success of Carnegie's adult courses revealed a deep want for education in the 'soft skills' of leading people, expressing ideas and creating enthusiasm. That technical knowledge or raw intelligence alone do not bring career success is now a given, but in Carnegie's time the idea that success was composed of many elements was only just starting to be researched. In seeing that people skills could make all the difference, Carnegie effectively popularised the idea of emotional intelligence, decades before it was established as fact in academic psychology.

He had kept in his mind a statement by John D. Rockefeller (the Bill Gates of his age) that the ability to handle people well was more valuable than all others put together, yet astonishingly, he could find no book written on the subject. Carnegie and his researcher hungrily read everything they could find on human relations, including philosophy, family court judgements, magazine articles, classical texts, the latest work in psychology, and biography, specifically the lives of those recognised for superb leadership.

Carnegie apparently interviewed two of the most important inventors of the century, Marconi and

Edison, as well as Franklin D. Roosevelt and even the movie stars Clark Gable and Mary Pickford. A set of basic ideas emerged from these researches. Originally a short lecture, they were relentlessly tested on the 'human laboratory' of his course attendees before emerging, 15 years later, as the 'principles' in *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. Whatever might be said about the book, it was not written on a whim.

Carnegie's principles

Did the principles work? At the start of the book, Carnegie gives the example of a man who had driven his 300+ employees mercilessly, apparently the epitome of a bastard boss who was incapable of saying anything positive about his own people. But after taking a Carnegie course and applying the principle, never criticise, condemn or complain, he was able to turn '314 enemies into 314 friends', inspire a previously non-existent loyalty and, to top it off, increase profits.

But there's more, Carnegie tells us: his family liked him more, he had more time for leisure, and he found his outlook on life 'sharply altered'. What excited Carnegie most were not stories of the beneficial career or financial effects of his courses, but how they made people open their eyes and reshape their lives. They started to see that there could be more lightness in their life - it was no longer seen as a struggle or power game.

The deepest urge in human nature is the desire to be important. The person who really understands this craving for appreciation, Carnegie says, will also know how to make people happy - 'even the undertaker will be sorry when he dies'. Such a person will also know how to draw the best out of others.

He loves telling the success stories of the great industrialists of his day. Charles Schwab was the first person to earn \$1 million a year by running Andrew Carnegie's United States Steel Company. He confided that his secret of success was being 'hearty in my approbation and lavish in my praise' to the people under him. Valuing your employees, making them feel special in the scheme of things, is now accepted wisdom in management circles, but in the era of Andrew and Dale Carnegie era it was not.

At the same time, Carnegie was anti-flattery. Flattery simply involved mimicking the vanities of its receiver, whereas sincere appreciation of someone's good points is an act of gratitude that requires you to really see that person, maybe for the first time. An effect is that you seem more valuable to them, the expression of value only increasing your own. You get the priceless pleasure of seeing a face light up, and in the workplace, are an amazed witness as excited co-operation grows out of boredom or mistrust. Carnegie's principle, give honest and sincere appreciation, is ultimately to do with seeing the beauty of people.

Principle 1: Do not criticise, condemn, or complain.

- Criticism is futile because it puts a person on the defensive and usually makes him strive to justify himself.
- Criticism is dangerous, because it wounds a person's pride, hurts his sense of importance (everyone wants to feel important/wanted) and arouses resentment.
- Instead of condemning everyone, try to figure out why they are how they are. "To know all is to forgive all"
- "I will speak ill of no man... and speak all the good I know of everybody"
- Many great leaders stood out because of this principle. Men like Abraham Lincoln made it a point at some point in his life to never criticise anyone.

Principle 2: Give honest and sincere appreciation.

- There is only one way to make someone do something, which is making them want to do it.
- The deepest craving in human nature is the craving to be appreciated.
- The best way to develop the best that is in a person is through appreciation and encouragement. – Charles Schwab
- Be anxious to praise and loath to find fault.
- “Once I did bad and that I heard ever/Twice I did good, but that I heard never”
- Let others know you appreciate them or something about them often
- There is a major difference between appreciation and flattery.
- Do not just tell someone something small like “You’re doing great” or “Looking good!”, but tell them HOW they are doing great, or what about them looks good, etc...
- Tell others you appreciated something they did, for example: tell a chef of some restaurant that you really enjoyed his meal. Tell a hotel manager that your room was very well kept... etc

Principle 3: Arouse in the other person an eager want.

- Think about things from other people’s perspective
- Put the other person’s wants before your own
- Convince this person of how something can benefit them
- Arouse in the other person an eager want

Principle 4: Become genuinely interested in other people

- You can make more friends in 2 months by becoming genuinely interested in other people than you can in two years trying to get people interested in you.
- We like people who admire us.
- “We are interested in others when they are interested in us” – Publilius Syrus
- Greet people with animation and enthusiasm.
- Say Hello to people in a way that shows you are pleased to talk with them.

Principle 5: Smile

- Actions speak louder than words. A smile says “I like you. You make me happy. I am glad to see you”
- Smile do not give an insincere grin. Insincere grins are mechanical and resented. Give real, heart-warming smiles that uplift the room.
- Smile even when on the phone. Your smile will come through the phone through your voice.
- You must have a good time meeting people if you expect them to have a good time meeting you.
- If you do not feel like smiling, force yourself to smile. Act as if you were already happy, and that will tend to actually make you happy. Psychologist William James – “Action seems to follow feeling, but really action and feeling go together. Thus, the sovereign voluntary path to cheerfulness is to sit up cheerfully and to act and speak as if cheerfulness was already there”
- Your mental attitude determines your happiness. “There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so” – Shakespeare
- To someone who has seen a dozen people scowl, frown, or turn away their faces, your smile will be like the sun breaking through the clouds.

Principle 6: Remember that a person's name is to that person the sweetest and most important sound in any language

- People value their name or whatever nickname it is that they go by.
- Remember people's names. Try to remember their names the first try. Do not even spell the name wrong if you can.

Principle 7: Be a good listener. Encourage others to talk about themselves.

- If you want to be a good conversationalist, be an attentive listener. To be interesting, be interested. Ask questions that people will enjoy answering. Encourage them to talk about themselves and their accomplishments.

Principle 8: Talk in terms of the other person's interests

- The royal road to a person's heart is to talk about things he or she treasures most.
- Try and focus on what that person is interested in and talk about it. Theodore Roosevelt, before having a visitor in his office, used to study topics he knew his guest would be interested in discussing before they came over.

Principle 9: Make the other person feel important – and do it sincerely

- Always make the other person feel important
- "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you". If you want to be appreciated, feel important, worthwhile, give that feeling to others first.

Principle 10: The only way to get the best of an argument is to avoid it

- Avoid arguments like you would rattlesnakes or earthquakes. Most of the time, they will just make someone feel embarrassed, uncomfortable, or hurt their pride and make them feel inferior to you.
- There once was a truck salesman friend of Dale Carnegie. He would not sell many trucks because he would argue a lot with customers who would complain or make remarks about the trucks he would sell. After Dale advised him to stop arguing, the salesman became one of the best salesmen his company had ever seen. If someone said something like "I don't want a white truck! I'm going to go buy _____ truck from (random company)!" The truck salesman could agree with the salesman that the competitor's truck was indeed a good truck and speak of its quality. Then, he would go back and speak about the quality of the white truck he was trying to sell.
- A misunderstanding is never ended by an argument but by tact, diplomacy, conciliation and a sympathetic desire to see the other person's viewpoint.
- If someone tries to argue with you and brings up a point you have not thought of, show them appreciation of that point and talk on that.
- Do not trust your first instinct when you feel an argument coming up. Sometimes we react harshly when we feel we have to defend ourselves or a certain point. Sometimes it brings out the worst in us.
- Control your temper.
- Listen first. Give them a chance to talk and try to find understandings.
- Look for areas of agreement.
- Apologize for mistakes or errors you have made while arguing. Put pride aside.
- Promise to think over your opponents' ideas and study them carefully and mean it. Your opponent could be right, and it is better you check it out and learn than them say "I tried to tell you, but you wouldn't listen".
- Thank your opponents for their interest in what you were discussing and them wanting to improve

upon what you believe.

- Perhaps postpone a debate/argument for a day so that you both can get your head clear and gather facts together. Gives you both more time to think through each other's points and whether the argument is worth your friend's pride or not. What might you lose if you win the argument?

Principle 11: Show respect for the other person's opinions. Never say "you're wrong"

- Telling someone they are wrong is a direct blow at their intelligence, pride and self-respect. It does not make them want to agree with you but strike back
- If you are going to prove anything, try not to let anyone know about it. Do it subtly and adroitly so that no one knows you are doing it.
- Alexander Pope – "Men must be taught as if you taught them not, and things unknown proposed as things forgot"
- If a person makes a statement you know is wrong, try saying something like "Well, now, look, I thought otherwise, but I may be wrong. I frequently am. And if I am wrong, I want to be put right. Let us examine the facts"
- Using the term "I may be wrong. Let us examine the facts" or something like it can do wonders.
- Respect other's opinions and treat them courteously
- You will avoid trouble by admitting you may be wrong. That will stop all argument and inspire your opponent to be just as fair and open-minded as you are to the fact that he himself, could be wrong too
- Do not tell anyone they are wrong about something. Use diplomacy to make your point

Principle 12: If you are wrong, admit it quickly and emphatically.

- Be humble by saying derogatory things about yourself you know the other person wants to say or intends to say – chances are they will then have a forgiving attitude towards you and minimise your mistakes in their minds
- There is a certain degree of satisfaction which can be found in admitting one's errors. It takes the guilt and defensiveness out of the air, but also helps solve the problem created by the error

Principle 13: Begin in a friendly way.

- If your temper is aroused and you go off on someone and tell them a thing or two, you might feel good afterwards, but how does that person feel? Do they want to agree with your points after you embarrassed them and attacked their pride?
- "If you come at me with your fists doubled, I think I can promise you that mine will double as fast as yours; but if you come to me and say 'Let us sit down and take counsel together, and, if we differ from each other, understand why it is that we differ, just what the points at issue are,' we will presently find that we are not so far apart after all, that the points on which we differ are few and the points on which we agree are many, and that if we only have the patience and the candour and the desire to get together, we will get together." – Woodrow Wilson
- "So, with men, if you would win a man to your cause, first convince him that you are his sincere friend"
- O.L. Straub, an engineer, needed to get his rent lowered or he would not be able to afford it. Instead of going in and trying to argue prices immediately or how ridiculously high the rent was, he discussed with the landlord how much he liked the apartments and how great of a job O.L. had done running the place. He then said he wanted to stay for another year, but he simply could not afford it. The landlord, as notoriously difficult to deal with as he was, actually went out of his way after to help O.L. achieve a lower and more affordable rent

Principle 14: Get the other person saying “Yes, Yes” immediately

- In talking with people, do not start by discussing things of which you differ in. Instead, talk about and keep emphasising on, the things you have in common
- Keep emphasising, if possible, that you are both striving towards the same end and that your only difference is one of method and not of purpose. Try to keep your opponent saying “yes, yes” instead of “no”. Once in the “no” state, a person will try to remain consistent with that statement in order to keep up their pride
- The skilful speaker will at first, get a lot of “yes” responses. This sets the psychological process of the listeners moving in the affirmative direction
- Once in the “no” state, it takes a lot of effort and wisdom to try and transform that bristling negative into an affirmative
- Ask questions which your opponent is forced to agree with (yes!). Keep on winning one admission after another until you have an armful of yeses to build upon, making your opponent possibly want to conclude with your side being right instead of their own

Principle 15: Let the other person do a great deal of the talking

- Most people trying to win others to their way of thinking do too much talking themselves.
- Let the other person talk themselves out. They know a lot more about their business and problems than you do. So, ask them questions and hear them out
- If you disagree with them, do not interrupt. Let them finish. If you interrupt, they will still have a stream of ideas running through their heads
- Encourage them to express everything out
- Almost every successful person likes to reminisce about his early struggles (remember that for interviews or building rapport)
- “If you want to make enemies, excel your friends. If you want friends, let your friends excel you”. In other words, build your friends up. Listen to their accomplishments. Do not boast about your own. Mention your achievements only when asked

Principle 16: Let the other person feel that the idea is his or hers

- Most people prefer to feel that they are acting on their own ideas or buying on their own accord, not told or sold something
- Let the person feel an idea is his or hers
- Ask for their ideas or advice about something

Principle 17: Try honestly to see things from the other person’s point of view.

- Remember to not condemn someone for being wrong, even if they are dead wrong. The wise try to understand why this person would say something like that
- Try to put yourself in that person’s shoes and try to figure out why they act how they do or why they would say something like they did
- Try to think through that person’s point of view and think why someone should want to adapt to your point of view, and also how they would like to hear what you are saying

Principle 18: Be sympathetic with the other person’s ideas and desires.

- One phrase that eliminates ill will, creates good will, and gets people listening to you better: “I don’t blame you one iota for feeling as you do. If I were you, I would undoubtedly feel just as you do.” You can say this phrase 100% honestly too, because if you truly were that person, with their

mindset and feelings and background, you really would feel that way. Now if you were in their body, you may obviously think differently

- Remember that no one typically deserves a lot of credit for being who they are. Their surroundings, upbringings, etc. help determine that
- Three-fourths of the people you meet want sympathy. Give it to them and they will love you.
- Before you speak back to someone who has offended you or is debating you, remember to try and react differently than just anyone would. Respond how a wise person would react, not just any fool.

Principle 19: Appeal to the nobler motives

- According to J.P. Morgan, everybody usually has two reasons for doing anything: one that sounds good, and then their real reason
- The person may know the real reason, but you do not need to emphasise that. Instead, try appealing to a nobler cause (something that sounds good to your opponent/customer/boss/etc). Show them good motives behind agreeing to what your trying to convince them
- When John D. Rockefeller wanted newspaper photographers to stop taking pictures of his children, he appealed to nobler motives. He didn't say "I don't want these pictures taken", but instead, said "You know how it is, boys. You have got children yourselves, some of you. And you know it's not good for youngsters to get too much publicity"

Principle 20: Dramatize your ideas

- The truth must be vivid, interesting, dramatic and you have to use showmanship. Do this if you want attention
- This does not mean lying but saying something that dramatizes the importance of something that you are talking about or trying to convey

Principle 21: Throw down a challenge

- Stimulate competition, not in a sordid money-getting, but in the desire to excel
- People love the chance to express themselves, their worth, and to show their importance.
- Examples of things to say to stimulate completion:
"I didn't realize you were lazy/a coward/quitter/etc..."
"You're right. You probably should not take that class. Only smart people can pass that class"

Principle 22: Begin with praise and honest appreciation

- It is always more comfortable to hear something unpleasant about ourselves after we have heard some praise about one of our good points
- A barber always lathers a man before he shaves him
- Imagine a dentist about to perform drilling. Yes, the patient is about to get drilled, but the dentist gives him Novocain to dull the pain

Principle 23: Call attention to people's mistakes indirectly

- Many people begin their criticism with sincere praise, but then follow it with the word "but" and end with a critical statement, such as "I've got to say bro, you're looking swollen, but your legs make it look like you don't even lift"
- Once someone hears the "but", it makes them question the sincerity of the praise and that it was only put there to cushion the insult coming

- Try replacing the word “but” with “and”. Example: “I’ve got to say bro, you’re looking thick, solid, tight... and if you work your legs a bit harder people will def. think you’re shredded”
- The praise now comes off as sincere and may make that person want to live up to our expectations

Principle 24: Talk about your own mistakes before criticising the other person

- It feels a lot better to hear someone talk about their faults and kind of “get down on your level” in a sense before they point out yours
- Admitting one’s own mistakes – even when one has corrected them – can help convince someone to change their behaviour

Principle 25: Ask questions instead of giving direct orders

- Giving suggestions instead of giving orders saves a person’s pride and gives him a sense of importance. It encourages cooperation instead of rebellion
- Asking questions instead of ordering someone around can make an order seem more palatable and often stimulates the creativity of the person’s you ask. Example: “do this!” versus “You think it’d be a good idea to try this next time?”

Principle 26: Let the other person save face

- “I have no right to say or do anything that diminishes a man in his own eyes. What matters is not what I think of him, but what he thinks of himself. Hurting a man in his dignity is a crime.” – Antoine de Saint-Exupery
- Do not belittle a person basically

Principle 27: Praise the slightest improvement and praise every improvement. Be “hearty in your approbation and lavish in your praise”

- Praise people on their improvements
- Words of praise can change someone’s life. Can you think of a moment where someone’s praise encouraged you and led you to becoming more successful?
- Enrico Caruso, one of the greatest and most successful opera singers, was once told by a teacher when he was 10 that he could not sing. His mother’s praise was what helped motivate him to continue trying anyway
- Give specific praise. Not just short flattery
- Abilities wither under criticism; they blossom under encouragement

Principle 28: Give the other person a fine reputation to live up to.

- “The average person can be led readily if you have his or her respect and if you show that you respect that person for some kind of ability”
- If you want to improve a person in a certain space, act as though that particular trait was already one of his or her outstanding characteristics
- For an example, instead of firing someone for slipping up, first try telling them what a valuable asset they have been in the past (if they truly have) and tell them they’ve been slipping up a bit lately and that you would like to work with them to help fix this problem
- Change the person’s attitude or behaviour by giving them a big reputation to lead up to. Example; telling them they have the qualities of a leader and you can see it by their work ethic. Perhaps the person will start working harder after that to live up to that reputation

Principle 29: Use encouragement. Make the fault seem easy to correct

- Praise someone's good points and minimise the person's faults. You could say something like "All it would take is a little _____ and you could be great!"
- Let the other person know you have faith in them to get over that obstacle

Principle 30: Make the other person happy about doing the thing you suggest

- Always make the other person happy about doing what you have suggested.
- Be sincere. Do not promise anything you cannot deliver.
- Know exactly what it is you want the other person to do.
- Be empathetic. Ask yourself what it is the other person really wants.
- Consider the benefits the person will receive from doing what you suggest
- Match those benefits to the person's wants
- When you make a request, put it in a form that shows the other person how they will benefit from it

What did I take from it

For Warren Buffet to say, "This book changed my life"; it had to be special. How To Win Friends was a revolutionary book because it put firmly into the public's mind that human relations are more understandable than we think, and that people skills can be systematically learned. It also proposed that we do not truly influence a person until we like and respect them first.

There is so much wisdom in this book but what stood out for me most was the six ways to make people like you. On the surface this might sound quite a sad statement; but actually, your whole success in life, whether that be financial and other; will completely depend on the relationships you will form. No person can become successful on his/her own. You will need a network of people to help you succeed, and therefore you must be surrounded by people who can help you, who wants to help you; and therefore, needs to like you. There is nothing genius about these six ways; but know that I fail on them daily. Basically, comes down to one sentence. Always make the other person feel special.

Six ways to make people like you;

1. Become genuinely interested in other people
2. Smile
3. Remember that a person's name is to that person the sweetest and most important sound in any language
4. Be a good listener
5. Talk in terms of the other person's interests
6. Make the other person feel important – and do it sincerely

The 5AM Club

Robin Sharma

Once upon a time there was a billionaire. He had reached the true elite, achieving epic results in both professional and personal spheres. He was a man who would leave a legacy for the world. But the secret to his success was a surprising one. He attributed his success not to his natural talents, nor to the hours he had invested in his work. He attributed it to a revolutionary morning routine, built around rising at 5 a.m. and following a little-known formula designed to turbocharge his mental focus, build his physical fitness and encourage him to be his best self, day in and day out.

With his latest book; The 5am Club, Robin Sharma, my favourite author and self-help guru, will teach you how you too can join the 5am club. You can learn how to rise each day and embrace the solitude, silence and lack of distraction the early hours of the morning can offer. Read on, and you will learn how true elite performers in all walks of life get ahead by making the most of a time of day that others use to sleep, waste time watching the news, or browse social media.

The three most powerful points I took from the book were;

1. The greatest people are defined not by their natural talent, but by the extent to which they capitalize
2. If you are only working on your Mindset, you are ignoring your Healthset, your Heartset, and your Soulset. That is like only polishing 25 percent of a picture!
3. The 20/20/20 formula says that you should use 20 minutes to move, 20 minutes to reflect and 20 minutes to grow

Secrets of the 5am club

This is the fictitious tale of a curious group of people. A depressed entrepreneur, in need of revitalization; a frustrated artist, trying to refuel his creativity and develop a legacy; and a billionaire with a string of successes behind him and a desire to pass on the knowledge of how to live an extraordinary life.

The three met at a personal optimization conference addressed by a legendary business guru, the Spellbinder, someone renowned for his ability to weave magic and captivate his audience with the power of his insights. The billionaire approached the entrepreneur and the artist after the Spellbinder's speech had finished but they did not know that he was a billionaire. The billionaire was disguised as a poor man, a habit he had developed to remind himself that money is not everything. The only clue to his actual wealth was his expensive watch. The impoverished-looking billionaire told the two that he'd made a fortune thanks to the Spellbinder, who'd taught him that while many people wish that extraordinary things will happen to them, truly elite performers learn that they can make extraordinary things happen themselves.

The entrepreneur and the artist became more and more curious about this mysterious man who talked like he was a guru himself. They listened as the billionaire explained how the Spellbinder – who, in fact, was the billionaire's personal mentor – had taught him one thing that was more important than anything else.

What was it? That the most reliable way to generate the best results in your personal and professional life is to build a world-beating morning routine. Being a generous man, the billionaire made an incredible offer. If the entrepreneur and artist wanted to come hang with him at his beach house in Mauritius, he would teach them the secrets of a world-class morning routine. All they needed to do was meet the next morning at 5 a.m.

The entrepreneur and the artist were a little sceptical the next morning, but it started to soften when a chauffeur-driven Rolls-Royce collected them and delivered them to a hangar containing a sleek, ivory-coloured private jet, which bore the logo: “5AC.”

The entrepreneur asked the chauffeur what the logo meant, and he explained that it stood for “The 5am Club.” And so, began their journey toward understanding a revolutionary morning routine and a whole new outlook on life with the potential to transform everything for the better.

Perform like an elitist

Early the next morning, the billionaire told the entrepreneur and artist how getting up at 5 a.m. was the way he had learned to escape mediocrity and achieve greatness. Getting up at 5 a.m. had promoted his creativity, doubled his energy, and tripled his productivity. How? Well, the billionaire told them, many true greats throughout history, from novelist John Grisham to composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, have understood that the isolation that comes from getting up at 5 a.m. has a multiplying effect.

All of us have limited mental capacity or cognitive bandwidth. And throughout the day, our attention is given to more and more things; work, the news, interaction with others and social media. Our bandwidth gets used up by all of these so, by lunchtime, we cannot really concentrate on anything at all. By constantly shifting our focus from one thing to another, we give nothing enough attention. But if you get up at 5 a.m., you have a golden opportunity to focus on one high-value activity without your brain getting distracted.

This focus is further enhanced by the concept of transient hypofrontality, which means, in a nutshell, that at 5 a.m., you are well placed to achieve a state of flow in your thinking. That is because, the billionaire explained, when you are enjoying a peaceful 5 a.m. start, the brain’s prefrontal cortex, which handles rational thought, temporarily shuts down. So, your tendency to analyse, stress and worry about things is impaired.

At the same time, the peace of daybreak stimulates the production of the neurotransmitter’s dopamine and serotonin. The result? You naturally enter a state of flow; of being fully energized, focused and in the zone. Flow is the elite mind-set that all top performers, from violinists to scientists, inhabit in their finest moments. So, you will find that if you get up at 5 a.m., you will be more focused and more productive for the entire day.

If you want another reason why joining the 5am club is a good idea, consider this: to get the results of the top 5 percent of elite performers, you need to do what 95 percent of entrepreneurs, artists and other people are unwilling to do. Most people are not willing to get up at 5 a.m. so if you are, you have a huge competitive advantage. Now let us take a look at how to not just achieve great things, but to become a true history maker, a person whose achievements change the world.

Master your talents and yourself and avoid distraction

On a dazzling morning in Mauritius, the entrepreneur, the artist, and the billionaire gathered by the sea. A school of squirrelish swam through the crystal-clear waters. In this beautiful setting, the billionaire recounted the four focuses of the great history makers.

Firstly, he said, the greatest people are defined not by their natural talent, but by the extent to which they capitalize. According to the billionaire, self-discipline and perseverance always trump talent and giftedness. So rather than thinking you do not have what it takes, capitalize on the gifts you have got to make a difference.

Secondly, the billionaire explained, freedom from distraction is key. Too many people today waste

hours on addictive but hollow technology and social media. If you want to win, you need to focus, simplify, and concentrate. That means becoming a purist, concentrating on a few amazing work projects rather than many good ones. And in day-to-day life, it means stripping out everything that distracts you from a relentless focus on what is most important. So, turn off your notifications and cancel pointless meetings that are taking you away from activities that really add value. Gain a distraction-free hour each morning to focus on what is important by joining the 5am club.

Thirdly, the truly great understand the power of day-stacking. That means that small things done daily are way more important than big things done once in a while. Consider enhancing one ability or skill by just one percent every day. It is a small change, but over a year it amounts to a 365 percent improvement!

Finally, the billionaire shared the final focus of history makers; personal mastery practice. According to psychologist Anders Ericsson, a person must invest at least 2.75 hours of daily practice in a skill for ten years for the first signs of an elite-level of mastery to appear. So, if you want to master yourself, you should spend your first hour each morning working deeply on you, your mind-set and also your approach to health, spirituality and love.

The entrepreneur and artist now understood much more clearly how the truly elite stay ahead, so the billionaire said it was time to take things to the next level. It was time for them to understand how to cultivate their best selves.

Mindset, Healthset, Heartset and Soulset

How often, asked the billionaire, have you heard a guru talk about improving your mind-set? We hear it all the time – think optimistic thoughts, and you will improve your life. But, said the billionaire, strolling along a white sand beach with his pupils, what these gurus do not tell you is that your Mindset is just one of four “interior empires.” If you are only working on your Mindset, you are ignoring your Healthset, your Heartset, and your Soulset. That is like only polishing 25 percent of a picture!

Your Heartset is your emotional life and well-being. It is important because, even with a world-class Mindset, you cannot deliver intellectually if your emotional life is a mess. As Sigmund Freud noted, “unexpressed emotions will never die. They are buried alive and they will come forth later in uglier ways.” So, focus on a healthy Heartset and you will soon feel the difference.

Next, give your Healthset – your physical health – some attention. One of the key ways to get ahead in life is longevity. As the billionaire jokingly pointed out, you cannot be a titan of industry if you are dead. Committing to optimal fitness allows you a couple of extra ultra-healthy and productive decades to build a greater legacy. What is more, elite performers realize that every day becomes far better with exercise. It ignites your energy, dissolves your stress and expands your joy. But even that is not enough, as there is another interior empire to cultivate.

Your Soulset, the billionaire explained, is your spirituality. Too often, everyday life pulls us toward the superficial and the material. So, take some time in the quiet moments of the early morning to remember who you truly are. Bond with the hero inside of you. In the silence of the dawn, meditate on what you have to offer the world. Focus on your Soulset, and you will reconnect with the very best part of yourself.

The entrepreneur remarked that this framework really changed his perception of himself, leading him to ask how he could use the first hour of the day to effectively apply it. The billionaire replied, telling him that he was ready to hear about the 20/20/20 formula, but not in Mauritius, but in The Eternal City – Rome. It was time to be inspired by the passion of the Roman people, the city’s architecture, and its divine food.

The 20/20/20 formula

Standing in the square at the bottom of Rome's famous Spanish Steps, the billionaire, the entrepreneur and the artist took in their surroundings. It is time, the billionaire said, to learn how you can transform your creativity, performance, utility, wealth and productivity. Just rising at 5 a.m. alone will not do it. You could rise at 5 a.m. and waste an hour scanning social media and checking messages, but that will not optimize your day. What will be the 20/20/20 formula that says you use 20 minutes to move, 20 minutes to reflect and 20 minutes to grow.

The first step is to move – to perform vigorous exercise for 20 minutes. What is really important is to make yourself sweat. That is because sweat gets rid of cortisol, the hormone of fear. Sweat generates the protein BDNF, or brain-derived neurotrophic factor, which repairs brain cells and accelerates the formation of new neural connections. So, by sweating for 20 minutes, it literally means you will think faster!

Then, make 5.20-5.40 a.m. a time for reflection with a period of deep peace and solitude. Before the complexity of the day emerges, reflect on what is most important to you. In an age of distraction, of constant notifications and messages, you will be amazed what visions, dreams and inspiration drift into your mind when you have a few moments of silence to yourself.

Write these thoughts in a journal. Commit your current ambitions, the things you are grateful for in your life, and your frustrations and disappointments to paper. Doing so will help you understand your vision and let go of toxic, negative energies.

Take a few minutes to meditate. Research shows that meditation helps lower cortisol, reducing your stress. It is a proven way to stay calm, and the great performers of the world are always calm! Now it's time for the last 20 minutes of your first hour. Here, you need to grow, so take 20 minutes to learn. Study the lives of great achievers by reading their biographies. Learn about human psychology. Watch documentaries on innovation or listen to audiobooks about business building. One thing every billionaire has in common is a love of learning. So, there you have it. A perfect morning routine, to make the hour your own and become a true member of the 5am club.

Embracing sleep is essential

As the city of Rome slowly came to life, the billionaire, entrepreneur and artist ventured down into the depths of the city. As they descended down a dark and dusty tunnel, the billionaire announced that they were in the catacombs – underground passages used as burial grounds by the ancient Romans.

The artist asked why they were there, and the billionaire explained that they were surrounded by people in a centuries-old-slumber, so it was an appropriate place to discuss the importance of deep sleep. Research has shown that sleep is one of the key factors in predicting life expectancy. How you spend the last hour of your day is almost as important to peak performance as how you spend the first.

Too many people today are in a state of sleep deprivation, driven by technology. Research shows that the blue light emitted by our devices reduces levels of melatonin – the chemical that induces sleep. Being in front of a screen before sleep will prevent you from sleeping properly, so turn off your technology no later than 8 p.m. Spend the rest of the evening talking with loved ones, meditating, having a relaxing bath or reading and go to bed no later than 10 p.m. That way, you can truly maximize the value of your 5 a.m. time.

Sleeping is not the only important way to rejuvenate yourself. In fact, a key to top performance over time is to oscillate between periods of passionate, focused work at the highest levels and periods of time for deep refuelling through relaxation, recovery and fun. It is a process that the billionaire calls the twin-cycle of elite performance.

Growth happens not just in the performance phase, but also in the recovery phase. If you want to understand why, said the billionaire, talk to a farmer. He will tell you that there is always an intense period of tilling soil, planting crops and serious work. But after that, is the fallow season. The fallow season might look like a period of rest. It looks like nothing is happening. But really, it has the fallow season, in which the soil is resting and replenishing its nutrients, that predicts how well crops are really going to blossom.

Some of us do not like to embrace the rest part of the twin-cycle. The entrepreneur recognized this, saying that if he is not working, he feels guilty. But, as the billionaire replied, balance is important. So, do not just work. Embrace rest, relaxation and fun, safe in the knowledge that it is a key part of elite performance.

What I took from it

The first hours of the day are where heroes are made. If you want to master your life, start by owning the mornings. Freedom from distraction at 5 a.m. will allow you to build your creativity, maximize your fitness and protect your serenity in an age of complexity.

Firstly, buy an alarm clock. Technology is distracting and should never be in the bedroom. Once you have got a nice old-fashioned clock, set it half an hour fast. Set yourself an alarm for 5.30 a.m. That way, when you wake up the next morning, you are tricking yourself into thinking you are getting up later. When the alarm goes off, jump out of bed immediately, before the weaker part of your character can come up with reasons to stay under the duvet.

The 7 Habits Of Highly Effective People

Stephen R. Covey

This was the first book on personal development I read about 20 years ago and am surprised how many times since it came up in conversation. I recently read a book called 'Turn the Ship Around' by L. David Marquet; who mentions Seven Habits a few times in there and how Stephen Covey actually visited the Sante Fe. I thought it was about time to read it again. I can with honesty say that I enjoyed it the second time as much as I can remember I enjoyed it the first time.

In short, the book is about how success encompasses a balance of personal and professional effectiveness. How before you can adopt the seven habits, you need to change your perception and interpretation of how the world works and how between what happens to you and your response to it is your freedom to choose that response. We see the world, not as it is, but as we are conditioned to "see" it. It describes how proactive people work on the things they can do something about. How management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things.

The three most powerful points I took from the book were;

1. To make relatively minor changes in your life, focus on your attitudes and behaviours
2. Think effectiveness with people and efficiency with things
3. We see the world, not as it is, but as we are—or, as we are conditioned to see it

1) Be proactive

- We are in charge. We choose the scripts by which to live our lives. Use this self-awareness to be proactive and take responsibility for your choices

2) Begin with the end in mind

- It is incredibly easy to get caught up in an activity trap, in the busyness of life, to work harder and harder at climbing the ladder of success only to discover that it is leaning against the wrong wall.
- Start with a clear destination. That way, we can make sure the steps we are taking are in the right direction

3) Put first things first

- We must have the discipline to prioritise our day-to-day actions based on what is most important, not what is most urgent
- In order to maintain the discipline and the focus to stay on track toward our goals, we need to have the willpower to do something when we do not want to do it. We need to act according to our values rather than our desires or impulses at any given moment
- The challenge is not to manage time, but to manage ourselves
- The key is not to prioritize what is on your schedule, but to schedule your priorities.
- Think effectiveness with people and efficiency with things

4) Think win/win

- In order to establish effective interdependent relationships, we must commit to creating Win-Win

situations that are mutually beneficial and satisfying to each party

- Another important factor in solving for Win-Win situations is maintaining an Abundance Mentality
- Abundance Mentality is the belief that there is plenty out there for everyone
- Most people operate with the Scarcity Mentality -- meaning they act as though everything is zero-sum (in other words, if you get it, I do not). People with the Scarcity Mentality have a very hard time-sharing recognition or credit and find it difficult to be genuinely happy about other people's successes
- When it comes to interpersonal leadership, the more genuine our character is, the higher our level of pro-activity; the more committed we are to Win-Win, the more powerful our influence will be.
- To achieve Win-Win, keep the focus on results, not methods; on problems, not people
- Lastly, the spirit of Win-Win cannot survive in an environment of competition. As an organisation, we need to align our reward system with our goals and values and have the systems in place to support Win-Win

5) Seek first to understand then be understood

- Before we can offer advice, suggest solutions, or effectively interact with another person in any way, we must seek to deeply understand them and their perspective through emphatic listening.
- We prescribe a solution before we diagnose the problem. We do not seek to deeply understand the problem first
- You have spent years of your life learning how to read and write, years learning how to speak. But what about listening?
- You have to build the skills of emphatic listening on a base of character that inspires openness and trust
- Most people listen with the intent to reply, not to understand. At any given moment, they are either speaking or preparing to speak
- Seeking to understand requires consideration; seeking to be understood takes courage
- If we listen emphatically, we see dramatic results in improved communication. It takes time to make this shift, but it does not take nearly as long to practice emphatic listening as it does to back up and correct misunderstandings, or to live with unexpressed and unresolved problems only to have them surface later on

6) Synergize

- By understanding and valuing the differences in another person's perspective, we have the opportunity to create synergy, which allows us to uncover new possibilities through openness and creativity
- When one plus one equals three or more, when the whole is greater than the sum of its parts
- Synergy allows us to create new alternatives and open new possibilities. It allows us as a group to collectively agree to ditch the old scripts and write new ones
- Without doubt, you have to leave the comfort zone of base camp and confront an entirely new and unknown wilderness
- By putting forth a spirit of trust and safety, we will prompt others to become extremely open and feed on each other's insights and ideas, creating synergy
- The real essence of synergy is valuing the differences -- the mental, emotional, and psychological differences between people
- The key to valuing differences is to realize that all people see the world, not as it is, but as they are
- After all, if two people have the same opinion, one is unnecessary. When we become aware of someone's different perspective, we can say, "Good! You see it differently! Help me see what you see"
- We seek first to understand, and then we find strength and utility in those different perspectives in order to create new possibilities and Win-Win results

Synergy allows you to;

- Value the differences in other people as a way to expand your perspective
- Sidestep negative energy and look for the good in others
- Exercise courage in interdependent situations to be open and encourage others to be open
- Catalyse creativity and find a solution that will be better for everyone by looking for a third alternative

7) Sharpen the saw

- To be effective, we must devote the time to renewing ourselves physically, spiritually, mentally, and socially. Continuous renewal allows us to synergistically increase our ability to practice each habit.
- Habit 7 is focused around renewal or taking time to “sharpen the saw.” It surrounds all of the other habits and makes each one possible by preserving and enhancing your greatest asset -- yourself

There are four dimensions of our nature, and each must be exercised regularly, and in balanced ways.

1. Physical Dimension: The goal of continuous physical improvement is to exercise our body in a way that will enhance our capacity to work, adapt, and enjoy.

To renew ourselves physically, we must;

- Eat well
- Get sufficient rest and relaxation
- Exercise on a regular basis to build endurance, flexibility, and strength

Focusing on the physical dimension helps develop Habit 1 muscles of pro activity. We act based on the value of well-being instead of reacting to the forces that keep us from fitness.

2. Spiritual Dimension: The goal of renewing our spiritual self is to provide leadership to our life and reinforce your commitment to our value system.

To renew ourselves spiritually, we can;

- Practice daily meditation
- Communicate with nature
- Immerse yourself in great literature or music

A focus on our spiritual dimension helps us practice Habit 2, as we continuously revise and commit ourselves to our values, so we can begin with the end in mind.

3. Mental Dimension: The goal of renewing our mental health is to continue expanding our mind.

To renew ourselves mentally, we can;

- Read good literature
- Keep a journal of your thoughts, experiences, and insights
- Limit television watching to only those programs that enrich your life and mind

4. Social/Emotional Dimension: The goal of renewing ourselves socially is to develop meaningful relationships.

To renew ourselves emotionally, we can;

1. Seek to deeply understand other people
2. Make contributions to meaningful projects that improve the lives of others
3. Maintain an Abundance Mentality, and seek to help others find success

Renewing our social and emotional dimension helps us practice Habits 4, 5, and 6 by recognizing that Win-Win solutions do exist, seeking to understand others, and finding mutually beneficial third alternatives through synergy. As we focus on renewing ourselves along these four dimensions, we must also seek to be a positive scripter for other people. We must look to inspire others to a higher path by showing them we believe in them, by listening to them emphatically, by encouraging them to be proactive.

The more we see people in terms of their unseen potential, the more we can use our imagination rather than our memory. Focusing on our mental dimension helps us practice Habit 3 by managing ourselves effectively to maximize the use of our time and resources.

What I took from it

This is a great book. Principles that are common for all people and essential for success. It really helped me to re-focus on what is important for me in life and how to re-prioritize my life around my principals. This is a self-development classic and a 'must read' for anyone who takes personal development seriously. It took me 20 years to read this book again. I will have to make it a more regular read

Leadership is communicating others' worth and potential so clearly that they are inspired to see it in themselves. We see the world, not as it is, but as we are—or, as we are conditioned to see it. The way we see the problem is the problem. The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them.

We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit. Sow a thought, reap an action; sow an action, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny. Proactive people can carry their own weather with them. Whether it rains or shines makes no difference to them. They are value driven; and if their value is to produce good quality work, it isn't a function of whether the weather is conducive to it or not."

Reactive people are driven by feelings, by circumstances, by conditions, by their environment. Proactive people are driven by values—carefully thought about, selected and internalised values."

Proactive people are still influenced by external stimuli, whether physical, social, or psychological. But their response to the stimuli, conscious or unconscious, is a value-based choice or response." It's not what happens to us, but our response to what happens to us that hurts us." What matters most is how we respond to what we experience in life."

Proactive people focus their efforts in the Circle of Influence. They work on the things they can do something about. The nature of their energy is positive, enlarging and magnifying, causing their Circle of Influence to increase. You simply cannot think efficiency with people. You think effectiveness with people and efficiency with things. Peace of mind comes when your life is in harmony with true principles and values and in no other way.

The 12 Rules Of Life

Jordan Peterson

In the story of Pinocchio, a little puppet gets his wish: he loses the strings that had been used to control his life, and gets the opportunity to be a real, independent boy. But what Pinocchio did not realize was that this also meant coping with all the dangers of real life, as well as the painful lessons to be learned through honesty, friendship and family.

Classic stories like Pinocchio, as well as many other popular myths, fairy tales and religious parables, all portray the task of finding meaning in life as a balancing act between order and chaos, the familiar and the exotic, or security and adventure.

People continue passing on and rereading historical texts, along with the works of philosophers such as Socrates and Aristotle, because we yearn for universal values and rules to give our lives meaning. And these are the themes that author Jordan B. Peterson has taken into consideration when making a new list of 12 such values to help modern people through today's chaotic times.

The three most powerful points I took from the book were;

1. If you are trying to give yourself an advantage, follow the first rule: hold your head high and strike the posture of a winner
2. Being picky about your friends is a smart move and is not selfish or snobby
3. Never compare yourself to others, and to always judge yourself against your own prior accomplishments

Give yourself an advantage with good posture

You have probably heard of the phrase, "the pecking order," right? But do you know where it originated? It comes from the Norwegian zoologist Thorleif Schjelderup-Ebbe, who was studying barnyard chickens in the 1920s when he noticed that there was a clear hierarchy among these birds. At the top were the healthiest, strongest ones that always got to peck first when the chicken feed came. At the bottom were the weakest chickens, with their feathers falling out, who only got to peck at the leftover crumbs.

Pecking orders like this are not limited to chickens; they occur naturally throughout the animal kingdom. Lobsters, for instance, whether they are in the ocean or raised in captivity, will aggressively fight over the best and most secure spots for shelter. Scientists have found that these competitive conflicts will lead to the winners and losers having different chemical balances in their brains. Winners will have a higher ratio of the hormone serotonin to octopamine, while the ratio in losers will tilt in the opposite direction.

These levels can even affect the posture of lobsters: more serotonin will lead to the winners being more agile and upright, and more octopamine makes losers tense and curled up. This difference will factor into further confrontations, as the upright lobsters will appear bigger and more intimidating, causing the tense ones to remain submissive.

As you may have guessed, similar hierarchies and cycles of winning and losing play out among humans. Studies have shown that those in the grips of alcoholism or depression are less likely to enter a competitive situation, which only reinforces more inactivity and continued low self-esteem and depression.

Conversely, those on a winning streak often present a swaggering and confident body language, which can help them keep their streak alive. Just like lobsters, humans are constantly measuring themselves up against each other, and we associate a person's intelligence with their physicality. So, if you are trying to give yourself an advantage, follow the first rule; hold your head high and strike the posture of a winner.

Care for yourself with the same tenderness you would a loved one

If your dog were sick and the vet prescribed it medication, you would not second-guess the doctor and leave the prescription unfilled, would you? And yet, one-third of people ignore the medical prescriptions they are given by doctors, which begs the question: why do we take better care of our pets than ourselves? Part of the reason is that, because we are always conscious of our own flaws, we feel self-loathing, which, in turn, can lead to unnecessary self-punishment and a sense that we are unworthy of feeling good. Thus, we take better care of others than ourselves.

This belief that we are unworthy goes at least as far back as the story of Adam and Eve being exiled from the Garden of Eden. In this tale, Adam and Eve represent all human beings, and they are tricked into eating the forbidden apple of knowledge by an evil serpent. By following the advice of the snake, humans are seen as being forever corrupted with wickedness. While the story of the Garden of Eden makes us self-conscious about this dark side within ourselves and can reinforce the sense that we don't deserve good things, says the author, it can also be read another way: it's not just us, but the whole world that is corrupted. The humans and the serpent of the garden can be seen as the entire world's natural mix of order and chaos.

This duality of nature can also be seen in Eastern philosophy as well, and represented in the two sides of the Yin-Yang symbol: there's a light and a dark side, yet both sides contain a portion of the other within them, and neither can exist without the other. In this scenario, harmony is achieved by finding the healthy balance between light and dark, and one should strive not to go too far in either direction. For example, if a parent were to try and protect their child from being exposed to anything "bad," they would only be replacing that chaos with the tyranny of too much order. In other words, it is futile to try to be perfectly good. This leads us to the second rule: care for yourself like you would a loved one.

So, look after yourself, but do not fight against chaos, as this is an unwinnable fight. And rather than only doing what makes you happy, try to do what is best for you. As a child, you may not have wanted to brush your teeth or wear your mittens, but these are things that should be done. As an adult, you must determine the goals that help define who you are and the direction you want to take in life. Then, you will find the steps that you should take, and the actions that are best for you.

The wrong companions can drag you down, so choose your friends wisely

One of the author's childhood friends never left the prairies of his northern Canadian hometown, Fairview, Alberta. Instead, he stuck around and ended up among the town's other ne'er-do-wells. Every once in a while, the author would return home and catch up with his friend – and each time, his friend's slow, sad decline became more apparent. What was once youthful potential became aging resentment.

For the author, it became clear that those ne'er-do-wells were bringing his friend down and holding him back in life. And this is something that can happen to anyone anywhere. In a workplace setting, a similar dynamic can play out when an underachiever is put into a team of high performers. The manager might think that this will result in the problematic employee picking up good habits from the others. But studies have shown that the opposite is more likely to happen, and the bad habits will start to spread and bring down everyone's performance.

This is why the third rule is to make sure you surround yourself with supportive friends, as these are the kinds of friendships that can bring about positive change. Being picky about your friends is a smart

move and is not selfish or snobby. Supportive and encouraging friendships run both ways: when you need a boost, they will be there for you, and if your friend needs help to rebound from a setback or make an improvement, you will be there for them.

This dynamic can encourage individual success, and, as part of a team, it can lead to great social accomplishments. When the author left Fairview for college, he joined a group of like-minded individuals who helped each other in their studies and in many other accomplishments, such as creating a newspaper and running a successful student union. You will know you have good friends when they do not tolerate your wallowing in negativity; they will want what's best for you, so they'll encourage you to snap out of it and get back on track.

Progress is made by comparing yourself to your past achievements, not to others

There used to be such a thing as being a big fish in a small pond. But now, thanks to the internet, even the concept of a small community is a thing of the past. These days, we are all part of a global community, and no matter where you are, there is always someone better than you. This brings us to the issue of self-criticism. Now, it is important to be critical of one's self – if we were not then we'd have nothing to strive for, no motivation to better ourselves and our lives would quickly become meaningless.

Luckily, it is a human tendency to always see the present as lacking and the future as promising much better. There is a reason for this tendency, as it helps us stay motivated to push forward and act. However, self-criticism can get ugly when it becomes all about comparing ourselves to others. When this happens, we quickly lose sight of our progress.

First of all, this leads to thinking in black-and-white terms: we've either succeeded or failed. This prevents us from seeing the incremental improvements that are often small, but nonetheless important. Comparisons also lead to losing sight of the big picture by focusing on a single aspect of our lives and blowing it out of proportion. For instance, let us say you are reviewing the past year and notice that you weren't as productive at work as some of your peers. You could instantly end up feeling like a total failure. But if you were to zoom out and look at all the aspects of your life, you might realize that you made some real improvements in your family life.

This is why the fourth rule is to never compare yourself to others, and to always judge yourself against your own prior accomplishments. Comparing current results to past ones will also keep you moving forward. If you start to think that you are always winning, this is a red flag that you need to do a better job of taking risks and giving yourself challenging goals.

When checking in on your progress, think of yourself as a home inspector. This means looking at things from top to bottom and categorizing every problem. Is it a cosmetic or a structural fault? Before you can give a stamp of approval, make a list of things that need to be improved. This detailed approach is likely to keep you so busy on yourself that you will be unconcerned with how you stack up against others.

It is a parent's duty to raise a responsible and kind child

If you have ever seen parents ignoring a child who is wreaking havoc, you may have wondered: are they just bad parents or are they being clever by allowing the child to tire himself out? Approaches to child-rearing have changed over the years, often as a result of the age-old nature-versus-nurture debate, and differing opinions about the kinds of instincts we are born with.

In the eighteenth century, there was a popular belief championed by the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau that suggested our prehistoric ancestors were sweet, gentle and child-like. They blamed our history of war and violence on the corrupting influence civilization has had on us.

But nowadays, we have a clearer understanding of the fact that people are indeed born with aggressive instincts, and must learn how to become kinder, gentler, more “civilized” adults. After all, you likely remember how vicious kids on a playground can get; most workplaces are a picture of tranquillity in comparison! According to the author, it’s really up to parents to make sure their naturally aggressive youngster learns how to be a well-adjusted adult, which brings us to the fifth rule: parents need to be more than a friend – they need to raise a responsible and likable human being.

This can be a challenge since no one likes being the “bad guy.” But children are aggressive because they have the natural instinct to push boundaries so they can find out where society’s lines are drawn. So, a parent must be firm and decisive in drawing those lines. While this may not sound like fun, think of it this way: if they do not learn these things from a loving, understanding parent, they will learn it later on in a way that is sure to involve less love and understanding.

So, let us look at three key methods for good parenting;

1. Limit the rules. Too many rules lead to frustrated kids who are constantly hitting barriers. So, limit things to a few basic, easy-to-understand principles, such as do not bite, kick or hit anyone unless in self-defence.
2. Use the minimum necessary force. Effective and fair discipline can only be applied when consequences are made clear. The punishment also needs to “fit the crime,” which means it should only be as severe as necessary for a child to learn not to break the rule again. Sometimes a disappointed look is all that is needed; other times it might be a week without video games.
3. Come in pairs. Children are clever and will try to get their way by playing one parent against the other – so a unified front is important. Also, every parent makes mistakes, but if you have a supportive partner, you will be likelier to notice and catch those mistakes.

The world is filled with injustices, but we should not blame others for our lot in life

There is no point in mincing words: the world is full of challenges and suffering, says the author – but this is not cause for despair. Nevertheless, many people throughout the ages have seen life as so cruel and unfair that drastic responses are justified. The Russian author Leo Tolstoy saw existence as so absurdly unjust that he suggested there were only four valid responses: childlike ignorance, hedonistic pleasure, suicide or struggling on despite it all.

Tolstoy analysed these positions in his essay “A Confession” and concluded that the most honest response was suicide, while struggling on was a sign of his weak inability to take the appropriate action. Others have responded in a similar fashion yet decided to take other lives along with their own, in acts known as murder-suicides, such as the Sandy Hook or Columbine school shootings. In June of 2016, there had been a thousand shootings in the United States over the preceding 1,260 days, in which someone had killed four or more people before, in many cases, shooting themselves.

But despite Tolstoy’s bleak worldview, and no matter how much you have suffered or however cruel and unjust you find life to be, you should not blame the world. This is the gist of the sixth rule for life, which states that you should take responsibility for your own life before you judge the world. There is another Russian writer, by the name of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who believed it was possible to reject the cruelty of life, even when it is being cruel to you.

Solzhenitsyn was among the communists who fought against the Nazis during World War II, yet despite his service he ended up imprisoned by his own state after the war. And as if life in a Russian gulag was not bad enough, he found out he had cancer while serving his sentence. But despite all this, Solzhenitsyn did not blame the world for his lot in life. He accepted his role in supporting the Communist Party that had imprisoned him and took it upon himself to use the time he had left to contribute something good and meaningful to the world.

What he did include writing the book, *The Gulag Archipelago*, which provided a history, as well as a

damning indictment, of the Soviet camps he had experienced first-hand. The book played an important role in extinguishing any lingering support that Stalin's brand of communism had among intellectual circles worldwide.

Sacrifice can be a meaningful act, and we should seek meaning over immediate pleasures

Have you heard the story about the monkey who got caught with his hand in the cookie jar? As the story goes, there was a cookie left inside an open jar, and the opening of the jar was just big enough for the monkey's hand to enter – but not big enough for his fist to come back out with the treat in it. So, if he insisted on trying to hold onto his treat, he would be stuck. The moral here is that there is a price for greed: the monkey got himself captured because he refused to just let go of the cookie. How different is this from human behaviour? How many people pursue pleasures every day that are not in their best interests? And how many are unwilling to make sacrifices that are in their best interest?

One of the side effects of seeing the world as a pit of despair is that it makes it especially easy to justify a life based in immediate pleasures that will make it more bearable. Plus, if it makes you happy, it cannot be that bad, right? This is the logic behind binge eating and drinking, drug use, sexual debauchery and other self-harming behaviours. The other side of this argument is sacrifice, the kind that brings better things in the future by giving up something now. This goes back to ancient times, where tribes would put food aside to make it through the winter or to help those in the community who could not hunt or farm.

This is another topic heavily represented in the Bible. When God kicks Adam and Eve out of paradise, it is made clear that their original sin is the cause of the harsh and cruel life that everyone must face. However, our suffering in life is the sacrifice we must make so that we may experience the joys of the afterlife. This brings us to rule seven: seek meaningful goals over instant gratification. Now, you might think this is a simple concept and something that most people already do. After all, we sacrifice our time to go to work and put in hard hours now so that we can take a vacation later on or relax on a beach in the summer.

But this goes deeper than sacrificing for your personal gain; there are big and small things we can sacrifice for the greater good, and the bigger the sacrifice, the more rewarding it can be. It can help to think of the lotus flower. This plant starts its life at the bottom of a lake, and inch by inch it escapes the darkness until it breaks through the surface of the water and blossoms in the sun's rays. In other words, stick with something and be ready to make sacrifices to reach your goal, and you will be rewarded.

Lies are a common tool of self-deception, but we should strive toward truthful living

The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche believed that you could measure the strength of a person's spirit based upon how much undiluted truth they can tolerate. While truth is often considered a valuable commodity in our culture, we nevertheless tell lies all the time. One of the main reasons for lying to ourselves and to others is to get what we think we want. The Austrian psychologist Alfred Adler called these life-lies, and they are characterized as the things we will do and say to turn a poorly-thought-out goal into a reality.

For example, you might picture your retirement as taking place on a secluded beach in Mexico, with an infinite supply of margaritas. This kind of goal can be so attractive that you will continue fooling yourself into thinking it is possible, even as events pile up that make it increasingly far-fetched. You could even develop allergies to sun, sand and booze, but continue lying to yourself about this perfect plan – even though it's not really a plan at all, since you haven't identified any concrete steps that could potentially make it a reality. Therefore, it's just a dream and not a goal with actions attached to it.

These kinds of delusions often go hand in hand with our ability to fool ourselves into thinking we already know everything we need to know. This is an especially foolish perspective to have since it

shuts off our natural desire to learn and grow. But worse, and far eviller, things can happen when you are living a life-lie and unwilling to recognize the truth. In John Milton's epic poem, *Paradise Lost*, Lucifer is portrayed as a reasonable character, but one who becomes too proud and enamoured with his talents – so much so that he and his followers are kicked out of heaven for daring to challenge God's ultimate truth. This sets up rule number eight, stop lying and be truthful.

You do not need to give up each one of your ambitious goals, but you should be flexible so that your goals are realistic and reflect the truth. So, as your understanding and worldview changes, so should your goals. And if your life is off track, it might be time to challenge the current truth you're following, the one that has you feeling weak, rejected or worthless, and reaffirm your personal truth so that you can get back on the right track.

Conversations are an opportunity to learn and grow, not compete

Thousands of years after his death, the ancient philosopher Socrates is still considered one of the wisest men who ever lived. One of the reasons for this is his belief that the only thing he was certain of was that he knew nothing, and this was a driving force in his conversations and his openness to learn. When you engage in genuine conversation, it should be a similar process to thinking. Thinking things over is essentially listening to yourself as you explore two sides of an issue. So, in a way, you are creating your own internal dialog, which can be difficult since you need to accurately represent both sides while also remaining objective in your conclusion.

This is one big reason why people talk to each other, so that they can more easily present the two sides of an issue and come to a conclusion. Even children will do this: if one kid thinks it would be fun to play up on a roof, they might suggest this idea to a friend who then points out the dangers of this idea. The conversation that ensues allows the child with the original idea to take in the new perspective, consider how likely it is that someone will fall and hurt themselves, and hopefully make the right decision.

However, conversations often do not go this way. Instead, one person – or perhaps both people – will refuse to listen and treat the dialog as a competition they need to win, in order to validate their preconceptions. So, rather than hearing what the other person has to say, they will be thinking about what to say next or act like it is a contest of one-upping each other.

This is why the ninth rule is listening to what others have to say, while presuming you have something to learn from them. An easy tip for being a better conversationalist is to listen and then summarize or recap out loud what the other person just said. This serves multiple purposes: it helps assure that you have heard things correctly, while also helping it stick in your memory; it also reduces the likelihood of distorting or oversimplifying details in order to suit your side of the conversation.

Sometimes the truth hurts, and it is painful to take in information that means you have to change your ideas and preconceptions. But this is the price you pay as part of the beautiful process of learning and growing.

The complexity of life should be confronted with clear and precise language

Life truly is an enormous and complicated tapestry, and yet we tend only to see the isolated parts we need to see. If you are walking along and see an apple on the ground, you probably do not think of the branch, tree, roots and soil that were all connected before it fell. The reason is that we tend only to recognize or pay attention to the things that are either useful to us or stand in our way. The apple catches our attention because it represents food and sustenance. But we do not consider the tree and the soil because they are of no use for satisfying our needs.

Of course, we cannot be thinking of everything all the time – the world is far too complex for that, so

the mind simplifies things and makes it easier for us to get on with our lives. However, every once in a while, something can happen to shatter our conception of the world and make things seem chaotic. This is why rule ten is extremely important: Use precise language. How does this help? Well, think of the word “car.” You know what a car is right? It is a vehicle that gets you from point A to point B. But when this vehicle breaks down halfway between A and B, do you know the precise ways in which a car works? Can you pop the hood and fix this piece of complex machinery?

There is a good chance that when your car breaks down, you feel primal urges to curse and maybe even kick the car for not being such a simple thing anymore. This is what happens when things get complex and chaotic, so in order to recover, you must re-establish order by clearly and precisely explaining what went wrong. The same thing needs to happen when your body breaks down and you get sick. There could be any number of problems going on, so you need to tell your doctor the precise symptoms. Does your stomach hurt or is it a fever? Did it begin after you ate something? What was it? By being precise, you can restore order and take steps to start feeling better.

Precise language can make your relationships run more smoothly as well. Does your partner do something that bugs you, like failing to clean up after themselves? The sooner you are honest and precise with them, the easier life will be.

There are bad and oppressive men, but we must avoid suppressing human nature

In George Orwell’s *The Road to Wigan Pier*, the author concludes that socialism was attracting defenders in England, not because of sympathy for the harsh conditions facing miners, but out of hatred for the rich and powerful. Today there are similar attitudes toward the male-dominated leadership known as the patriarchy. One influential source of this hatred for the patriarchy is Max Horkheimer of the Marxism-based Frankfurt School, a proponent of so called “critical theory”. He felt that education and intellectualism should focus on social change, and, instead of working to empower women, it should seek to combat and destroy the powerful oppressors in a culture – i.e. the ruling males. Likewise, in humanities courses around the world today, the recommended political action is the dismantling of our macho culture.

Everything is about destroying rather than fixing or creating, and according to the author it has left us with an outrage directed at male behaviour that can tend to be excessively harsh and short-sighted. For example, many male students are regularly confronted with hostile accusations of being part of the patriarchy – but according to the author the path of righteous change should not involve treating every man as a potential sex offender.

While it is true that many men have behaved deplorably, the author argues that men have also used their naturally aggressive attitudes for good, like engaging in healthy competition, exploring dangerous areas and making much-needed progress. It reminds the author of skateboarders. Outside some of the buildings on the University of Toronto campus, there were amazing skateboarders showing off admirable fearlessness and a willingness to embrace danger. But then, city officials decided to prohibit skateboarding on the campus. Which brings us to rule number 11; do not bother young people skateboarding.

According to the author, we cannot establish rules that go against the very nature of who we are as people. Our rules should definitely protect us, but they should not do so in a way that suppresses the good qualities in people. We have actually seen a fairly good fictionalized account of what can happen when men are stripped of their masculinity. As the story in *Fight Club* shows us, aggression can then become a forbidden fruit that manifests itself in fascist tendencies. Another, real-world reaction to emasculation is the current resurgence of right-wing politics.

The truth is women do not want boys to grow up without a chance to learn things for themselves and be independent. He posits that every boy has a mom, and what kind of mom would want to care for a dependent man-child?

Life is hard and full of sorrow, so it is important to celebrate the small joys in life.

Have you ever had to care for a sick person? It can be one of life's more difficult challenges. The author's daughter has been coping with severe arthritis since she was six years old. She has suffered from constant pain, requiring frequent injections and multiple surgeries for joint replacements.

If you had a daughter in this situation, you might think life is unfair – but it is important to recognize that the dark bits of pain, suffering and sorrow are what give the good moments their value. Consider Superman, says the author. When this character was first introduced, he was hugely popular. But then, the comic book writers kept giving him power after power until he was virtually invincible. Naturally, readers started to find him super boring.

If there is no risk of danger, Superman's victories are hollow. And in the same way, good moments would be meaningless if we did not have to fight through difficulties and suffering to reach them. This is why it is important to follow rule 12: make the best out of even the smallest joys that life offers. By following this rule, you will be sure to embrace life and appreciate every good thing that comes your way. You will also be sure to see yourself through the tough times, even when they are prolonged.

After years of pain and discomfort, the author's daughter eventually found a new physiotherapist who helped her find greater mobility, a fair amount of normality and a lot less pain. There may be further complications down the road, but they are both happy to enjoy the improvements for as long as they last.

This is the best attitude to have; it is the kind that makes you take your time to stop and pet a cat when you cross one on the sidewalk. Remember, there is no day without the darkness of night, just as there is no order without chaos. There is suffering in life, but it is also what gives meaning to our perseverance and makes the moments of peace so rewarding.

What I took from it

Navigating through life is a constant struggle filled with trials and tribulations, and if there is any guarantee in life, it is that there will likely be more troubles around the corner. But there is also beauty and joy to be found, however fleeting these moments may be. All you can do is try your best, be honest and truthful, and avoid being selfish and prideful. It is also important to take responsibility for your own lot in life, and not blame the world or others for your shortcomings. Ultimately, it is only you who can improve your life.

Ask yourself, how was I wrong? You may not like the answer, but this is a way to keep improving and stay truthful. By asking yourself this question on a regular basis, you will be able to enjoy the satisfaction of making progress every day as you keep striving to be a better human being.

The Four Agreements

Don Miguel Ruiz

I have been meaning to read The Four Agreements by Don Miguel Ruiz for some time now. The book often appears in many thought leaders list of books to read. What made it more appealing to me was that it is about 4 rules to live by and not the usual exhaustive list of things to do or not to do. Four rules or agreements is something that I should be able to muster – I thought.

The Four Agreements reveal the source of self-limiting beliefs that rob us of joy and create needless suffering. Based on ancient Toltec wisdom, the book offers a powerful code of conduct that can rapidly transform our lives to a new experience of freedom, true happiness, and love.

The Toltec were an ancient society of artists and scientists who explored and saved spiritual knowledge from ancestors who had lived in central Mexico before the Aztec became the dominant group. They had a deep tradition of education and passing on knowledge from generation to generation.

The four most powerful points I took from the book were;

1. Be Impeccable with your word
2. Do not take things personally
3. Do not make assumptions
4. Always do your best

Like most ancient civilisations, they had a system of beliefs about the workings of the world and the humans who populated it. But what can these teachings tell us today, asks Ruiz? Ruiz starts by saying that we are taught strict rules as children, which we force ourselves to abide by as adults. Nobody gets to choose their native tongue, but the language we grow up speaking is not the only thing society imposes upon us. Social norms, says Ruiz, even prescribe the content and form of our dreams.

For instance, everyone has individual dreams, but there is also a collective dream. This is the dream of the planet, as he puts it. The rules that define this collective dream are taught to us by parents, schools, religions and other influential forces. It is through this education that we learn what proper behaviour is, what we should believe and the difference between good and bad.

However, these rules and agreements were not chosen by any of us. Our acceptance of such rules without question amounts to our domestication. If we rebelled as children, adults were still more powerful than us. They could suppress our dissent and punish us if we disobeyed them. Not just that, but we were also rewarded for obeying their beliefs and following their rules. As a result, the vast majority of us surrendered. Just consider how many parents tell their children that they are “good” when they follow the rules and “bad” when they do not. In this system, the primary reward for proper behaviour is attention from parents, teachers and friends, says Ruiz.

Naturally, getting such a reward feels great, and we learn to abide by these rules to reap this benefit. We fear rejection and often pretend to be something that we are not. As a result, at a certain point, it's not necessary for anyone to control us because all of these beliefs are lodged deep within us. In other words, we domesticate ourselves. We devise a perfect self-image and, when we fail to act in accordance with it, punish, judge and blame ourselves.

But there is a different way, says Ruiz. We can break free from this structure by establishing new agreements for ourselves.

Be impeccable with your words

Did you know that the word “impeccable” stems from Latin, meaning “without sin”, ask Ruiz? In that sense, being impeccable with your language means never using it against yourself, as any harm done to yourself is considered sinful, he states. Such harm might come in the form of self-judgment or blame. You might think that you are too fat or too stupid. Simply by harbouring these thoughts, you are using your words against yourself and passing judgement. Instead of doing this, you could insist on reaffirming how great you are and how much you love yourself.

That is why it's important to remember that the words you use are powerful and can either liberate or enslave you – and other people. So, while a word might seem like a random jumble of sounds, it's actually much more. Your word lets you communicate and express yourself but also transforms the way you think. In this regard, your words can create ideas in your mind, shape your sense of reality and affect the opinions of others.

Ruiz asks us to consider a story. A smart and good-natured woman had a daughter whom she loved with all her heart. One day, the woman arrived home, wishing only to have some quiet time alone. However, her daughter was in a happy mood, boisterously singing. Losing control over herself for a moment, the woman yelled at her daughter, “You have an ugly voice! Keep quiet!”

Because of this experience, the daughter believed what her mother had said, making an agreement with herself that her voice was ugly. She did not sing for a long time and even had difficulty speaking to people. It just goes to show how words can enslave us. Just think of how often you have told yourself you are not good enough. Each time you do this you are making an agreement and choosing to abide by it. That is why the first agreement is not to use the word against yourself.

Do not take things personally

Ruiz asks; can you remember the last time somebody was rude to you and you took it personally? It likely was not too long ago and that is a problem. After all, as soon as something is construed as personal, you begin inadvertently agreeing with it and taking it upon yourself, even if it has nothing to do with you. Beyond that, by taking things personally, people get trapped in what is called personal importance, a state in which they believe that everything is about them.

This is actually a result of the process of domestication mentioned earlier. It teaches people to take literally everything personally. But in reality, absolutely nothing people say or do to you is about you. All of it is actually about them. People have their own dreams and live according to their own agreements. When someone calls you fat, it is not about your own body, but rather the issues, opinions and beliefs with which they are dealing.

That means when a person is happy, they might tell you that you are the best, but call you the devil when they are angry. To overcome this issue, know who you are. Because then you will not need to take other people's comments personally. When you know yourself, you do not need to seek this information from others or get their acceptance. As a result, nothing they say will affect you. This is also helpful in realising that all people view the world from a different perspective and that you too should recognise your own viewpoint.

Just imagine somebody telling you that your words are hurtful. It is not actually your words that are causing them pain, but the wounds they experience as a result of their own agreements. In the same way, when you get mad about something someone else says, it is actually because of your own fear, which makes it essential to deal with such emotions.

Instead of making assumptions, ask questions

Have you ever assumed something was seriously wrong with one of your relationships simply because the other person failed to say “hi” one time; asks Ruiz. Well, similar things happen to everyone and this is just one example of how assumptions create problems. After all, says Ruiz, when you make assumptions, you think that your thoughts must be true and feel duped when they turn out not to be. This is a major issue as most assumptions have just about no basis in reality. They only appear real in the imagination.

So, when you have a hard time understanding something, you assume you know what it means. Then, when the truth becomes clear, you see it actually has an entirely different meaning. Imagine you are walking through a city when a beautiful person catches your eye and that person smiles at you. You might immediately assume that the person likes you and drift away on a daydream that ends with the two of you getting married.

Such out-of-control assumptions can also cause serious problems in relationships, as people often assume that their partners know what they are thinking. As a result, people believe that their partners will do what they want and get disappointed and angry when they do not. But you also likely make assumptions about yourself. You might think you can do something and, when you fail, feel bad for overestimating yourself, while in reality, you might have just needed to ask more questions to succeed. So, assumptions are damaging. You should replace them with courageous questions instead. While asking questions can be difficult, it is the only way to stop making assumptions.

If a friend does not greet you, rather than assuming something is wrong, you might ask, “What’s going on?” The most important thing to keep in mind here is clear communication. That means asking as many questions as you need to get total clarity on the issue. By asking questions, you will get closer to the truth and not feel the desire to assume.

Always do your best

Ruiz asks; do you remember your parents and teachers telling you to just do your best when you were a kid? Well, it is pretty sound advice and you should always do your best, whatever it might mean in a given context. That is because doing your best always depends on the situation, you are in, and as long as you give it all you have got, you will not need to blame or judge yourself. Doing your best changes from day to day. On certain days, your best will be totally stellar, while on others it might not be so great.

Just consider how different you are in the morning when you are full of energy compared to late at night when you are exhausted after a long day. You must keep this in mind because if you try to go beyond your best at any given moment, you will just end up depleted and worn out. Naturally, wearing yourself out will mean it takes you longer to reach your goal, but doing less than your best will make you prone to self-judgement, criticism, guilt and frustration.

So, to do your best, do things for their own sake. You should work hard because it makes you happy, not because of some external motivation. A great example here is salary, says Ruiz. You will never do your best if your only motivation is your paycheck. Most people only do their job for the money and not because they enjoy it. As a result, most people have jobs that feel difficult, joyless and imposed upon them. This lack of fulfilment means that people need to distract themselves at the weekend through partying, drinking and other less than beneficial activities.

On the other hand, if doing your best means working hard because you love the task at hand, you will perform better, and your work will begin to feel effortless. In this way, the final agreement – to always do your best – will increase the power of all the other agreements, while helping you free yourself.

Break with your old agreements and find your freedom

There are three ways to break old agreements and free yourself. The first relates to the dream you are living right now, which is called the dream of the first attention, since people used your earliest childhood attention to forge it. But you are not a child anymore and today you can start changing your dream and believing whatever you want. You also have the benefit of beginning to notice that the things you learned as a child are not the sole truth. Because of this, you can alter your dream, decide on your beliefs and create what is called the dream of the second attention. To do so, begin by noticing the fear-based beliefs that cause you unhappiness. Then, break them apart bit by bit, replacing them with new beliefs like the Four Agreements.

The second way to become free corresponds to the Toltec belief that there is a parasitic organism in control of our minds. To break free from this burden you must practice forgiveness, which cuts off the parasite's food supply. Imagine waking up in the morning, loaded with energy. Then you get into an argument with your partner and suddenly feel totally depleted, trapped in negative emotions. These feelings, says Ruiz, sap your energy and make it difficult to change your life or those of others. Not just that, but your resentment feeds the parasite, causing more negativity. To stop this vicious cycle, you need to forgive people who hurt you, including yourself.

And finally, the third way to free yourself is to live each day like it was your last. Doing so will let you see that you have nothing that does not exist in the present. It gives you a clearer vision of how you want to live. This is called the initiation of the dead and it asks, "Do you really want to spend this amazing moment worrying what other people think of you?"

What I took from it

From the moment we are born, society makes us conform to its rules, thereby preventing us from realising our true selves. But it is possible to break free by replacing these ingrained rules with the Four Agreements from ancient Toltec wisdom.

Start to break your agreements. Most people live by hundreds, if not thousands, of agreements. Take a moment to break one of them right now. Maybe you tell yourself that you can't sing. To break this agreement just sing your heart out and imagine someone applauding your performance. By following this process, you can chip away at all your agreements, replacing them with new ones that set you free. I certainly have many and will start breaking free from them today.

I enjoyed this book so much that I when I finished it, I immediately jumped to the beginning and started reading it again. Highly recommended.

The Greatest Salesman In The World

Og Mandino

I told my sister upon finishing *The Greatest Salesman In The World*, that beside her Bible, this is the one book that she should read, if nothing else, ever! I really loved this book and going by the fact that it sold over 50 million copies and have been translated into over 25 languages, shows that I am not the only who thinks that.

First published in 1968, it proves that not all masterpieces need to be of 'War and Peace' volume. It is a short book that will take a couple of hours to read through and will be time well spent. I found this book brilliant, profound in its message and yet simple in its delivery. It is one of those life-changing books that one can take as much or as little from, but cannot claim to be untouched by its message in some way

The book contains the basic principles of life, simple but powerful, this short book, at only 110 pages will change your life if the principles are applied properly. There is just something about these older books that I love.

The three most powerful points I took from the book were;

1. What might look like a failure to start with, might just be the first step in being successful
2. Love conquers everything and is your most powerful tool in becoming truly successful
3. By living a simple life does not make you poor but wise

Hafid is a master salesman and a trader; a very wealthy man. He lives in an elegant palace equipped with every possible comfort. One day towards the end of his life, he requests a meeting with Erasmus, his trusted servant and friend. He asks Erasmus how much money is in the treasury and tells him to estimate the worth of his property. It is a large sum.

Hafid then directs Erasmus to sell all his possessions in exchange for gold and alludes to his long practice of distributing half his annual profit to the poor. Now, says the salesman, he wishes to divide all his riches with the neediest, keeping only enough to live out his remaining days in peace. He requests that Erasmus turn over each of his emporiums to the person who manages it, together with a reward of 5,000 talents and bequeaths upon him his palace and warehouse.

Though Erasmus can hardly comprehend this, Hafid again orders him to do as he has asked, assuring the servant that on his return he will share with Erasmus a long-kept secret he has imparted to no one except his wife.

When Erasmus arrives back at the palace after distributing Hafid's property, he is led to a room kept boiled for as long as anyone can remember. The only object within the room is an old chest. Hafid unlocks the chest - empty, except for some tattered scrolls. Hafid then speaks: "All the success, happiness, love, peace of mind, and wealth that I have enjoyed is directly traceable to what is contained in these few scrolls. My debt to them, and to the wise one who entrusted them to my care, can never be repaid."

Hafid explains that each of the ten scrolls contains a principle, or law, that together will enable their possessor to accumulate all the wealth he desires. Long ago he was commissioned by the one who gave him the scrolls to share them only with one person and was told he would be given a sign to know who that person was. He petitions Erasmus to stay with him until he receives this sign. The faithful servant agrees to do so. The story then shifts back in time. Young Hafid, a camel boy travelling

with a caravan, beseeched the leader of the caravan, Pathros, to grant him the chance to be a merchant. After some argument, Pathros gave him approval and agreed to allow Hafid to sell a finely woven robe. However, he warned the boy that he would be confronted with temptations and that his handling of these temptations would determine his success, both in life and as a salesman. Pathros then dispatched that would-be merchant to a poor settlement - Bethlehem - to sell the garment.

For three days Hafid worked to peddle the robe, but without success. On the night before he was to rejoin the caravan, Hafid sought out a stable to tend to his donkey. There he discovered a young couple with a shivering newborn baby. Both husband and wife had wrapped their own cloaks around the infant, trying to warm him, but to little avail. Hafid gave the worried parents back their cloaks and wrapped Pathros's fine robe around the beautiful child. The boy then commenced his trek back to the caravan, considering himself a failure and trying to find an excuse, some story to cover up what had done.

When Hafid reached the caravan, Pathros was waiting outside his tent. He had observed a bright star that followed Hafid back to the camp. Something extraordinary had taken place. Hafid, in tears, blurted out the story of the robe; but instead of chiding the boy, Pathros assured Hafid that he had not failed. He would explain everything, said the merchant once they returned to their headquarters.

There, the dying Pathros summoned the lad to him. He told how he once had rescued a traveller, and how this grateful traveller had insisted that Pathros come to live with him and his family. During this sojourn, the traveller conferred upon Pathros a chest containing ten scrolls, some money and a letter.

For a year Pathros memorized the scrolls, incorporating their wisdom into his life. After leaving the traveller's home, he opened the letter, which instructed him to forever share with the poor half of his wealth, but never to divulge the information in the scrolls, except when he received a sign telling him of the person who would next guard the scrolls. As he watched the star following Hafid home that night, Pathros had come to realize that he was indeed the awaited sign.

Pathros's story ended, whereupon he instructed Hafid to go to Damascus and purchase a small supply of rugs. Hafid was to open the scroll, study it until he fully understood its contents, and begin selling the rugs. He must proceed to study each scroll thoroughly, in the same way, applying the principles one by one as he learned them. Finally, he was not to share with others the knowledge contained in the scrolls, nor show the scrolls to anyone, until he himself was given a sign.

Hafid set out to inquire of the scrolls as he sold the rugs, and was taught the keys to prosperous and triumphant living:

Scroll I: Everyday a person is reborn - he can forget the failures of the past. Habits are the difference between success and failure. Therefore, in order to achieve success, it is necessary to form good habits and become their slave. This first scroll teaches the best way to learn the meaning of the others. Each successive scroll will contain a principle enabling the reader to replace a bad habit with a good one. Each scroll must be read three times a day - the last time aloud - for thirty consecutive days. This way, the scrolls' wisdom becomes both a part of the active and subconscious mind.

Scroll II: Love can be the salesman's greatest weapon, for even if people reject many particulars concerning the salesman's wares, love will soften them. Love can be developed by always looking for the best in people. Each time we meet someone we should state silently, "I Love You." But in order to love others, we must love ourselves, treat ourselves with respect, and not be satisfied with anything but our finest efforts.

Scroll III: "I will persist until I succeed." People are born to succeed, not to fail. Defeat will not be considered, and a word such as quit, cannot, unable, and impossible are not part of the growing disciple's vocabulary. Every failure moves a man closer to success. When the day ends and the salesman wants to quit, he must force himself to make one more sale; to end the day with success.

Scroll IV: People are nature's greatest miracle. Each person is different in appearance as well as ability, and we should capitalize on, rather than despise, these differences. We must concentrate on the task at hand, not allowing ourselves to be preoccupied with problems of home while in the marketplace, or of the marketplace while we are at home. We each have eyes to see, ears to hear, and a mind with which to think. This is everything we need to thrive.

Scroll V: Live each day as if it were your last. Dwelling on the failures or misfortunes of the past is useless, for we cannot change them. Nor should we think about tomorrow. The present hours and minutes pass too quickly and are gone forever, and so, they must be traded only for things of value. We should always treat our family and our friends as if today were our last day together.

Scroll VI: We are masters of our emotions. Although we daily pass through different moods, each of us has the power to control them; to "create our own weather." If we bring joy and enthusiasm and brightness to all that we do, others will react in a similar manner. "Strong is he who forces his actions to control his thoughts." No matter how we feel when we arise in the morning, we can sing or laugh and make ourselves feel better. No matter what other people do or how they react, we can decide to be positive and understanding.

Scroll VII: "Cultivate the habit of laughter." Man is the only creature who can laugh, and the best thing to laugh at is ourselves. Whenever things seem serious or dismal, repeat the word, "This too shall pass," and all troublesome thoughts will seem lighter. Laughter puts events - successes as well as failures - into perspective. Only with laughter and gratitude can we enjoy the fruits of prosperity.

Scroll VIII: Seek out opportunities and experiences that will multiply in value. A grain of wheat has no choice as to what it will become - whether it will be ground into bread or planted in the earth to multiply - but each human being has a choice - to grow or to perish. In order to "multiply in value," we must set goals, short-term as well as long-term. We must not worry if we experience initial failure in reaching our goals; we compete only with ourselves. Upon reaching a goal, we multiply again by setting another, and by striving to constantly make the next hour better than the present one.

Scroll IX: Our dream and plans are of no value without action. Procrastination comes from fear, and we overcome fear only through action. It is better to act now and risk failure than to refrain from action and certainly flounder. Fireflies give light only when they fly. Through doing, we become like them, giving off light amid the darkness. Only action gives life significance. If success is offered now, we must act now.

Scroll X: Almost everyone, in a moment of terror or anguish, will turn to God for help. But a true believer will pray for guidance, not only for help. He calls on God not for material things, but for the knowledge to understand the way to acquire what is needed. Nevertheless, we must realise that sometimes we will not be given the sort of guidance we ask for - this, too, is an answer to prayer. Pray for ability equal to the opportunity, for good habits, for love, to use words well, to humbly forge through all obstacles, to reach worthwhile goals.

It is now three years since Hafid has sold all his goods. Together with his wife and Erasmus, he lives a simple life. One day an unkempt traveller comes to see him. It is Paul, a follower of Jesus. Paul relates to Hafid his conversion to Christ, tells about Jesus' life, and declare that Jesus has sent him to find the greatest salesman in the world and ask him to share his miraculous secrets for converting others. At last the man to whom Hafid can confer the sacred instructive scrolls has arrived.

What I took from it

I loved this book. It is short enough to complete in a couple of hours, yet it is packed with wise learning points. Even though it is called *The Greatest Salesman in the World*, the 'sales' factor is only a small part of this overall personal improvement masterpiece. Probably the most inspiring book I have ever read.

Below are my Top 10 quotes from the book.

1. Success is a state of mind. But failure is always described in one way. Failure is man's inability to reach his goals in life, whatever that might be.
2. I will make love my greatest weapon and none on whom I call can defend against this force.
3. The prices of life are at the end of each journey, not near the beginning, and it is not given to me to know how many steps are necessary in order to reach my goal
4. I am rare, and there is value in rarity; therefore, I am valuable.
5. I will live this day as if it is my last, and if it is not, I shall fall to my knees and give thanks. My last must be my best.
6. Today I will master my emotions. I will become a master of myself. I will become great.
7. I will laugh at the world. Henceforth I will cultivate the habit of laughter.
8. Today, I will multiply my value a hundredfold. I will not commit the terrible crime of aiming to low.
9. Action is the tinder that ignites my dreams, my plans, my goals, into a living force.
10. Let me become all you planned for me when my seed was planted and selected by you to sprout in the vineyard of this world. Help this humble salesman. Guide me.

The Success Principles

Jack Canfield

Do you feel stuck? Could make more out of your life? Do you envy people who pursue their dreams while you struggle with taking the first step? Many of us are burdened with these questions and concerns but are unsure of how or where to find answers. The Success Principles can help you push through and start making real progress toward success in your life.

In his book, *The Success Principles. How to get from where you are to where you want to be*; published in 2004, Jack Canfield outline timeless and universal principles to help you achieve unprecedented success both personally and professionally. You will then discover ways to apply these principles in your own life and witness the difference they can make.

The three most powerful points I took from the book were;

1. No one says that change is easy. It requires discipline, persistence and some experimentation.
2. You can achieve your greatest ambitions, but it takes some know-how. Following and practicing the principles of success will equip you to reach your personal and professional goals and live your dream life.
3. Ask someone you admire for 15 minutes of their time. Find someone who has achieved a dream similar to your own and ask for 15 minutes of their time per month to advise and mentor you. The worst they can say is “no,” and in the best case, you might find a person who will be an invaluable resource in helping you live the life you want.

Enough complaining, no more excuses. It is all in your hands

Are you ready to ditch your unfulfilling daily routine and start living your dream life? Then let us get started! The first thing you need to understand on your journey to personal and professional success is that you are the director of your own life. When we fail, we often look for an excuse, blaming the failure on things that happen to us. But how these events affect us in the long run depends on how we respond to them.

Imagine one circumstance where you receive \$400, says Canfield. You could buy something nice for yourself or invest the money in a mutual fund. If you opt for the former, you have no money left. If you choose the latter, you have made an investment on which you can later build and earn even more money – a much wiser decision. So, if you want to start seeing improvements in your life, you need to change your responses.

It is far too easy to just complain about your circumstances. But if you pay more attention to how you are living and the choices you are making, you will soon see whether you are on the right path to success. For instance, you are either fit or out of shape, says Canfield. Ask yourself, what are you doing – or not doing – to make your body this way?

If your goal is to lose weight, you will need to be aware of your daily calorie intake and your level of activity. Be honest with yourself. Do you eat well? Should you cut out chocolate or junk food? No one says that change is easy. It requires discipline, persistence and some experimentation.

What is your purpose in life?

What if you are not sure what personal success would look like for you? Relax – you are not alone.

Slow down and take some time to contemplate. One of the first steps toward personal success is to examine your reason for being. Why are you here on earth? The life purpose exercise can help you discover this.

To find your purpose, identify two of your strongest personality traits; describe the way you interact with others; and then imagine your ideal world. Once you have done this, combine these into a statement of life purpose. You might come up with: "My purpose is to use my honesty and passion to inspire others to move forward in their chosen profession, to help contribute to a world where people have fulfilling careers."

The next step is to create a vision – a mental picture of what your perfect future looks like. What would your perfect job be? How much free time would you have? What sort of friends? American president John F. Kennedy, who envisioned putting a man on the moon, and civil rights leader Martin Luther King, who imagined a free and equal America for all people, were two influential visionaries. They succeeded in making seemingly unattainable ideas a reality – so why shouldn't you do the same?

Once you have your vision in mind, break it down into smaller goals that are ambitious, specific and tangible. What do you want to achieve, and how much time will you give yourself to achieve it? For example, being nicer to your employees may be well-meaning, but it is not a specific, measurable goal. A clearer goal would be, "I will acknowledge six employees for their help with the latest project by the end of this week." As you can measure your progress, you will know when you have achieved your goal. Defining a goal for every part of your vision will narrow the gap between your current reality and ultimate success.

See, smell and feel your dreams

How do you push beyond your comfort zone toward achieving your vision? Two practices – affirmation and visualization – can help you. Affirmation starts when you state your goal as if it has already been realized, in a complete sentence. The most effective affirmations are in the first person, are positive and to the point. For example, "I love driving down the highway in my new yellow Lamborghini" is far more effective and precise than saying, "I want a new car." You should specify exactly what your goal will look like once you have reached it.

It is also important to add to your affirmation sentence how you will feel when you have reached your goal. Researchers have found that ideas stick in our memory better when a thought is coupled with a strong emotion. Thus, "I feel ecstatic when I'm driving down the highway in my new yellow Lamborghini" is a great affirmation!

Once you have crafted your affirmations, connect each with a vivid image of your affirmation, called a visualization. To do this, close your eyes and imagine your affirmation in as much detail as you can. If your affirmation is, "I enjoy relaxing in the sunroom of my villa in Madrid," visualize the colours of your house, the furniture in the sunroom, and so on.

Add sounds, smells and tastes to your mental picture. What does it physically feel like to sit on the couch in your sunroom? Can you hear the sounds of the busy street, or birds singing? The more you fill your visualisation with emotions and sensory details, the more intensely you will feel it, giving you more power and momentum to reach your goal.

Be persistent

Now that you are well on your way to achieving ultimate success, you will need to prepare yourself for potential obstacles and, if you depend on others, possible rejection. Rejection is just a speedbump on the road to success. If someone says "no," just keep trying until someone says "yes," while keeping in mind your next step.

Kentucky Fried Chicken founder Harland Sanders was no stranger to rejection. In fact, he heard “no” more than 300 times when proposing his business idea before someone said “yes.” If he had quit at the first rejection, there would not be more than 11,000 KFC restaurants around the world! Best-selling author Stephen King also nearly chucked out the manuscript for his book *Carrie* after receiving many early rejections. But because he refused to give up, *Carrie* ended up selling more than 4 million copies, and was made into a film.

On your road toward your dream life, you need to excel at what you do. An important principle to focus on is to become an over-achiever. Do not be afraid to keep trying and work your way toward your goal one step at a time. Take author Debbie Macomber. It took her five years of hard work before she sold her first book. She wrote for two and a half years while raising her children. To add to the pressure, her husband wanted her to give up her dream and go back to work.

However, Macomber knew she could do it and spent a further two and a half years pursuing her dream, despite being tight on cash, never taking a vacation and losing a lot of sleep. In the end, it was worth it; she has published over 100 books, and many have become best sellers. Now that you know perseverance is the key to success, how do you allow success to happen?

Do it, delegate it, delay it or dump it

Now that we have explored the fundamentals of success, let us focus on some work you need to finish before you can really achieve your dreams, says Canfield. First, you need to address unfinished business. Do you have any projects you have abandoned or left half-done? Do you need to clean your closet, or finish last year’s taxes? These small things can take valuable energy from achieving your larger goals.

View it this way, says Canfield. It is better to have five completed projects than 15 half-completed projects. One useful method is to schedule a completion weekend, where you take time to clear your slate of all unfinished business. Be clear and decisive; either do it, delegate it, delay it or dump it. Although choosing to delay a project does not sound productive, it differs from procrastination in that you are consciously deciding to relegate the item.

This “cleaning up” is not only applicable to tangible stuff in your life, but also to your relationships. How much energy are you wasting, holding a grudge against a colleague who sold your work as his? How about that friend who is never around when you need her? To move forward, you need to forgive. Forgiving does not mean doing someone else a favour, it means that you have let go and released tension for your own benefit.

People who have found the strength to fully forgive can experience remarkable results. In some instances, they no longer suffer from ailments such as chronic migraines, constipation or other diseases. One man even dropped six pounds within two days without changing his diet. Picture how fantastic you would feel if you were suddenly at peace with others! One effective technique you can use to help you forgive someone is to write a “total truth letter” to vent your anger. Write down things that have angered you, and you will notice that acknowledging your pain and grudges is the first step toward forgiveness.

Think positively!

Once you have taken care of unfinished business, you will hopefully feel like you are already making significant progress toward your goals. Now, let us make sure that your thoughts are in order, too. Face it: you are often your own biggest enemy. Most of us harbour negative thoughts about ourselves, so-called limiting beliefs, where we fixate on the things, we think we cannot do. This mentality can be very damaging, as this one example shows.

A railroad worker got trapped in a refrigerated freight wagon while carrying out some repairs. Panicked, he could not stop thinking about the possibility of his freezing to death and decided to write a last message to his family. The next morning, he was found dead in the wagon. And although he showed physical signs of having frozen to death, the wagon's cooling system was actually out of order, and the temperature inside the wagon was a temperate 13°C. The man had essentially died through his own negative thinking.

To succeed, you need to stem, if not eliminate completely, your negative thoughts. Yet if you look deep enough, self-love is often found underneath self-criticism. You might think, "I'm fat and lazy," but if you examine this thought, what you're really saying is, "I'm scared." You are scared that you might get sick by being overweight, and in your self-criticism, you are asking yourself to take better care of your body. You're really saying inside: "I care about myself. I want to be healthy and strong and I deserve to feel great about my body!" This is an expression of self-love.

By transitioning from judgment to admitting fear, to a request for action and then acknowledging love, you will start changing your limiting beliefs into thoughts that are positive and beneficial. So, stop judging yourself and start talking to yourself like you know your real value!

Build your mastermind group

Having personal resolve is crucial on your path to success, but you cannot walk that path on your own. Highly successful people always have others to inspire or mentor them along the way. The thing you can do is to create a support group. You can do this by gathering a so-called mastermind group, a supportive circle of people with whom you can share ideas and challenges. Consider identifying six people with whom you are close and hold scheduled conferences or Skype calls where each person takes 15 minutes to pose questions. For you to get the most value from these sessions, each group member should excel at a skill you wish to learn or have achieved a goal you covet.

For example, if you are a small business owner, it might be advantageous to include one or two successful entrepreneurs from your industry in your group. Other professionals such as consultants, lawyers or investment bankers can also be of great help. Another powerful way you can find support is to identify a mentor. Even though it is tempting to ask advice from friends or co-workers, it is far more useful to ask people who have already achieved what you want to achieve. You need not be shy about approaching successful people, as most will be eager to share their recipe for success with you.

For example, when motivational speaker Les Brown started his career, only Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, an acclaimed motivational guru, had faith in him. When Brown approached Peale, the latter was honoured to share his experiences and ensured that Brown was well-equipped to become a successful coach and speaker. You can get the ball rolling by writing an email to someone you think would make a suitable mentor and ask if they could spare 15 minutes per month for you to share ideas and ask questions.

Create meaningful, honest relationships!

To get the most benefit out of your support network, you must first lay a solid foundation of honesty and appreciation to build meaningful relationships. Telling the truth can be scary. But we must tell the truth if we are to create and foster our connections with others. Consider the story of Jack Canfield and Larry Prince and their non-profit, Foundation for Self-Esteem.

The two men submitted a proposal to design a training program for job hunters for the Los Angeles County Office for Education. However, when they realized the restrictions of the program, they decided to inform the county officers that they could not comply with the regulations, thus risking losing the competition and the \$730,000 grant. But because of their honesty, they actually ended up winning the

competition! In addition to honesty, appreciation of others is often undervalued in relationships. In a study of some 200 companies, employees rated appreciation as the number-one motivator of a list of ten motivational themes; managers and supervisors, however, ranked appreciation in eighth place.

It is clear that we want to be more appreciated at work; so be sure you do your bit by showing appreciation for others. How exactly do you do this? It depends on the type of person you are, whether auditory, visual or tactile. The best way to appreciate others is to discover what makes them tick and combine different ways to express appreciation. For instance, you could invite someone for dinner, give them an encouraging pat on the back, praise them over the phone or write them a thank-you card. But crucially, be as authentic as possible. You should not hide the truth when it needs to be told. But also remember to honour and thank the people who support you.

Being a “wealthy” person means so much more than just having a lot of cash in the bank

Do you agree that “money is the root of all evil?” If so, you need to redefine what wealth means to you. Most of us think that wealth is only about money, our assets or possessions. However, it is much more than that! Wealth also contains intellectual, human and civic facets. In terms of financial assets, you may ask; what goals do I have for my property, and what stocks and bonds would I like to own?

Aside from tangible assets, try to also see how your relationships, health, morals and habits connect with how you create wealth. Also consider your education, your reputation and your skills. Bearing these factors in mind, you can start making your wealth work to your advantage. Many financially successful people consider their human and intellectual assets to be more valuable than their financial assets, as health, happiness and relationships form a foundation for lasting financial success.

Another factor that will add considerably to your personal well-being is to offer your time to a worthy cause. Helping others has a remarkable effect on keeping us content and satisfied in our lives. Studies on volunteerism have shown that people who help others enjoy longer and healthier lives. Also, those of us who start volunteering and helping others at a young age are more likely to benefit from a successful career later on.

Consider which causes are closest to your heart. For example, if you love to read, you could volunteer to read to the blind. You could even start a business that makes books for blind people. To get the most out of what life can offer, you need to become “wealthy,” which means so much more than just having financial assets.

What I took from it

You can achieve your greatest ambitions, but it takes some know-how. Following and practicing the principles of success will equip you to reach your personal and professional goals and live your dream life.

Cross off a nagging task on your to-do list, today. It may be as simple as filing some papers or getting your car’s oil checked, but completing a neglected task, even if just one per day, will make a huge difference toward achieving your more ambitious goals.

Ask someone you admire for 15 minutes of their time. Find someone who has achieved a dream similar to your own and ask for 15 minutes of their time per month to advise and mentor you. The worst they can say is “no,” and in the best case, you might find a person who will be an invaluable resource in helping you live the life you want

Think And Grow Rich

Napoleon Hill

In our culture, any book with the words 'rich' or 'success' in the title has a better than average chance of selling well; money and external achievement are basic to our time, as rank and honour were to the Middle Ages. A compelling title might explain initial rushes to buy a book, but in the last 60 years, the world has bought over 15 million copies of Think and Grow Rich. Why?

Napoleon Hill refused to accept that success was the domain of luck or background or the gods and wanted to provide a concrete plan for success that depended entirely on us. The book also sold because it was not simply Hill's dreamed-up ideas, but an amalgamation of the success secrets of hundreds of America's most successful men beginning with his patron, steel baron Andrew Carnegie.

Carnegie had given Hill letters of introduction to the likes of Henry Ford, and Thomas Edison, and he would spend 20 years absorbing their experience and insights. Hill's mission was simply to know 'how the wealthy become that way', and that approach to success became the eight-volume Law of Success (1928).

Think and Grow Rich is the condensed form of this larger work. The early pages allude to a secret that the book contains but does not spell out. Hill suggests we 'stop for a moment when it presents itself, and turn down a glass, for that occasion will mark the most important turning point in your life'. Try to resist that! The book is easy to read; it is philosophically, setting out the things 'which work', and leaving others, rightfully, to the realm of mystery.

The three most powerful points I took from the book was;

1. Wealth creation is a product of mind, combining reasoning, imagination and tenacity.
2. What the mind of man can conceive and believe, it can achieve
3. Since all thought tends to find its physical equivalent, we need to focus on positive thoughts so that positivity will manifest itself in your life.

Money and the spirit

Near the end of Think and Grow Rich, Hill admits that the main reason he wrote Think and Grow Rich was 'the fact that millions of men and women are paralysed by the fear of poverty'. This was in the America of the 1930's, still scarred by the Depression, when most people were focused on avoiding poverty rather than getting rich. The book did not stop at poverty avoidance but dared to be about becoming fabulously rich. Rest assured that it is not a greed manual as some might suggest.

The link between spiritual values and making money is something people may find difficult to take seriously or even comprehend, yet it is the very expression of Western morality. Wealth creation is a product of mind, combining reasoning, imagination and tenacity. Hill understood that uniqueness, expressed in that a refined idea or product, would always eventually meet with monetary reward.

The concept that all earned riches and achievement comes from the mind is commonplace now - Recent success books like The Secret is acknowledgement of that. Yet in 1937 Hill was already talking about 'brain capital' and the marketing of one's self as a provider of non-physical services. The sage-like qualities of the book are encapsulated in its title: 'Think and grow rich' is effectively the motto, not of Hill's, but of our era.

Desire

Hill relates the story of Edwin C Barnes, who arrived on Thomas Edison's doorstep one day and announced that he was going to be the inventor's business partner. He was given a minor job but chose not to see himself as just another cog in the Edison business wheel, imagining himself as the inventor's silent partner. This he eventually did become. Barnes intuitively knew the success secret of willingness to burn all bridges, ensuring there is no retreat to a former, mediocre life. Definiteness of purpose always yields results, and Hill includes a six-step method, developed by Andrew Carnegie, for turning 'white-hot desires' into reality.

Hill counsels never to worry if others think your ideas are crazy. Marconi's friends took him to a mental hospital for believing that he could send 'messages through the air' (he invented radio). Hill's famous statement is: 'What the mind of man can conceive and believe, it can achieve', but his great insight is that no more effort is required to aim high in life than to accept an existence of misery and lack. He quotes the verse: 'I worked for a menial's hire only to learn dismayed, that any wage I had asked of life, life would have willingly paid.'

Infinite intelligence

A defining feature of this classic is its respect for the ineffable, being possibly the first of this century's prosperity classics to suggest that mental attunement with 'Infinite Intelligence' (the Universe, or God) is the source of wealth. Hill realised that consciousness was not confined to the brain; rather, the brain was an element of the great unified Mind. Therefore, to be open to this larger mind was to have access to all knowledge, power and creativity.

He mentions Edison's retreats to his basement where, in the absence of sound and light, he would simply 'receive' his ideas. A person receptive to this realm is likened to a pilot flying high above where normal people work and play.

The subconscious and our connection to Infinite Intelligence

Hill illustrates the concept of Infinite Intelligence through analogy to a radio receiver. Just as we can receive important messages if we are tuned in, thoughts we hold about ourselves are effectively beamed out to the world through the subconscious, boomeranging back as our 'circumstances'. By understanding that our experiences matter only because of how we perceive them, and becoming the master of our own thoughts, we can control what filters into our subconscious.

It becomes a better reflection of what we actually desire, and 'broadcasts' to the infinite realm clear messages of those desires. Since all thought tends to find its physical equivalent, we create the right conditions for manifesting our desires. This is why it is important to write down the exact figure of how much money we want to possess. This amount, once entrenched in our subconscious, is removed from the conscious mind and its doubts, and helps to shape our actions and decisions towards its realisation.

The concept extends to prayer. Most people give up on prayer because it does not work for them, but Hill believed this to be essentially a failure of method. Whatever we seek through prayer has slim chances of eventuating if it is just a heartfelt wish, muttered through the conscious mind. What we desire cannot remain at this level - it must become part of our unconscious being, almost existing outside of us, for it to really have effect.

What I took from it

Hill's central idea, that the source of wealth is non-material, is yet to be fully appreciated - we still tend to worry about our level of education or amount of capital more than about intangible assets such as persistence, vision, and the ability to tap into the Infinite and shape the subconscious. Successful people are shy of attributing their wealth or influence to such 'spiritual' abilities, but Hill knew their importance. This is why I love this book and will most likely always be part of my Top 10 books of all time. I highly recommend making reading this book an annual event in your life.

This book goes beyond just money. The book covers topics like faith, persistence, decisions, procrastination and creating a mastermind of people around you. Hill tries at the outset to define 'rich' in terms of quality friendships, family harmony, good work relationships and spiritual peace. Further, he warns us not to rely on position or force of authority, remarking that most great leaders began as excellent followers and that we have to learn how to serve before we can achieve.

Psychology

“The greatest discovery of my generation is that human beings can alter their lives by altering their attitudes of mind.” — William James

A New Earth

Eckhart Tolle

For a few months now I have refrained myself from watching any news because when I watched it, it is hard for me not to get depressed by all the conflicts and man-made catastrophes plaguing groups of people all over the world. The media thrives and survives on selling bad news. Instilling fear and uncertainty; their main driver. In A New Earth, Tolle expands on the powerful ideas from his first book; The Power of Now - to show how transcending our ego-based state of consciousness is not only essential to personal happiness, but also the key to ending conflict and suffering throughout the world.

Tolle describes how our attachment to the ego creates the dysfunction that leads to anger, jealousy, and unhappiness, and shows us how to awaken to a new state of consciousness and follow the path to a truly fulfilling existence. Even if there is plenty in society that is improving, there just seems to be something wrong with humanity in general – our perpetual violence, our greedy destruction.

So, what is the underlying cause of all these conflicts and constant misery? The answer, according to Eckhart Tolle, is found in our minds. By being too caught up in either the past or the future and by worrying too much, our egos dominate and steer us away from the true happiness and fulfilment of the present moment. In short if we overcome our egos, we can create a better world, says Tolle.

The three most powerful points I took from the book were;

1. That the problem with the ego is that it tricks us into thinking that knowing ourselves is the same as knowing about ourselves
2. Whether you are struggling to make ends meet financially or have plenty of money in the bank, having a true-life purpose is the only thing that will bring you contentment
3. When you attain a state of enlightenment, your motivation to act will stem from enjoyment rather than feelings of desire or wanting

Madness and violence in today's society.

Most people say we live in crazy, overwhelming times. One of the most renowned Indian sages, Ramana Maharshi, once said that the “mind is maya.” In Hinduism, the word maya describes a form of collective mental illness. In fact, most ancient religions agree that dysfunction – even madness – makes up a large part of our natural way of living.

Buddhism articulates this idea differently, describing the mind's natural state as ‘dukkha’, one of suffering and misery. Buddha saw dukkha as an essential component of the human condition. In Christianity, the concept of sin, when translated from the ancient Greek of the New Testament, means “to miss the mark.” Therefore, to sin means to miss the point of human existence, according to Tolle.

And yet despite humanity's profound achievements in art, medicine and technology, we still seem to be tainted by an insane, destructive force – regardless of whether we call it suffering, madness or sin. In fact, people of the twentieth century have both created and witnessed some of the most horrific, systematised methods of destruction, from bombs and machine guns to poisonous gas. Such developments led to the mass killings in Soviet Russia and to the brutal Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia, responsible for massacring a quarter of the nation's population.

Even today such violence, greed and hate continue, not only among ourselves but also toward other species and even the Earth itself. We destroy forests, pollute the air and water and mistreat and slaughter animals in factory farms. Though many religions have tried to provide ways to counter or

mitigate these apparently very human tendencies, few have discovered the way to stem violence.

A cure to our inner madness.

People have always attempted to improve society. An idea such as communism is an example of a philosophy inspired by good, yet as an organising principle it failed, as the people who tried to lead this new society lacked the proper state of consciousness and ability to change themselves, says Tolle. To guide us, we still have the enduring wisdom of ancient religious teachers, from Jesus to Buddha to Lao Tzu, the author of the Tao Te Ching. However, many of these teachings have been misunderstood or distorted by both the teachers' contemporaries and following generations.

Ideas were often added to such teachings that bore no relation to the original message, and some teachers were ridiculed and killed – or sometimes, in contrast, even worshipped as gods. In this fashion, an original message of kindness, humility and unity might be twisted into a religion of hate and division – becoming part of the very insanity it was trying to cure in the first place. Considering that Jesus spoke about empathy and kindness, it is shocking that brutal periods such as the Crusades and the Spanish Inquisition could take place under the banner of Christianity.

The desperate search for a way to rid ourselves of destructive habits can be seen in how we live today. Ironically, it is this pattern that is threatening the very survival of humanity. Progress in science and technology has only accelerated our capacity to destroy ourselves and our planet, and magnify the problems created by the egoistic human mind.

Although slavery and torture have always been part of human history, the twentieth century and its cycle of brutality has raised the stakes to an unsustainable level. The need for a fundamental shift in our actions and how we live in the world can be stated simply as, “evolve or die.”

The ego and I

Identifying with the ego keeps us floundering in our thoughts, feelings and desires to connect with anything outside of ourselves. It perpetuates our misunderstanding of the world. It is time to stop identifying with the ego, and release it, says Tolle. The problem with the ego is that it tricks us into thinking that knowing ourselves is the same as knowing about ourselves.

The world today feeds on ego. We maintain the myth that our identity is defined through our accomplishments, backgrounds and material possessions. Letting go of the ego, however, is far more than simply giving up our attachment to material goods. It also requires the recognition that what we normally refer to as the self – the “I,” or the stream of consciousness that feels, thinks and forms opinions – is not who we are.

This self – the ego – is a mental construct, according to Tolle - a story we tell ourselves about who we are. The true “I” is the I who can observe this stream of consciousness from the outside. Releasing the ego is not an easy thing to do, but it is necessary as it is the source of all our discontent, insecurities and feelings of anxiety.

The effect of being led by your ego

You may know the feeling of experiencing something that is annoying or hurtful and then, instead of letting the issue go, turning it over in your head until there is no room in your mind for anything else. I know I have been guilty of that in my own relationships.

The consequences of ego-driven over-thinking are alienation and suffering and only leads to conflict and unhappiness. When we think too much, we constantly ruminate over past hurts or dwell on anxiety

about the future. Spiritual texts provide many examples of negative over-thinking. Tolle mentions one story in particular of two Zen monks, Tanzan and Ekido. Tanzan and Ekido were walking down a muddy road when they saw a young woman trying to keep her silk kimono clean as she tried to cross the road. Wanting to help, Tanzan picked her up and carried her safely across. The two monks walked on in silence, but after five hours, Ekido could no longer contain his outrage. He said to Tanzan, "We monks are not supposed to do things like that!" Tanzan said simply, "I put the girl down hours ago. Are you still carrying her?"

The majority of us are like Ekido, constantly collecting situations, resentments, hurts and other negative emotions that prevent us from enjoying life. Instead, we should take inspiration from nature, says Tolle - such as examining the behaviour of ducks. After a fight, ducks quickly separate and swim away in opposite directions as if nothing happened. I picture myself in a similar situation! Mostly I would continue thinking about the event, fuelling resentment and anger within myself, creating stories and speculating about the other person - I am sure I am not alone doing that. It would be far better to let go of the incident and return to the present moment, which is where we can always find peace.

Your outer purpose and the inner purpose.

Whether you are struggling to make ends meet financially or have plenty of money in the bank, having a true-life purpose is the only thing that will bring you contentment. But how do you find it? We all share the same inner purpose, says Tolle: to awaken by experiencing a change in consciousness that separates thought from awareness. This state of enlightenment may also be described as presence, or a state in which we are conscious but without thought.

Instead of being caught up in the ego and our thoughts, we can recognize that our real "I" is the awareness that exists outside of our thoughts. Being aware of this inner purpose is vital. Outer purposes, like making money or building a career, are always subject to external change. Inevitably, then, the things that feed our outer purposes will at some point let us down.

Tolle goes on to say; say you believe your purpose is to raise children. This means that you depend on your children depending on you! What happens when they grow up, leave home and no longer need you? In addition, if you define your purpose as being the best at something, it also means you depend on others being "worse" than you. In this way, meaning in your life depends on another person's failure, says Tolle.

We should remember that it is not the goals or actions themselves but rather the state of consciousness from which they come that determine whether something is motivated by ego. A person working as an activist for homeless people, for example, may have an outer purpose that seems selfless and noble, but she might be doing it for the selfish inner reason of ego: to gain accolades or to feel superior to others working in "lesser" fields.

Acceptance and enjoyment lead to enlightenment

Do you ever wish you could dial down the pressures of your daily life to experience more peace, perhaps even a sense of enlightenment? Then you need to learn how to enjoy and accept life as it is right now. But how do you do this?

Tolle explains that acceptance is the willingness to do whatever you need to do in the moment, in a peaceful, open fashion – even when a task is not inherently enjoyable, perhaps even stressful like filing your taxes, taking a driving test or doing the laundry. The aim is to reach a state of mind where you can accept the task and be at peace with it. If you cannot bring yourself to enjoy – or at least accept – what you are doing, you should stop the activity. If you carry on without a joyful or accepting mind-set, you are surrendering responsibility for the one thing you have true control of in your life – your state of mind. Only you can control the way you deal with the situation's life presents.

When you attain a state of enlightenment, your motivation to act will stem from enjoyment rather than feelings of desire or wanting. The good news is that enjoyment happens naturally when you are able to focus on the present moment. Doing this enables the joy of 'being' to move through your body – this is the joy of consciousness! Remember, though, that even if you are able to affect the lives of others through the enjoyment and enthusiasm you show, you must not forget that you are still human. Maintaining humility will keep the ego in check when it feels the need to crow about any achievements or successes you have had.

What I took from it

The human ego fuels a dangerous, self-sustaining cycle of violence and destruction within each person and in the world at large. Learning the destructive nature of the ego is essential to letting go of it and experiencing the satisfaction of non-judgement, non-resistance and non-attachment. This is the way to achieve both internal joy and greater world peace.

A quick win from Tolle is to just breathe. Most of us are too distracted by the constant bombardment of thoughts and anxieties within ourselves to feel our inner aliveness. Focusing on your breath will help you reconnect with this. Simply take two or three deep breaths and feel your limbs, fingers, toes, stomach and chest swell with air as you fill yourself with life. It is an incredibly simple and powerful exercise, yet we so often neglect to do it with the intent to calm and focus ourselves. I have been doing this simple exercise for a while now and it is working well for me.

A Whole New Mind

Daniel H. Pink

Our brain has two parts: the left hemisphere for details and the right hemisphere for more holistic, big-picture thinking. Since ancient times, people have assumed a division of the brain into a left and a right hemisphere, a neurological divide that has been supported by modern science.

While today we know that every activity, we engage in requires cooperation between both the right and left hemisphere, we are also aware that each hemisphere takes the dominant role in certain activities. Generally, we can say that the left hemisphere focuses on breaking things into details, while the right hemisphere is in charge of providing the broader picture.

These differing roles can be seen, for instance, in the context of language use. Much of our language originates in the left hemisphere, where we process symbols in sequence (for example, when reading). However, the right hemisphere also plays an important role by allowing us to take a step back from the language itself and interpret the context of the message. Without our right cerebral hemisphere, we would not be able to understand irony or metaphors.

The seven most powerful points I took from the book were;

1. As we move from the Information Age to the Conceptual Age, Right-Directed Thinking is becoming more and more important.
2. In an age of material abundance, design has become crucial for most modern businesses.
3. Nowadays, as we move into the Conceptual Age, facts can be accessed easily online, and so knowledge has become less relevant. Instead, what is important is an aptitude for story: the ability to place facts in context and deliver them as a story
4. Today, as knowledge is widely available (for example, online), it is no longer necessary to store individual facts in your memory. Instead, what has become important is an aptitude for symphony i.e. putting the pieces together is more important than taking them apart.
5. As computers take over more and more tasks, abilities unique to people, such as empathizing with others, become more important.
6. Light-heartedness will likely play an ever more important and beneficial role both at work and outside of work.
7. Now that our material needs are met, we search for meaning, purpose and fulfilment in life.

Reasoning is another area where the hemispheres have different, complementary roles. Responses that originate from the left are derived from what we have learned in the past. If someone points a gun at you, it is the left hemisphere that tells you to be alarmed because you have learned that guns are dangerous.

The right hemisphere, on the other hand, does not recognize the gun, but it can draw on more intuitive knowledge and recognize other signs of danger, like an angry facial expression. The fact that all cultures tend to interpret facial expressions similarly illustrates how natural and intuitive these functions of the right hemisphere are.

We have always sought to understand which part of our brain is responsible for different activities. Today we know that although the two halves are constantly cooperating, they specialize in different ways of thinking. Our brain has two parts: the left hemisphere for details and the right hemisphere for more holistic, big-picture thinking.

Historically, the right side of the brain and its way of thinking has been undervalued

Ever since we discovered that the left side of the brain is responsible for more analytical tasks, it has been viewed as being of greater importance than the right side. But where does this idea of the hemispheres being “separate but unequal” come from?

First of all, it was once thought that because the left hemisphere allows people to solve analytical tasks, it must be the side that separates us from animals.

Second, we know that the left side of the brain actually controls the right side of the body, which is responsible for many important movements in a world where most people are right-handed and where Western language is written from left to right.

This difference in appreciation also manifests itself commonly when the two halves and their different modes of thinking are used as metaphors for different approaches to life. Left-Directed Thinking is thought to draw on traits from the left hemisphere, meaning it is sequential, literal, functional, textual and analytic. These traits would then also dominate a Left-Directed thinker’s approach to life.

Right-Directed Thinking, on the other hand, would be characterized by being simultaneous, metaphorical, aesthetic, contextual, and synthetic – all traits of Right-Directed thinkers. Much as the left side of the brain has been appreciated more than the right, Left-Directed Thinking has been viewed as the more successful approach to life. This can be seen on a societal level – for example, in the exam’s students must take in the United States. These exams reward linear, sequential thinking to arrive at a single correct answer in the time allotted, and thus teach students to reason like computers.

Today, however, the undervaluing of Right-Directed Thinking is slowly coming to an end, as the ability to see the “big picture” is growing in importance. Historically, the importance of the right side of the brain and the way of thinking it represents has been undervalued.

In the Conceptual Age, Right-Directed Thinking is becoming more and more important

Today, we live in an era of abundance enabled by left-brain thinking. How? To be successful in the Information Age, you had to accumulate a lot of knowledge, most importantly by getting a college education. As this option became increasingly available to everyone, more and more people were able to follow this inherently left-brain method to success and become well-paid white-collar workers. Thus, the Information Age has contributed to the economic growth and rising living standards we now enjoy. However, this situation is changing. Today, Right-Directed Thinking is becoming more and more important for a number of reasons.

First of all, certain right-brain directed aptitudes are highly prized: these are a sense for design, story, symphony, empathy, play and meaning. Someone who develops their aptitude in these areas gains a crucial competitive advantage in today’s crowded marketplace, especially as left-brain intensive white-collar work is increasingly being outsourced to low-cost countries.

But Right-Directed Thinking is also gaining importance outside the office. Living in this era of abundance has made us yearn for the immaterial: we search for purpose and meaning in life, and Right-Directed Thinking is how people excel at such ambiguous tasks. These developments are part of a change of eras, as we move away from the Information Age into the so-called Conceptual Age.

In this age, it is no longer an aptitude for “high tech” that is important; rather, the skills in demand fall under the categories of high concept, meaning the ability to combine unrelated ideas from different spheres into completely new inventions, and high touch, meaning the ability to empathize with others. The rising demand for these attributes can be seen in the fact that students are now taught classes on developing their creativity and increasing their empathy.

As can be seen, the move towards the Conceptual Age is happening everywhere: at school, at the office, and in our hearts and minds. As we move from the Information Age to the Conceptual Age, Right-Directed Thinking is becoming more and more important.

In an age of material abundance, design has become crucial for most modern businesses

If you look around, you will find that every object in sight has been carefully designed, from the furniture you are sitting on to the clothes you are wearing. But what constitutes good design? Basically, good design combines utility with significance. For example, a graphic designer making a brochure will try to use good design to make the brochure easy to read (utility) and to transmit ideas that the readable words themselves cannot convey (significance).

The ability to create good design requires both kinds of thinking: Left-Directed Thinking helps find the utility component, whereas Right-Directed Thinking helps find creative ways to add significance. Today, good design is more important than ever. This is because people are more aware of what constitutes good and bad design. For example, these days most people can easily distinguish between different fonts like Times New Roman and Arial, but just 20 years ago, only typesetters would have been aware of such knowledge.

Also, people are more aware of the impact that design can have. For example, a poorly designed ballot during the US election in the year 2000 actually confused so many voters that it is likely the outcome of the election would have been different if the ballot had been better designed. Also, research indicates that improving the design of a school's physical environment can increase the performance of students.

This trend means that product design has become a crucial aspect of businesses. It is no longer enough to produce functional products at a reasonable price; customers demand good design. This trend can be seen even in such trivial objects as kitchen utensils: bottle openers now come shaped like animals, and spoons may have faces imprinted on them. Research at the London Business School shows that for every percent of sales invested in product design, a company's sales and profits rise by an average of 3 to 4 percent.

To be successful today, presenting facts is not enough; you must know how to tell stories

Throughout history, telling stories has been an integral part of the human experience. We tend to remember stories far better than individual facts, and we also tend to see our lives as stories: they begin somewhere and unfold from there into a certain direction. Looking at life as a story gives us a sense of purpose and meaning.

In the Information Age, factual knowledge was very important: knowing more than others allowed you to stand out from the crowd. Yet nowadays, as we move into the Conceptual Age, facts can be accessed easily online, and so knowledge has become less relevant. Instead, what is important is an aptitude for story: the ability to place facts in context and deliver them as a story. Indeed, in various fields of business such as advertising and consulting, being able to tell a story is crucial to success.

Similarly, the ability to understand and tell stories is becoming increasingly important for doctors. Nowadays, many medical schools are offering their students courses in the humanities so they can become more sensitive to the stories their patients tell. Telling stories has also become a keyway for companies and individuals to make their goods and services stand out in a crowded marketplace. This is because people think of their lives as stories, so they also find it easier to relate to companies and products if they hear about them as stories, not as a series of facts.

There is even a movement called "organizational storytelling," where organizations collect the stories their employees tell so that the company has relatable human stories to share. For example, rather

than relying solely on manuals to train their technicians, Xerox collects all the stories their technicians tell about repairing machines and passes them on for others to learn from. These phenomena demonstrate how, in the Conceptual Age, storytelling is becoming more important than ever.

Putting the pieces together is more important than taking them apart

In the past, what was important in most jobs was the ability to acquire knowledge. Typically, this was done by looking at a complex topic, taking it apart and memorizing the individual pieces of knowledge it consists of. This approach is also emphasized by the modern education system: disassemble and memorize. But today, as knowledge is widely available (for example, online), it is no longer necessary to store individual facts in your memory. Instead, what has become important is an aptitude for symphony: being able to combine individual elements and put them together to form something greater, much like a composer or conductor does with music.

This is because, first of all, we live in a very diverse age, and people who can combine expertise from multiple cultures and languages are better suited for such an age. Second, the life cycle of a new product is becoming increasingly short: yesterday's innovation is tomorrow's near-obsolete commodity. This means companies must constantly innovate, and the best innovators are those able to combine unrelated ideas and thoughts into something new. For example, when George de Mestral saw how burdock seeds stuck to his dog's fur thanks to the tiny hooks that covered them, he realized he could use something similar to bind materials together. This led him to invent Velcro.

The aptitude for symphony also helps people see the big picture instead of the individual parts, which can bring both success and happiness. Consider a study that showed self-made millionaires are more likely than average to be dyslexic. This is significant because dyslexics struggle with linear reasoning but excel at broad, big-picture thinking – a trait that seems to make them more successful than average. Also, big-picture thinking can be useful in your personal life: it is easier to deal with stress and worries if you see that they are just small parts of the big picture.

Abilities unique to people, such as empathizing with others, become more important

Many of the jobs that existed in the Industrial Age and Information Age are increasingly being taken over by computers and machines – for example, assembly-line work and data analysis. In the face of this development, it is comforting to know there are some tasks that computers will never be able to do. While any work that can be reduced to a set of rules that must be followed can be given to machines or outsourced to other countries, tasks that demand a deeper understanding of the subtleties of human interaction are more immune to such developments. At the core of such tasks is empathy, which is important in a variety of fields.

For example, think of lawyers: whereas legal research could be done by smart algorithms or lawyers elsewhere in the world, the crucial part of a lawyer's job – to empathize with clients and understand their needs – is irreplaceable. Similarly, physicians cannot be totally substituted by computers because computers do not feel empathy, and patients want their doctors to empathize with them. In fact, empathy is increasingly being recognized as a very important part of healing.

Not only is empathy important in the professional sphere but it is necessary for understanding others in general. Empathy is a universal language, and research has shown it is communicated mostly through universally understood facial expressions. Also, an aptitude for empathy supports and enables other aptitudes, like design and story, as it helps you to see things from another person's perspective.

The good news is that everyone can learn to become more empathetic. For example, at Stanford Business School, students are already taking classes in "interpersonal dynamics." Likewise, people from government agencies like the FBI and CIA receive training in reading facial expressions, the language of empathy.

Light-heartedness will play an important and beneficial role both at work and outside of work

You may have heard that one should not mix business with pleasure, or work with play. But today, introducing elements of play, meaning humour and light-heartedness, into all areas of life is not only more common but necessary. To understand how much more prevalent the element of play is, consider the huge industry that has grown around video games. They are now an essential part of the lives of young Americans, with half of the population over six years of age playing video games.

This increased tendency to play has brought with it some positive influences. Research has shown that video games can promote skills vital in the Conceptual Age. For example, the most popular video games are role-playing games (i.e., simulation games), and these can improve players' aptitude for empathy.

Another element of play, humour, is also becoming increasingly valuable in the world of work because humour reduces hostility, deflects criticism, relieves tension, improves morale and helps communicate difficult messages. And which side of the brain is humour generated in? The right side, because humour requires skills specific to it: placing situations in context, seeing the big picture and seeing things from new angles.

At the same time, this new-found joyfulness is likely to make us more productive and fulfilled – both in private as well as professionally. For example, research has shown that laughter decreases stress hormones and boosts the immune system, and that playing video games at work can increase productivity and job satisfaction.

Now that our material needs are met, we search for meaning, purpose and fulfilment in life

Most people feel the desire to seek some kind of meaning in their lives; it is a fundamental drive in humans and has become one of the essential aptitudes of the Conceptual Age. Nowadays, with aging populations and the constant threat of terrorism, and with increasing prosperity thanks to technological advancement, spiritual and immaterial concerns are becoming of profound importance to people.

This means that spirituality, the search for the higher meaning and purpose of life (for example, through religion) has recently become increasingly important – both in business and in private life. This is exemplified by the fact that employees today increasingly want to experience greater spirituality at their workplaces. The rise of new businesses like yoga studios and “green” products also demonstrate how spirituality and the new emphasis on meaning are affecting the business landscape.

Similarly, increased spirituality is impacting our personal health. Studies have shown it can improve maladies and it reduces the risk of suicide. It has even been found that people who regularly go to a place of worship like a church, mosque or synagogue live longer than others. These effects are why many medical schools now have courses on spirituality, and why many physicians take some form of spiritual history of their patients.

Of course, the pursuit of meaning is strongly connected to the pursuit of happiness. While happiness is derived from a mix of biological and environmental factors, people who find meaning in life are also the most likely to be happy.

What I took from it

It used to be thought that right-brain aptitudes are useless. But as we move from the Information Age into the Conceptual Age, they are becoming increasingly important. Being innovative, creative and empathetic are traits that help us succeed professionally, while also increasing our personal well-being. While left-brain thinking is still important, it is insufficient on its own.

Breakfast With Socrates

Robert Rowland Smith

Perhaps you have always thought that philosophy is not your cup of tea. Think again. Philosophy is not only about asking big questions like, “What is the meaning of life?” It is about asking the right questions, big and small. So says Robert Smith in his book, *Breakfast With Socrates*, published in 2009. Philosophy is as concerned with “How much should I tip the waiter?” as it is with “Does God exist?” It is about looking at the world around you and being able to make wise decisions throughout your everyday life, says Smith.

In fact, the original Greek word “philosophia” literally means “love of wisdom.” Wisdom is the skill of assessing a complicated world and making sound judgments through reflection, i.e. asking the right questions in different situations. Making wise decisions in your everyday life is philosophy.

A wise example in the real world; it would be wise to consider where, how and when your spinach was grown. Was it grown in a country that has had a recent salmonella outbreak? Were loads of fertilizer and pesticides used? When was it picked? How much longer will it be healthy to eat? These are questions a wise person asks to make a practical decision in the supermarket, says Smith.

However, wisdom should not be confused with cleverness. Cleverness is primarily concerned with triumphing over one’s opponent in an argument. Sure, you may have won an argument with your partner, but would it have been wiser to walk away in the first place? Are you happier with winning or living peacefully? Ultimately, you will be happier with philosophy in your life, says Smith. Ask yourself the big questions sometimes but ask the small questions always. Love wisdom. Practice reflection. Live philosophy. Philosophy arms you to make wise, practical decisions in a complex world.

The three most powerful points I took from the book were;

1. Wisdom is the skill of assessing a complicated world and making sound judgments through reflection, i.e. asking the right questions in different situations. Making wise decisions in your everyday life is philosophy.
2. It is only when you know that you would happily relive each moment of your life that you are the master of your destiny. Master your destiny. Become a superman.
3. Meditation relieves you from needless suffering by holding your focus in the moment, where it is impossible to desire anything other than what you have

Descartes: If you are awake, you are thinking, and therefore you must exist

Even though we do it every day, waking up can be quite a shock – we can wake up with a wicked hangover, after too little rest, or next to the wrong lover. But why does waking surprise us so? It is because in the moment before you awake, you are, by definition, asleep. You are not conscious of the fact that you are about to wake.

Philosophers have dwelled for hundreds of years on the subject of consciousness. Clearly, consciousness is complicated. How can you be certain you are awake? How can you know you are not dreaming about being awake? How do you know that everything around you are not an illusion meant to trick you?

In the 1630s, French philosopher René Descartes set out to answer these very questions. He committed to doubt absolutely everything and took nothing for granted, starting with consciousness. Descartes arrived at the basic understanding that he could doubt everything except the fact that he

doubted. And since doubting meant thinking, he knew he was thinking. And since thinking meant living, he knew he was living. Descartes then famously concluded, “Cogito, ergo sum” – I think, therefore I am. Even if you think you are asleep or dead, you are still thinking and therefore you are alive. You exist. This is Descartes’ proof of existence. This is why waking each morning is deeply philosophical. It is a daily embrace of consciousness and a re-affirmation of your own existence.

Freud: The morning routine is a fierce competition between the ego and superego

Certain of your own existence, you perform a series of morning rituals: shower, shave, dress, eat and rush out the door. As always, however, preparing to leave for work is more complicated than we imagine.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Sigmund Freud, the famous Austrian neurologist, immersed himself in the newly evolving field of psychoanalysis, a way of studying the unconscious mind. According to Freud, our minds consist of different forces constantly struggling with each other. The ego represents the part of an individual’s mind that aims mainly at living comfortably in routines without excessive stress or surprises.

The superego, on the other hand, demands we interpret what the rest of the world demands from us. The superego makes us feel obligated to shave, speak politely, wear appropriate clothing, and generally follow society’s rules. Getting ready to leave home in the morning is always a turning point in the ego/superego conflict. We prepare to abandon the calm, routine pleasures of the ego for the external regulations required by society and enforced by the superego.

The outside world will often require you to abandon your routines, present you with surprises and impose rules on your behaviour and appearance. The subway may be jammed, your hat may be blown into a puddle while you hail a taxi, and when your boss chides you for being late, you will have to respond politely. Consequently, every button you fasten and each shoelace you tie are in fact a surrendering of the ego to the superego. With each compromise, your superego takes you one step closer to the door.

Nietzsche: Abandon the herd’s fantasies, master your destiny and join the ranks of supermen

Every day, billions of human beings commutes in herd-like unison to toil in offices and complete series of arbitrary bureaucratic procedures under oppressive fluorescent lights. Perhaps you are sitting on the train reading this right now. Look to the right. Look to the left, asks Smith. Surrounded as you are by comrades of the herd, this is the perfect moment to consider the ideas of 19th-century hypercritical German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. He challenged us to ask ourselves, “What if I had to live this life over again? Would I be able to stand it?”

What parts of your life would be unbearable? Nietzsche asserted the doctrine of two worlds meaning that, in addition to reality, we invent a fantasy world to escape the drudgery of our real lives. While these fantasies are certainly consoling, Nietzsche said they are simply symptoms of weakness. We live vicariously through them, and thus do little to bring our dreams to reality. The herd marches on in near-perfect, hallucinatory unison.

Nietzsche believed the only way to escape the herd was to abandon the fantasy altogether. Without it, you must master your destiny by living for each moment and seeing the world for what it is. He called those able to do this “supermen.”

Supermen do not conform or submit to the fantasy demanded by the herd but instead embrace their individual non-conformity in all its rugged reality. They are not afraid to be different. They abandon their fantasies and vow to live so that they would happily relive every moment. It is only when you know that

you would happily relive each moment of your life that you are the master of your destiny. Master your destiny. Become a superman.

Marx: Work is wage slavery. You have nothing to lose but your chains

You have disengaged from the commuting herd and arrived at the location of your employment. As you cross the threshold, what sort of agreement are you getting yourself into? What is work really about?

Classically defined within the capitalist system, work is the exchange of one's labour for money. The nineteenth-century German philosopher and economist Karl Marx literally revolutionized the modern understanding of work through a key insight.

Fundamentally, Marx concluded that it is not an accident, nor the result of laziness, ability, or nature, that the average worker remains poor while the elite stay wealthy. In fact, the rich are effectively masters of the average worker, the wage slaves. The rich earn more than their labour is worth, actively prospering from the desperation of wage slaves, who are known as Marx's proletariat.

The proletariat consists of the working class within the capitalist structure. Capitalists, owners of the majority of assets, are the dominant class. Marx inspired revolutions around the world for decades with the claim that wage slaves, having "nothing to lose but their chains," should revolt against capitalists. What do you have to lose?

Weber: If you work hard and live simply, you will become wealthy

Shortly after Marx, one of sociology's founders, German Max Weber, offered competing ideas about the nature of work. While Marx believed that the wealthy are slave-masters who exploit the average worker, Weber believed that the rich benefit from the capitalist system because they were once poor but became wealthy through hard work and frugal living.

Weber called this phenomenon the "protestant work ethic." The idea made America and much of Western Europe very wealthy. Far from being slave-masters who exploit the average worker, Weber contended that wealth is the result of twin virtues: hard work and self-denial. He believed that hard work and frugality bring us closer to God, who rewards us accordingly with wealth.

You could certainly duck out early from work, head to the mall and blow your week's wages on designer clothing, lattes and a fancy dinner, but Weber would say that your poor work ethic and spendthrift ways will ultimately lead you to poverty and further away from God. So put in that overtime, eat dinner at home and say a little prayer before falling asleep.

Learn from French feminists: Let go of your gender and live in peace with your partner

Even the most tranquil relationships include some conflict. It is inevitable given the emotional and social investments involved. This makes it very difficult for each person to remain objective, unemotional and rational. Tensions are easily inflamed. People often blame their partner's faults on traits attributed to maleness and femaleness. Men are assumed to be insensitive and angry, women as emotional and overly dramatic. It can often seem as if the row is between mankind and womankind themselves.

In the 1970s, a group of female French feminists addressed this peculiar conflict in a unique way; their target was not men but the idea of gender altogether. Known as essentialists, they argued that there is no inherent quality that separates women and men. While physiological characteristics set them apart, there is no metaphysical or essential difference between the two. Any metaphysical difference would have to be more profound than mere differences in genitalia and hormones. So, when you are arguing

with your partner, you may unwittingly assert that they are fulfilling gender stereotypes: “Craig, you’re so unemotional. Can’t you just FEEL something?” or “Veronica, can’t you just think rationally and not get hysterical?” A related trap is an unwitting statement that your partner is not fulfilling his or her gender role appropriately: “Craig, why can’t you be strong?” or “Dammit, Veronica, why can’t you just be more understanding of my needs?”

These traps are real but avoidable if you are aware of respective gender stereotypes and avoid demonizing your partner with them. You may even be able to forget gender entirely and treat each other as equal human beings, regardless of societal expectations.

Buddhism: Meditation releases you from suffering

After a long day, you may enjoy meditating in the warm waters of your tub, conjuring up Eastern images of candles, oils, low lights, flowers and serene relaxation. Contrary to this image, Buddhist meditation is not about maximizing relaxation; rather, it is about heightened consciousness, says Smith. In the Buddhist tradition, meditation means allowing yourself to live completely in the moment, being intensely aware of everything in your vicinity.

You are conscious of each inhalation and exhalation. What is the difference in temperature you feel as you exhale? Inhale? How does it feel as the water slips between your toes? How does the cool, smooth tub feel on your back? Meditation is the process of training your mind to stay focused in the moment and to not drift off to other things going on in your life.

Your thoughts are inevitably drawn to wants and desires. A promotion at work, a new lover, a vacation fantasy. Your desires, however, inevitably result in suffering. You become attached to things and people. Attachment eventually creates suffering and enslavement. You begin to need the things and people to which you are attached to be happy, instead of being happy with what you have.

Meditation relieves you from needless suffering by holding your focus in the moment, where it is impossible to desire anything other than what you have. The heightened consciousness you experience during meditation releases you from the slavery of superficial desires, and thus from unnecessary suffering. Lower yourself into the tub’s warm embrace, close your eyes, and focus all your attention on this moment and no other.

Jung: Dreaming connects you to the collective unconscious, the world’s soul

The end of your waking hours is near. As you drift into deep slumber, consider the final element of your day - sleep itself. Sleep has confounded humanity for thousands of years, and, considering that we sleep for about 20 years of our lives, it is certainly an activity worth thinking about.

There are many competing ideas about what our exciting nocturnal scenarios, or dreams, mean. Freud’s colleague and psychoanalyst rival, Carl Jung, believed that not only do we have a personal unconscious but a combined human dream state as well. This idea obviously requires deeper exploration.

Jung believed that humans have subliminally drawn together a reserve of memories from the dawn of mankind. This is the collective unconscious. However, Jung thought this collective unconscious was more than just combined memories; it is the world’s soul, and when you dream, the world literally dreams through you. Every human that ever lived has contributed to the collective unconscious, and we are all connected to each other through it.

When you fall asleep, you are no longer an independent actor but part of a massive telepathic network of billions of humans unconsciously experiencing and contributing millions of years’ worth of memories to the world soul. Good night.

What I took from it

Philosophy arms you to make wise, practical decisions in a complex world.

How do ideas from the greatest thinkers impact my everyday life?

- Descartes: If you are awake, you are thinking, and therefore you must exist.
- Freud: The morning routine is a fierce psychological competition between our ego and superego
- Nietzsche: Abandon the herd's fantasies, master your destiny and join the ranks of supermen.
- Marx: Work is wage slavery. You have nothing to lose but your chains.
- Weber: If you work hard and live simply, you will become wealthy.

How can philosophy relieve my suffering and reconnect me to the world?

- Learn from French feminists. Let go of your gender and live in peace with your partner.
- Buddhism. Meditation releases you from suffering.
- Jung. Dreaming connects you to the collective unconscious, the world's soul

Enlightenment Now

Steven Pinker

Think things are bad today? If you get all your information from the daily news, you just might think we are living in the worst times ever. But the reality is, we occupy a period in time that is better than any other. If you look at the rates of violence, famine and poverty, they are each at all-time lows, while life expectancy, overall wealth and happiness levels are at all-time highs, so says Steven Pinker in his book Enlightenment Now.

Sure, the environment needs our attention, but even here, the rates of pollution are down drastically from what they were just a few decades ago. So rather than panic and despair, you actually have every reason to believe that things may continue to improve, with more diseases becoming things of the past, and even less poverty and hunger in the world.

How has all this been possible? Thank the Enlightenment, the movement that took us out of the Dark Ages and emphasized science, reason and humanism as the principles that might guide us to a better tomorrow, says Pinker

The three most powerful points I took from the book were;

1. With the emphasis on science, people began to value knowledge, especially as it pertained to certain universal human traits
2. the more diverse and interconnected a system becomes, the more resilient it becomes against entropy.
3. The Enlightenment believed problem-solving was the key to progress and resolving disputes, and in the twenty-first century, this has been by and large a success

The Enlightenment is at the heart of today's modern cosmopolitanism

If you are familiar with European history, you have probably heard of the period known as the Enlightenment. Sometimes referred to as the "age of reason," it was a historical watershed moment. Indeed, it profoundly influenced the future development of Western society. The Enlightenment started in the first half of the eighteenth century and it offered a bracing antidote to the rampant ignorance, terror and paranoia to which society had previously been in thrall.

Prior to the Enlightenment, spells of bad weather were blamed on witches or angry, sky-dwelling gods; oceans and forests were the domain of evil beasts; and scores of people were tortured and killed in the name of religion. It was high time for a change. And thus, four main Enlightenment themes began to take shape: reason, science, humanism and progress.

Reason means that there are things in the world that are non-negotiable – that no matter what your so-called sacred text or authoritarian leader says, only reason can dictate the ultimate right. A good example is slavery. Prior to the age of reason, slavery was seen as a fact of life, but as the values of Enlightenment spread, reason shook the foundations of this barbaric practice and eventually helped bring it down.

With the emphasis on science, people began to value knowledge, especially as it pertained to certain universal human traits. Early versions of neuroscience, psychology and cultural anthropology opened the door to humanism, which offered a secular way for people to understand and respect one another. Before this period, religious fervour had been responsible for the bloodbath of the Crusades, and humanism offered a moral footing to acknowledge that genocide and murderous conquests were not

acceptable.

Humanism also led to what is known as cosmopolitanism, which can be seen in today's modern values. Cosmopolitanism is a rejection of tribalism and the narrow-mindedness that pits one group against all others. It looks at everyone as a child of the world and recognizes that just because someone was born in a different country does not mean they are less deserving of the same rights.

Things might look worse than ever, but we are still benefiting of the Enlightenment

Though people did not know it at the turn of the nineteenth century, there is a very good reason for the establishment of a cosmopolitan system of global trade and mutual benefit. Why? Because the more diverse and interconnected a system becomes, the more resilient it becomes against entropy.

Entropy is described in the second law of thermodynamics, and it says that a closed system will eventually fall apart due to the impact of outside forces. If you build a sandcastle on the beach and walk away from it, the wind and the tide, as well as animals and other people, will all but guarantee its disappearance.

This law of entropy pertains to humans and the entire universe and it is why some people will keep insisting that things are in a state of decline. Every so often, another cultural critic will say that the benefits of the Enlightenment are long gone, and we are now circling the drain. According to them, one look at the news suffices to show that reason is out of favour and that war, violence, crime and resurgent tribalism mentalities reign supreme.

But first, it is important to recognize that an organism is not a closed system – and can therefore push back against entropy. This is part of why the Enlightenment can, and has, continued to flourish. By taking in a growing amount of energy from a variety of sources, an organism can increase the level of order rather than let that order fall apart. Now, if we look at any number of graphs and hard, factual data about the state of the world over the past hundred or more years, we can see that we are still in the process of adding energy and greatly improving.

Whether it is life expectancy, crime rates, happiness levels, wealth or quality of life, just about every measurable indicator of “the good life” has been on the rise and shows no sign of stopping.

Enlightenment has improved our life expectancy, health and sustenance

At the start of the Enlightenment, in the mid-eighteenth century, the global average life expectancy was 29 years. That is not good at all - even our hunter-gatherer ancestors are believed to have lived to around 32.5 years! But post-Enlightenment, the life expectancy of people around the world has increased by leaps and bounds.

One of the greatest factors is the reduction of the child mortality rate, which, statistics-wise, significantly improves overall life-expectancy numbers. And while far fewer infants are dying, mothers are also surviving childbirth at a much greater rate than they were just a few generations ago. It does not matter if you are 50, 60 or 70 years old – you can now expect to live longer than ever before.

In 1845, a 30-year-old person in Britain could expect to live another 30 years while an 80-year-old could count on about another five more. In 2011, that 30-year-old could expect another 52 years, while the 80-year-old could expect nine more years.

This kind of improvement is global: in Ethiopia, a ten-year-old in 1950 could expect 34 more years, but a ten-year-old today can expect 51 more years. These years can also be expected to be lived in better health than that of previous generations, thanks to further gains in knowledge that have led to the entire or near eradication of diseases such as polio, smallpox, measles and rubella.

In the 1800s and early 1900s, it did not matter if you were the poorest or the richest person in the world; you were just as likely to die from an infection. Just consider the son of thirtieth US president Calvin Coolidge. At 16 years old, Calvin Jr. succumbed to infection after suffering a particularly bad blister from a game of tennis.

Today, we place value on science and knowledge, and people know the benefits of washing their hands, using mosquito nets and boiling their drinking water. Also, remarkably, famine is very nearly a thing of the past. Just 150 years ago, children in Sweden were starving to death during long winters. And a mere 45 years ago, 35 percent of the world was malnourished. That number dropped to an all-time low of 13 percent in 2015. Making this even more impressive is the fact that five billion people have been added to the planet in that time. This is due to the science of agriculture and the progress that has been made, especially in our ability to use less land and water to grow more nutrient-packed grains.

Enlightenment has brought the world more wealth and less inequality

Prior to the Enlightenment, it was common for a nation's poor people to be forced into backbreaking labour for next to no pay. In England, the poor would grind up bones for fertilizer, while in Paris, they would be chained together and made to clean out the city's drains.

In 1820, close to 90 percent of the world was in extreme poverty, but this is when the tools of the Enlightenment really began to take effect. Between 1820 and 1900, global income tripled. Nations, like England, had begun using trade as a tool to improve international relations, pushing aside religious differences in favour of mutual benefit. This cosmopolitan attitude was taken up by many other countries and, gradually, wealth spread across the globe.

Between 1900 and 1950, the world income tripled again, and then it took only 33 years to triple a third time. Now, South Korea and Singapore are getting rich while Vietnam, Rwanda and El Salvador are doubling their income every 18 years, with another 40 nations doubling theirs every 35 years.

With this growth, it's to be expected that a period of inequality will follow. But as time goes on, this inequality naturally levels itself out, which is what we are seeing today. This is called the Kuznets curve, named after economist Simon Kuznets.

A lot of nations experienced fast growth in the 1970s, and at this period inequality was grossly apparent. But, since then, things have followed the Kuznets curve: data shows a gradual decline in wealth inequality. This decline also parallels declining poverty levels.

Another rule we can see in action is Wagner's law, which states that the wealthier a country gets, the more it spends on social programs that benefit the poor. In European countries during the early twentieth century, the average amount of earnings spent was 1.5 percent. Now, an average of 22 percent is spent on social programs and relief for the poor.

Enlightenment has reduced violence and brought us to the safest time in history

There's little room for optimism in the ongoing war being waged in Syria. Very conservative estimates have put the number of deaths, in 2016 alone, at 250,000 people. But if you want an accurate assessment of how violent we are globally these days; the data shows that war is a lot less rampant than it used to be. You might think there is an unprecedented number of refugees today, too, but if we go back a few decades to 1971, we see that the Bangladesh War displaced 10 million people. In 1947, the shift in India's borders turned 14 million people into refugees. And, during World War II, 60 million people were forced to flee.

The Enlightenment believed problem-solving was the key to progress and resolving disputes, and in the twenty-first century, this has been by and large a success. In 1945, the United Nations was formed, and, with it came the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Written by a diverse group including Mohandas Gandhi, Aldous Huxley and Muslim scholars, this is perhaps one of the most humanist and Enlightenment-aligned documents ever created, says Pinker.

Since then, this organization has been extremely influential in helping settle disputes, along with the continued trade and commerce agreements that have helped forge healthy international relations. So, for 70 years, wars have been few and far between. And in 2009 they became significantly fewer after a number of civil wars drew to a close, including ones in Angola, Chad, Peru and Sri Lanka.

With rising wealth across the majority of nations in the world, there is less of an opening for militant groups to form an uprising and try to convince the people that they should join in a revolution. With increased wealth, a nation can begin offering better health care and education, and the incentive for civil war is greatly reduced.

This is what we can see in the data from around the globe, and we see fewer incentives for crime as the world becomes a more prosperous place.

Democracy, equal rights and a better quality of life are all important values that flourish thanks to Enlightenment

In the 1970s, things did not look so good for democracy. In West Germany, Chancellor Willy Brandt called democracy a “peculiar holdover with no future.” But little did Brandt know that just around the corner was a huge push toward democracy that would find one nation after another adopting their own version of the Enlightenment form of government.

Democracy is very much the result of Enlightenment thinkers looking for a better form of government than the reign of terror that had plagued the world since biblical times. People were tired of slavery, torture, human sacrifices and the public mutilation of dissidents.

Another thing people wanted to avoid was leadership breakdowns, such as those that led to the bloody revolutions in China and Mexico in the early twentieth century. In this sense, democracy is a way to protect people from both tyranny and anarchy, and it is proven to be the one form of government with healthier economic growth, fewer genocides and better education.

As of 2015, there are 103 democratic nations, a pretty good number, considering that it fell to 12 during the fascist uprisings of the 1920s. The shift toward democracy has been a boon to the Enlightenment agenda and, since it is allowed the world to become more cosmopolitan, it's also reduced racist and sexist attitudes.

Simply put, racism and sexism are untenable arguments, which means they cannot withstand scrutiny and there is no rational or reasonable defence of them. In a more cosmopolitan world, with more travel and more people crossing paths, people are far more likely to be exposed to enlightened ideas and have their unenlightened assumptions challenged and refuted. So, it makes sense that the modern world has far fewer ethnic and racial discriminatory laws on the books. In 1950, half the world's nations had these laws, but by 2003, that number was down to under one-fifth. And with the exception of Vatican City, women can now vote everywhere that men are allowed to.

The environment and existential threats can be met with optimistic reason, rather than pessimism and doom.

The daily news offers no shortage of things to freak out about. But if you do some digging and uncover the real problem, there is not as much reason to panic as you think. Case in point: terrorism. The

actions of ISIS and other terrorist organizations are abhorrent, but are Americans right in thinking that ISIS is an immediate threat to the existence of the United States? After all, this is what a majority of Americans believed in a 2016 poll.

The reality is that an American is more likely to be killed by lightning or a bee sting than a terrorist. If we look at the worldwide statistics, all people would still be 125 times more likely to die in an accident than at the hands of a terrorist. People are afraid because of the negative bias and fearmongering sensationalism that taint the media's presentation of world news. The press is fond of exaggerating the severity of all sorts of existential threats.

It is not uncommon to read articles about artificial intelligence (AI) that suggest that we are moments away from some Terminator-like scenario, and that an AI program will soon begin killing humans because it misinterpreted its programming directives. Even Elon Musk and Stephen Hawking have been quoted as saying AI is an all-too-real threat.

But there's really little reason to conclude that AI's ability to drive a car or beat someone at the board game Go means it poses a serious threat to humanity. In fact, as technology has progressed, it is also gotten safer, with more levels of fail-safe monitoring. If something poses any threat, chances are there is someone with a switch who is monitoring the person with the switch who is monitoring yet another person and so on. If people are clever enough to create a ground-breaking AI program, they no doubt have contingency plans for any problem you can dream up.

Beware of politics and organizations that attempt to vilify science and reason.

Believe it or not, science does not have an agenda, other than using information to gain knowledge. It is not a field that exists with the intent to poke holes in your religion or belief system. And contrary to what some have suggested, science is not racist, sexist or responsible for the Holocaust.

It might sound absurd, but there is a long history of science being attacked by ignorance and misunderstanding, not to mention by people trying to advance their own agenda. Since science is one of the tenets of the Enlightenment, it is important to spot this nincompoopery and see the truth, says Pinker. A popular claim is that science fuelled Hitler's Nazi agenda, even though Hitler was expressly anti-science, anti-reason, anti-progress and, therefore, anti-Enlightenment.

Nevertheless, some people claim that science led to the Holocaust, an argument that hinges on the Aryan myth, which was invented by Arthur de Gobineau, promoted by Wagner and embraced by Hitler. According to the myth, the Aryan race was perfect until it was blighted by other races, an idea that flies in the face of Darwinism, which argues that all humans have base impulses and that no group is superior to any other.

People also blame eugenics for Hitler's actions, even though the eugenics proposed by Francis Galton, a Victorian statistician and polymath, was limited to incentivizing talented people to procreate. It had nothing to do with sterilizing "unfit" people, which is an unscientific proposal that other people came up with sometime later.

These days, attacks on science are likely to be thinly veiled attempts to discredit a legitimate concern, such as climate change. One of the greatest challenges facing humanity is cutting back on CO2 emissions by 50 percent by 2050 and eliminating them completely by 2100. If we don't do this, the threat of global temperatures exceeding an additional 2 degrees Celsius is extremely likely, which will cause permafrost to melt, raise sea levels and cause all manner of catastrophe. This isn't some Chinese conspiracy, as Donald Trump has suggested – this is real science.

Despite recent upticks in populism, Enlightenment is still the path forward.

While it's certainly distressing to see Donald Trump, who the author sees as distinctly anti-Enlightenment, win the US presidency, we can still take some small comfort in the fact that he lost the popular vote by a significant margin and has one of the lowest approval ratings of any US president. Another advantage of democracy is that there are checks and balances in place to prevent authoritarian demagogues from wreaking too much havoc, and we have already seen the justice system prevent some of his attempts at overstepping his bounds.

In Europe there has also been a movement of people pushing back against the values of the Enlightenment, but there are reasons to believe that this too will pass. Across Europe, the populist parties, which favour nationalistic, tribalist, anti-cosmopolitan values, have only managed to get about 13 percent of the vote, while ultimately losing as many legislative seats as they have gained. They may have gained a foothold in Poland and Hungary, but the numbers show that these populist voters are old, and not the voice of the future.

While the Brexit vote may have been alarming, only 29 percent of people with a college education voted in favour of it. In 2016, the "pro-leave" voters signalled their disapproval of how the world has become more cosmopolitan, but it is likely to continue to do so despite their protests. Younger generations across the globe are polling as more progressive, tolerant and less religious than the previous generation. According to WIN-Gallup International's Global Index of Religiosity and Atheism, even in traditionally religious countries, like Poland, Turkey and Russia, there was an average nine-percent decrease in people who identify themselves as religious between 2005 and 2012. So, with each successive generation, we see more people relying on reason, science and humanism as the source of their values.

While religion need not be at odds with Enlightenment, progress can be impeded when people base their values on the interpretations of sacred texts. Despite cultural critics' doom-and-gloom prophecies and the media's negativity, the data shows a positive story, a story of the triumph of reason and humanism over the past 100 years, says Pinker. And there is no reason to think this progress will be reversed. In fact, the opinions and polling of today's youth show them to be even more in line with the values of the Enlightenment than the people who got them to where they are today.

What I took from it

There is still war, violence, disease and poverty in the world, but if we put this into the context of history, we are looking at a tiny fraction of what once was. Ever since the age of reason in the eighteenth century, we have been making progress at reducing poverty, disease and war. By reducing superstitions, racism and warmongering, we have turned the world into a much safer and enlightened place than it's ever been before.

Flow. The Psychology Of Optimal Experience

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

I have always wondered, why it is that some people enjoy a happy and creative life while others seem to find themselves settling into a comfortable but frustrating rut? What does the former have that the latter does not? Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's Flow has the answer. In his book, Mihaly argues that in our increasingly anxious, distracted lives, we can become too focused on external rewards and opinions (for example, by compulsively comparing ourselves with our peers).

As a much-needed remedy, Mihaly offers techniques that enable us to focus on inner rewards, which can lead us to engage in our own interests so totally that we enter a state of pure flow. In such a state, Mihaly says, we simply do not care about external rewards like power or wealth and we do not even consider the opinions of others. Following years of research, Flow also taps into ancient wisdom, philosophy and modern psychology to provide countless examples of people who discovered how to "get into the zone," and thus lead contented lives and do their best work.

For instance, the book states that many scientists did some of their most revolutionary work in their spare time. It tells the story of why a surgeon or millionaire footballer might be deeply bored, while a factory worker finds delight in all he does. You will also learn why going to jail can help you discover your goals and strengthen your resolve – as it did for Malcolm X and Nelson Mandela – Not that I would suggest going to that length. And, finally, you will see how being more mindful of your surroundings can also help you enjoy the small things in life.

The three most powerful points I took from the book were;

1. Satisfaction with life does not correlate strongly with being wealthy.
2. We choose instant gratification (pleasure) as compensation for the daily grind of our lives; instead of the more rewarding, yet more difficult to attain, enjoyment.
3. We need to seek Flow (To be in the Zone). This immersion in the task that we see is so powerful it can release us from our self-consciousness,

If you are dissatisfied at work or bored and unhappy at home, this book will shake you up and drive you to make the most of your limited time on this planet. Mihaly states that we live in luxurious times and people from the past would not believe the conveniences that modern life provides. But having more money and acquiring more stuff does not seem to make us happier. As one study in the book shows, satisfaction with life does not correlate strongly with being wealthy. You do not need to look far to see evidence of this: just think about the number of rich patients that psychiatrists treat regularly. So, in order to give our lives meaning, we try to change the environment around us, whether by displaying our wealth to impress others or chasing powerful positions. Yet these all fail to sustain our happiness.

Pleasures or Enjoyment

On a daily basis, most of us choose instant gratification as compensation for the daily grind of our lives. This is because we favour simple pleasure over the more rewarding, yet more difficult to attain, enjoyment.

Pleasure provides simple satisfaction; much like sleeping or eating we have evolved so that when our blood sugar is low, we feel hungry and are urged to eat something. Enjoyment, on the other hand, involves us stretching ourselves, using our skills and concentration to transcend the apparent limitations of our genes. In this way, enjoyment helps us to accomplish ambitious goals that we set for ourselves and enables us to gain control over our attention.

Mihaly gives an example of a meal that we are preparing and never have made before. The patience and the willingness to experiment that this task requires contributes to the development of a sophisticated palate, which enables us to savour every bite.

Nevertheless, Mihaly states; it is pleasure, not enjoyment, that we seem to prefer, often in the form of pain-free escapism and hedonism. Yet these lack novelty and the opportunity for growth. For example, after a hard day's work, many of us sit watching TV, films or videos. This state of pure consumption is when we are at our most passive and easily distracted.

Furthermore, on the weekends, many of us unwind with alcohol or even other drugs. While these may 'promise' relaxation or an expanded consciousness, the result is often that we damage our ability to concentrate and we lose control.

The storylines of TV programs and the 'artificial paradise' of alcohol or drugs both require external stimulation, while neither allow us to exert skill or to focus fully on our goals. Our minds often don't do what they can to achieve growth or complexity, but we shouldn't take the path of least resistance and most distraction.

In The Zone

Across different languages and cultures, people use the same terms to describe what they feel when they are "in the zone." This feeling is one of enjoyment rather than pleasure and it comes when you are engaged in a task or activity that balances skills and challenges, has clear goals and immediate feedback.

Being 'in the zone' means that you are totally immersed in the task at hand. This combines action and awareness, which gives you a feeling of control. Take rock climbers, for example. Obviously, they face extreme danger in their goals, but what they enjoy is using their expertise to push through their fears – for instance, by accurately estimating the difficulty of a climb. To do this, they have to devote their full attention to the task.

This immersion in the task that we see is so powerful it can release us from our self-consciousness, worries and anxieties and allow us to lose track of time. Indeed, the rock climber focuses so deeply on the intricacies of the rock face that he forgets his problems as they become 'one with the mountain'.

Developing New Skills

One morning in Naples, a US tourist walked into an antique store and asked to buy a sculpture. The owner quoted a steep figure, yet when he saw the tourist was about to pay, he claimed the sculpture was not for sale. Why? He quoted the high price not because he wanted to exploit the tourist, but rather because he enjoyed bargaining and the battle of wits it involves, as it sharpened his mental dexterity and his selling skills.

Whenever we engage in something like this – something that is neither too easy nor too difficult – we tend to expand our personal limits and achieve more. For example, if you are a beginner at tennis, you will first simply enjoy trying to hit the ball over the net. As you improve, this easy challenge will start to bore you and you will start looking for ways to further challenge yourself – probably by playing against another person.

If you choose an opponent who is far more skilled than you are, you'll soon begin to feel out of your depth and anxious. Because the challenge is so difficult, you may even give up the chance to acquire new skills. But if you choose an opponent who is just above your skill level, your skills may actually improve.

Improvement also requires, however, that these skills be aligned with personal goals and passions and remain unaffected by external circumstances such as the promise of a reward if you do well, or the threat of punishment if you do not. With discipline, we can use our senses and movements to help us tune into a heightened state of awareness

For most of us, the idea of paying attention to our walking is an unusual one. Walking simply gets us from A to B. But by paying attention to the variety of sights around you – the people, their interactions, historical relics, architecture and so on – even the most routine actions, such as walking, can be transformed. By practising mindfulness of our surroundings, we can learn to perceive much more than our automatic response to the world allows. Indeed, the world is ripe for inspiration. Being mindful of the wonders around us allows us to feel connected to the world and to see things in a new light.

Work that you treat like a game, with intrinsic rewards and varied skills, ceases to be “work”

Mihaly mentions that many people are dissatisfied with their daily routines and often their jobs are to blame. What makes matters worse is that their leisure time is spent recovering from their work in the laziest way – watching TV, sleeping etc. However, work can be developed into something that provides a challenge, focuses our attention and reduces our anxieties.

Many people have described themselves as more often being in a flow-like state when they were working than when they were not. They also reported an increased belief in their own creativity and concentration.

One way of getting into a flow state is to set yourself intrinsic rewards (that is, ones not motivated by cash incentives or extrinsic power), such as trying to surpass your usual performance level or learning as much as possible about the job.

Therefore, to get into a state of flow you should seek out new challenges in work, aiming to learn as much as possible about all of the essential tasks involved in keeping your company running, rather than just clocking in and clocking out.

Engaging with family, friends and community is vital for our happiness, self-expression and growth

Good families provide honest feedback, unconditional acceptance and long-term goals. Families that are conducive to enjoyable experiences are both differentiated, accepting each family member's distinct skills and traits for what they are, and integrated – being honest, fair to everyone and neglecting no one.

Mihaly gives an example of parents who take part in challenging, skilful tasks like carpentry or cooking rather than TV-watching or drinking are more likely to see their children try to emulate these positive traits. We also require good friendships, as these are essential for strengthening our expressive side. The skills we have are either instrumental, like survival and professional skills, or expressive, communicating our personalities clearly. Compared with being alone, spending time with friends nurtures our expressive side: it produces much higher levels of happiness, self-esteem, strength and motivation – not to mention providing an audience. Focused attention distances us from our anxiety, helping us to gain perspective and find new ways to grow.

We are all faced with misfortune at some time or other. Rather than simply giving up because we feel unable to handle the situation, we could employ the following three strategies:

1. We should let go of our egos and trust in our ability to handle situations as they arise.
2. We should practice being mindful of our environment.

3. Instead of giving up in the face of difficult situations, you should use them to discover novel solutions.

Discover purpose in life through having unified goals and the resolve to put them into action

As earth is not the centre of the universe and our lives are manipulated by our genes, life can seem bereft of ultimate meaning. Yet we can certainly create meaning and the beauty of this is that each of us can choose what that meaning is. To find your meaning you need an ultimate goal in life to focus on. The end goal is irrelevant, as long as it immerses you fully in increasingly complex challenges, allowing you to disregard others' opinions.

Once you have established your goal, you have to act on it and for this you need strong intentions and resolutions. It is all too easy to conceive of some life goal yet never realize it. Indeed, many people remain "armchair activists," procrastinating by writing endless to-do lists.

Finally, your goals and resolutions should be harmonious, expressing a life theme. One person who mastered this was Malcolm X. He grew up in poverty, dealt drugs and went to jail. It was there that he discovered reading and reflection and gained the self-knowledge which drove his resolve, to become a civil rights activist and improve the lives of others. Just imagine where we would be without such clear goals and strong resolve. Would we be capable of fighting deadly diseases, crafting masterpieces or walking on the moon?

What I took from it

To live an optimal life, try not to be influenced by external rewards or the opinions of others. You can attain enjoyment in life by focusing your attention on every moment, being mindful of your environment and immersing yourself in your interests. You should also never avoid facing difficult challenges, as they can lead to personal growth and achievement.

Learn more about your job. Set yourself a challenge to learn as much as possible about your job, accept opportunities for new tasks and work better and faster than you have before. Not only will this lead to less procrastination, but the time will pass much more quickly. You will also become more popular with colleagues and you may even be offered a promotion, but don't let these be your central motivations. Also, to turn off the TV and get creative.

Instead of watching TV or movies in the evening, engage with your friends, partner or community and challenge yourself. Plan your weekend activities. If you lose yourself in salsa dancing, stand-up comedy, seminars, outdoor adventures, book clubs etc, you can improve your confidence and elevate your conversations beyond the usual small talk and chit-chat.

Man's Search For Meaning

Viktor E. Frankl

Growing up, I was always fascinated by the stories my grandmother told of how they survived WWII in Holland. Stories about how my aunt helped my grandfather escape a Nazi prison by hiding him in a basket attached to her bicycle and cycling through Germany to Holland. How he lost his toes while on a German train being attacked by allied forces. How my father, a toddler at the time, was fed 'soup' which contained water and flower bulbs. A horrific time in history.

It is also simply impossible for anyone other than survivors to know what life was like for a prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp. We can only imagine how people got through each day, and how they managed to stay sane when surrounded by atrocities.

Viktor Frankl, himself a survivor of the camps, helps explain how prisoners of the Nazi regime struggled through. These experiences also provided Frankl with evidence for his psychological theory, logotherapy, which explains how, in order to thrive – and, in more dire circumstances, survive – we need to discover our personal meaning of life.

This book explains both Frankl's findings from the camps and his development of logotherapy.

The three most powerful points I took from the book were;

1. The freedom to choose, is something we all take for granted. It all comes down to where you place your focus
2. People who are unable to live according to their values, or feel like their lives have no meaning; will find an emptiness inside themselves
3. Logotherapy assumes that people are able to make decisions and define their life's purpose independently of their environment

Prisoners' first reaction to the concentration camps was shock – first in the form of hope, then despair

Today, everyone has at least some awareness of the horrible, inhumane acts that were carried out in the concentration camps across Germany and Eastern Europe under the Nazi regime. Likewise, the targets of Nazi violence during the Holocaust had at least some inkling of the terrible fate that awaited them. Because of this, you would think that the initial reaction upon entering the camps would have been fear. Reactions, however, were split into three distinct phases.

The first phase began upon arrival at the camp – or even as inmates were being transported. Prisoners were so shocked at what was happening that they desperately tried to convince themselves that, somehow, everything would be alright. Most prisoners had heard horrific stories about what happened at the camps, yet when they themselves were sent there, they told themselves that things would be different for them.

Those who arrived at the death camp Auschwitz, for example, were sent to the left or right as they exited the train – one group for hard labour and one for immediate execution. However, none of them knew what these groups meant. Due to the shock of arriving at the camp, the prisoners succumbed to the delusion of reprieve, falsely believing that the line they were in would somehow mean an escape from certain doom.

During this first phase, the prisoners who had not yet become accustomed to the horrors of the camp

were terribly frightened by everything that went on. Newly arrived prisoners could not manage the intensely emotional experience of watching other prisoners being punished in the most brutal ways for the most trivial offenses. Confronted with grotesque brutality, they soon lost their hope and began to see death as some kind of relief. Most, in fact, considered suicide as a way out – perhaps by grabbing the electrical fence around the camp.

After a few days in the camp, prisoners fell into a state of apathy, which allowed them to concentrate on survival

Following their initial shock, prisoners soon became “used to” the horror and death that surrounded them, thus becoming emotionally dull. Instead, all their thoughts and emotions were focused on survival. Rather than muse about feelings like love or desire, for example, prisoners mostly talked and even dreamed about food or any other kind of vital, life-sustaining satisfactions that we normally take for granted, but which were severely limited in the camps.

While prisoners hid from the horror in the first phase, the dull emotions of the second phase acted as a shield, giving them the constitution to both live through the everyday cruelties of the camps and grab any opportunity to improve their own chance of survival. For example, after several people died during a typhus outbreak in one of the camps, prisoners in the second phase no longer felt disgust or pity as they gazed at the corpses. Instead, they saw an opportunity to grab leftover food, shoes or other clothing items from the now deceased prisoner.

There was no foreseeable end to their time in the camp other than at the hands of the guards, which left prisoners unable to imagine that life still had any meaning. Usually, we live for the future: we make big plans and get excited about seeing our life unfold. Prisoners in the camps, however, had a completely different view. For them, there was no excitement for the future. There was not even a future – nobody knew when (or if) their prison term would come to an end. Most prisoners thought their lives were already over. They merely “existed” in the camp – they gave up “living” as there were no goals to reach.

Life after liberation from the camps was often characterised first by a feeling of disbelief, and then by bitterness

The prisoners who were lucky enough to survive the concentration camps had to face a new challenge upon their release. Most had spent such a long time in the camps that living a normal life became very difficult.

Immediately after their release, the prisoners were unable to grasp their freedom. Accustomed to a state of emotional apathy, they could not immediately change their perspective. At first, prisoners could not experience pleasure or joy. Having dreamed so often of liberation, they found it unreal when it finally came. After being liberated many prisoners felt as though, after all of the brutality that had been inflicted upon them, it was their turn to inflict harm on others. Having been made to suffer such inhumanity, it made complete sense to them to look for some sort of compensation, for instance, by taking vengeance against the guards in the camps.

What is more, liberated prisoners did not always receive the warm welcome they imagined they would when they returned home. Unfortunately, many prisoners came home only to find that their family had been killed and their towns turned to rubble. But their bitterness was not just about lost family and friends. They hoped for compassion, expecting that their suffering would be understood. All too often, however, the people they talked to after release – those who had never seen a concentration camp – would only shrug and tell that they too had suffered, for example, from rationing and bombing.

While returning to a normal life certainly was not easy for the liberated prisoners, after a while most of them managed to enjoy their lives once more and be happy that they had survived the Holocaust.

Prisoners concentrated on their “inner” lives to distract themselves from what was happening in the real world.

How was it possible to protect their sanity and survive the horrors? In essence, it all came down to where they placed their focus. For some, imagining their loved ones and reminiscing about the past made it possible to mentally escape the terror and brutality of their environment. In fact, those who were able to find at least a bit of happiness in their memories were often better able to survive than others. In the brutal reality of the camps they had no relief, as they were forced to do hard labour in the cold with little more than rags on their backs. Love, however, could bring them fulfilment. A nice conversation with their loved ones – even if only in their imagination – was something the camp guards could not take away from them.

Even the smallest slivers of memory were able to bring relief – mundane things like switching on the lights in their own bedrooms back home. A few of the prisoners found solace by immersing themselves in nature and humour. An idyllic sunset or a cute bird could offer the inmates a fragment of happiness, even if it was only fleeting.

There were even rare moments when prisoners found their sense of humour. This humour often involved imagining the future – after being released – and joking about how their camp routines might affect later situations. For example, sitting at the family dinner table, they might forget where they were and ask for soup from the bottom of the bowl, where the few nutritious peas would be found in the camp cook pots.

Prisoners managed small gatherings during their half-hour lunch break, during which they tried to distract themselves from their reality, for example, by songs or other small performances.

Most prisoners accepted their fate, but some tried to make decisions whenever they could

The freedom to choose, whether it is picking out our outfits, our lunches or the charities to which we donate, is something we all take for granted. Of course, in the camps, nothing could be taken for granted. The ability to decide for oneself took on a completely new meaning. Most decisions were a matter of life or death, and many prisoners were afraid to make them.

Sometimes, for example, prisoners were ordered to go to another camp. However, the prisoners were kept in the dark about the true destination and the meaning of the transfer. The guards sometimes referred to these as “rest camps,” but no one could be certain that they were not being led to the gas chambers.

Yet there was also the possibility that their new camp would actually bring them relief. There was simply no way for them to know what decision would be best, and thus many prisoners decided that they should not intervene in their fate. So, once prisoners realised that they would be sent elsewhere, some would become desperate to change that decision. This was sometimes possible if they worked harder for their captors, e.g., by volunteering for extra shifts.

There were other prisoners, however, who were determined to maintain even the tiniest freedoms, and therefore grabbed any opportunity to make decisions. Despite their miserable conditions, these prisoners tried – as far as was possible – to live in accordance with their own values.

Their spiritual life, for example, was something that could not be taken away from them. Although they might have to abandon their rituals, they could still decide to live up to high moral standards. For instance, some prisoners would give bread to those who were in greater need, even though they were hungry too.

According to logotherapy, our motivation to act stems from our life's meaning

Frankl witnessed many terrible scenes in the camps. During that time, he realized again and again that people need meaning in their lives in order to have something to look forward to. Indeed, the prisoners who could maintain this meaning were stronger and more resilient than those who had lost it.

This observation helped confirm many ideas from his own theory of psychotherapy, logotherapy, which states that our search for meaning is the greatest motivation in our lives. There is plenty of research that supports this idea. For example, in a study from Johns Hopkins University, students were asked what they considered to be central in their lives. The vast majority – 78 percent – reported that finding a purpose and meaning in life was most important to them.

When we are unable to find meaning in our lives, we are left with what is referred to as an existential vacuum. People who are unable to live according to their values or feel like their lives have no meaning; will find a kind of emptiness inside themselves. You do not have to undergo serious trauma to experience the existential vacuum. Just take the widespread “Sunday neurosis,” for example, which occurs when people start to relax after a structured week of hard work, only to realize that their lives are totally devoid of substance. Logotherapy aims to help people find meaning, and thus prevent the negative consequences that could result from a persisting existential vacuum.

There is no general meaning of life; everyone's life has its own specific meaning in a given moment

Knowing how important it is to find a purpose in life, we are left asking ourselves how we go about finding our own. Indeed, many people believe that, in order to make the right choices in life, they must first discover their life's purpose. Logotherapy, however, suggests that the opposite is true. It is how we act, and it is the responsibility we feel toward our choices that determines our meaning. For example, the prisoners in the concentration camps who were able to maintain a purpose in life did so based on the choices that they made. The decision to look for beauty in nature or help others in greater need gave them a purpose, a realisation that they were not beaten and could keep going.

One consequence of this is that our meanings do not have to be the same. In fact, everyone has his own meaning of life. If you ask a chess grandmaster the best move, he/she will tell you that there is no best move in general. There is, however, a best move depending on the varying situations during the game. The same applies to life's meaning: there is no general meaning of life, and life's meaning depends on each individual's unique set of circumstances and decisions.

Logotherapy aims to help people understand the possibility that their lives can have meaning and that everybody has to figure out his life's purpose according to his own decisions. The meaning of life has no restrictions. For example, you might discover that your new job at a recycling start-up offers you personal meaning (e.g., feeling like you're part of a positive contribution to the world) or it could go beyond the personal, and involve society and social conscience (e.g., seeing the improvement in other people's lives).

You can manage your fears by actively pursuing them

Although the ultimate goal of logotherapy is to help patients find the meaning of life, that is not its sole application. Logotherapy has also developed a number of techniques that are helpful for people who have developed mental disorders, e.g., after experiencing an existential vacuum. Logotherapy is able to accomplish this by focusing on the internal rather than external factors that affect patients.

In normal psychotherapy, the patient is analysed, and his neurotic fears explained by his environment and other external events and circumstances. In contrast, logotherapy assumes that people are able to make decisions and define their life's purpose independently of their environment. This basic

understanding is necessary to help people realize that they are actually in control of their fears and anxieties in order to achieve long-term results. But how?

Logotherapy makes use of this strange phenomenon: when we fear something will happen, it often does, yet when we try and force something to happen, it never happens! Imagine you have a nervous friend who is deathly afraid of blushing in front of other people. Since he is always thinking about it, he immediately starts blushing whenever he is in a crowd.

In this situation, logotherapy uses something called paradoxical intention, in which the patient is asked to do exactly the thing that she is afraid of. Your nervous friend, for example, could start trying to blush as much as possible whenever he is around other people. Soon he will notice that when he tries to force it, nothing happens, and he will thus lose his fear of blushing.

What I took from It

Our success, and sometimes our very survival, is dependent upon our ability to find our life's meaning. This does not have to be something grand or existential – your own personal meaning depending on your immediate circumstances will do just fine.

Mindset

Carol Dweck

From the shape of your skull to the size of your foot, your body's physical characteristics are more or less entirely predetermined from the start. Of course, you can get plastic surgery or break a bone, but we human beings generally have very little control over our bodies' features. But what about intellectual and physical abilities, like playing basketball, drawing or solving math problems? Are they hereditary or learned? Today, most scientists agree that if you want to become a concert violinist, you not only need to have a musical disposition, but must dedicate years of your life to practising.

Still, there are as many answers to this question as there are people, for our mindset plays a crucial role in how we see ourselves and others. Simply put, our mindset shapes our beliefs in accomplishing something. These two extremes form the basis for the concept of a fixed versus a growth mindset.

People with a fixed mindset believe they are born naturally gifted at doing some things but utterly incapable of others, whereas people with a growth mindset believe they can become virtuosos of anything if they try hard enough. So, the people in the latter group continue growing throughout their lives, acquiring new skills without reservation and actively engaging in their relationships. For them, life in all its facets is in a constant state of change.

By contrast, people with a fixed mindset often let their black-and-white way of thinking obstruct their development. If they fail at something, they bury their heads in the sand or blame others. They hope for everlasting love in their relationships rather than working on the relationships themselves. Our mindset shapes whether we believe we can learn and change and grow – or not.

The three most powerful points I took from the book were;

1. People with a fixed mindset believe they can only do things they show a natural aptitude for – that practice certainly does not make perfect
2. Nobody has to be a victim of their surroundings when developing their own mindset. The brain can be trained like any other muscle: if we want a growth mindset, we can teach ourselves to think that way one step at a time.
3. Anyone can adopt a growth mindset and make the impossible possible.

An individual's abilities are set in stone in the fixed mindset

People with a fixed mindset believe that talent is king. In their view, a person's abilities are set in stone from the get-go; a person is, by nature, either intelligent and talented or stupid and incompetent, and will stay that way. Big companies like Enron and McKinsey whose HR departments invest a lot of money into scouting out so-called naturals at universities embody this way of thinking. The grads they hire are expected to instantly boost company performance with their outstanding abilities. But since the grads are so talented, they receive little training and are not expected to progress in their jobs or grow into new roles.

As a result, their superiors evaluate them constantly: are these grads really as smart as we thought or do their errors reveal that they lack the talent to get the job done? People with a fixed mindset think that employees who are not perfect from day one never will be, so it is best to let them go quickly. Moreover, people with a fixed mindset believe they can only do things they show a natural aptitude for – that practice certainly does not make perfect. Since they are quick to judge themselves and other people as being good or bad at something, they assume others are judging them all the time, too. Thus, they feel the need to show how talented and smart they are every chance they get.

They believe their entire personality is at stake: one slip-up could be enough to brand them as incompetent fools for life. They constantly seek approval from others to protect their egos and confirm that they really are as great as they think they are. An individual's abilities are set in stone in the fixed mindset.

Growth and development are possible in the growth mindset

When children with a growth mindset are given a difficult math problem to solve at school, they jump to the challenge and want to do more problems just like it at home. They recognise that the more problems they solve, the more they learn. The sky's the limit when it comes to life's possibilities for children with a growth mindset. It is hard to define their precise degree of intelligence today, let alone predict what it may be tomorrow. Sure, their grades reflect their status at one moment in time, but these kids believe they can learn more with hard work, dedication and perseverance.

Moreover, they are not interested in getting the highest grades or being better than other students; they want to feel the satisfaction of pushing themselves to the limits of their growth potential. Whether music or sports, writing or drawing, they practice relentlessly and are quite aware that it is only through practice – and the occasional failure – that they can improve their skills.

People with a growth mindset relish any opportunity to learn tricks from the crème de la crème in a field. They reconsider and discard strategies used in the past and are always thinking about how they can eradicate their faults and weaknesses. In their relationships, they encourage their partners to continue learning and working on themselves. When they play sports, they play knowing they are serving the team. When they run a business, they show their employees respect, are grateful for their work, and ask for their honest opinions on things, however inconvenient the truth may be.

People with a growth mindset welcome problems and see them as challenges, not insurmountable obstacles. They willingly put their energy into bettering themselves and the world around them. Growth and development are possible in the growth mindset.

People with a fixed mindset seek approval; those with a growth mindset seek development

Lee Iacocca became the CEO of Chrysler Motors when it was on the brink of collapse. Thanks to his swift decision-making and good feel for employees, he was just able to bring the company back to life. But after that, his behaviour changed abruptly. He started resting on his laurels, flaunting his superiority and putting more energy into his own image than into the company's welfare. His sole objective became to seek approval from others.

Iacocca clearly exhibits a fixed mindset. Just as he classifies everything as either "good" or "bad," he feels others scrutinising him, labelling him as a winner or a loser. And because he would like to be a winner, he tries to appear as intelligent and talented as possible instead of finding ways to improve the company.

Contrast this with Lou Gerstner, who took over IBM just as it was about to go belly up. Plagued by a fixed-mindset work environment, the company was wasting energy on internal disagreements instead of focusing on service and teamwork. Everyone was trying to do what was best for themselves; thus, the company was not meeting customer needs. To change that, Gerstner broke down the company's hierarchies and emphasised teamwork, rewarding employees who supported their co-workers. He also opened up communication pathways throughout the company, putting himself on the same level as his employees. This enabled him to establish personal contact with as many employees as possible in a short period of time.

Gerstner's growth mindset enabled him to create a new work environment based on teamwork and development. The focus moved away from individuals' success and towards shared development. Based on this concept, he was able to bring about lasting success at IBM. People with a fixed mindset seek approval; those with a growth mindset seek development.

The fixed mindset sees failures as disasters; the growth mindset sees them as opportunities

Failure has dramatic repercussions for people with a fixed mindset. Take the golfer Sergio García. When he was having a bad streak, he fired one caddy after another in fits of rage. Once, he even blamed his shoes, whereupon he took them off and threw them at an innocent bystander out of frustration. People with a fixed mindset do not believe they can learn from their mistakes. They see a single failure as evidence that they will be losers forever: one defeat negates and devalues all past successes.

In order to preserve whatever little self-confidence they have, people with a fixed mindset make excuses, cheat, or lose interest and look the other way. They do not seek help or analyse their weaknesses, and they certainly do not try to get better by practicing. They see themselves as a finished product – not a continual process.

Even basketball hall-of-famer Michael Jordan had periods in his career when he did not dunk every ball he touched. He fluffed a good 26 potentially winning shots. However, rather than sticking his head in the sand, he practiced the shots he missed over and over again. By the end of his career, he had the best shooting techniques of anybody on the court.

Michael Jordan obviously had a growth mindset. Rather than finding fault in his teammates or the court's floor, he looked for ways to improve his own skills and game. He analysed his mistakes, practiced even harder than before, and took advice from other people. He firmly believed that he could transform his defeats into victories – as long as he tried hard enough. The fixed mindset sees failures as disasters; the growth mindset sees them as opportunities.

People with a fixed mindset avoid difficulties; those with a growth mindset relish them

There are many things in life we can only achieve with effort. Yet when people with a fixed mindset are faced with a difficult situation, all they can see are risks, because the more time and energy they invest in something, the fewer excuses they have if they fail. Plus, they believe in the enormous power of natural talent: gifted people should not need to try so hard. This way of thinking makes it impossible for people with a fixed mindset to better themselves without questioning their own talent – and so they avoid difficult situations. They do not want to potentially make a fool of themselves.

The violinist Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg exhibited this kind of behaviour. At age 10, she was already critically acclaimed; by 18, she held her violin incorrectly and her fingers were stiff. Every time she tried to learn something new, she became so afraid of failing she would stop bringing her violin to lessons and avoid playing altogether.

If the actor Christopher Reeve had such a mindset, he would have remained completely paralysed from the neck down for the rest of his life, just as the doctors predicted after his accident. However, he had a growth mindset: rather than passively accepting his fate, he took control of his situation. So, he underwent a strenuous training program – and then the impossible happened: contrary to all diagnoses, he moved his hands, then his legs, and, finally, his entire upper body.

Challenges give people with a growth mindset the opportunity to pursue purpose-filled actions. The more dejected they are, the more energy they put into fighting against and rewriting their fate. Like Reeve, they strive to make the impossible possible. People with a fixed mindset avoid difficulties; those

with a growth mindset relish them.

Our mindset is often strongly influenced by the role models we had as children

What factors determine whether a person has a growth or a fixed mindset? What factors determine whether a person realises his potential or spends his life treading water? Mindset development begins at birth. Babies come into the world with a growth mindset: they want to learn and grow as much as possible each day.

The adults in a child's environment – usually his or her parents – play a huge role in determining whether the child maintains this desire to grow or eventually adopts a fixed mindset. Simply put, parents set a mindset example for their children. Parents with a growth mindset encourage their children and urge them to continue learning, whereas those with a fixed mindset are always judging their children, telling them what is right or wrong, good or bad.

Babies aged between one and three already behave accordingly: growth-mindset babies will try to help another baby who is crying; fixed-mindset babies, by contrast, are annoyed by it. Teachers are also very important role models and influence children's mindsets. There are many teachers who believe that a student's performance is unchangeable – that good students will continue to do well, and weaker students will always get C's or D's. Weaker students will develop a fixed mindset as a result.

But good teachers – those who firmly believe their students are capable of learning anything – handle the situation differently. They show their students different ways of solving math problems or understanding Shakespeare. Their weaker students embrace a growth mindset and start getting better grades: they are no longer doomed to thinking of themselves as “dumb” by nature. Our mindset is not entirely predetermined. It can change as early as childhood when we adopt the mindsets of our role models. Our mindset is often strongly influenced by the role models we had as children.

Anyone can adopt a growth mindset and make the impossible possible

Nobody has to be a victim of their surroundings when developing their own mindset. The brain can be trained like any other muscle: if we want a growth mindset, we can teach ourselves to think that way one step at a time. Here is an example: you accidentally drop a plate on the floor. The first – fixed – thought might be, “I'm so clumsy!” But people who are conscious of this reaction and want to change it can push themselves to adopt a growth mindset by thinking, “Oh well, these things happen. I'll clean it up and be more careful next time.”

Working towards a growth mindset presents a great opportunity to reach out to others for support, to talk about our faults and mistakes, and to make viable, concrete plans for achieving our goals. It is important to understand that a fixed mindset is not easy to kick. It has likely become an emotional crutch over the years: it protects us from failure, creates recognition in the eyes of our parents and partners, and boosts our self-confidence. It comforts us time and again, so getting rid of it can be extremely discomfoting.

In truth, it is not necessary to give up a fixed mindset altogether. As long as we adopt the growth perspective in certain situations, it is usually enough: even if a person believes he is a lost cause when it comes to sports, he could still be making leaps and bounds at work every day. Adopting a growth mindset in any field enables us to make the impossible possible (Christopher Reeve) and to continue improving our talents and abilities (Michael Jordan). In this regard, the growth mindset is the key to self-fulfilment. Anyone can adopt a growth mindset and make the impossible possible.

What I took from it

People with a fixed mindset obstruct their own development through their belief in innate talent and their fear of failure. On the contrary, people with a growth mindset work hard and train hard to ultimately realise their potential to the fullest. By confronting our own attitudes and ideas, we can develop a growth mindset.

Our mindset shapes whether we believe we can learn and change and grow – or not. An individual's abilities are set in stone in the fixed mindset. Growth and development are possible in the growth mindset.

People with a fixed mindset seek approval; those with a growth mindset seek development. The fixed mindset sees failures as disasters; the growth mindset sees them as opportunities. People with a fixed mindset avoid difficulties; those with a growth mindset relish them.

Our mindset is often strongly influenced by the role models we had as children. Anyone can adopt a growth mindset and make the impossible possible.

Psycho Cybernetics

Maxwell Maltz

What kind of person are you? Are you perpetually tardy, type-A personality, or maybe a poor writer? Where did those beliefs come from? A judgmental teacher, a circle of friends who label you a certain way, or maybe from yourself? We all have an image of the type of person we are. Some of these are positive, and some are detrimental to moving forward and making changes.

We use stories to understand the world, but sometimes we make ourselves the villain without thinking twice about the consequences of that narrative. So, get out your editing pen; it is time to make some changes. So says Maxwell Maltz in his book Psycho-Cybernetics, published in 1960.

We act according to the image we create of ourselves. Each person has a self-image – a mental blueprint that describes the kind of person she is. This all-important conception of self contains the beliefs she holds about herself based on past experiences, successes and failures. Such perceptions are crucial since people act like the person; they believe themselves to be. If you think of yourself as a failure, you will quite likely fail. Conversely, if you consider yourself successful, you will find ways to succeed.

The four most powerful points I took from the book were;

1. Humans may not be machines, but we can think of our mental processes as mechanized. By using cybernetic principles to understand this machine thinking, we can overcome negative ideas about ourselves, enhance our self-image and live a fulfilling, successful life.
2. The human nervous system cannot tell the difference between experiences that we imagine and ones that actually occur. As a result, it reacts according to what we believe or imagine to be true
3. Most people think of happiness in terms of the future. We think we will be happy once we are married or get a better job. But happiness must be practiced in the present. We first need to recognize that happiness is an entirely internal feeling, a product of our thoughts and the attitudes we hold about them.
4. Just like a sharp surgical implement, genuine forgiveness can cut away old hurts, allowing healing to occur. But to truly forgive, you must forget the feeling that you were wronged and even forget the act of forgiveness itself.

But why are these life-determining self-images formed in the first place, ask Maltz. It is usually for a logical reason. A person might consider herself a failure because she had a bad year in school after her parents got divorced. While some people can easily recover from such an event and be back on the honour roll in no time, others find themselves trapped in a self-image that tells them they are the kind of student who gets F's. In this way, whether good or bad, the formation of a self-image is crucial to everything that follows in a person's life.

Here is another example; the author knew a man who suffered from his 'ugly' looks; he felt his nose was too large and that his ears stuck out. He suffered because he felt other people were judging him for his peculiar looks.

In reality, however, people were not judging him for his appearance. Rather, it was his own negative self-image that made him cripplingly insecure and miserable. In this case, his perception that others were spiteful toward him made him spiteful back. However, this was a loop that could be broken if he turned his negative self-image around.

Why we have negative beliefs and how to get rid of them

You probably think of hypnosis as a stunt for an oddball circus act, says Maxwell. But every human is hypnotized in one way or another. After all, the power of hypnosis comes from belief, and you already know how powerful beliefs can be. Just consider a friend of the author, Dr. Alfred Adler, who did poorly at math in school, leading his teacher to believe he had no talent for the subject.

Adler accepted this as a fact, and the grades he earned proved his teacher right. But one day, he suddenly understood how to solve a complex equation. When he showed the solution to his teacher, he realized that he had no trouble grasping arithmetic. His confidence soon increased, and he became a better math student. What changed, asks Maxwell.

Adler had been hypnotized by a false belief about himself. Studies have proven that Adler's experience is typical of many low-achieving students. People experience both positive and negative beliefs that hypnotize them in similar ways, and the goal is therefore to overcome the preconceptions that hold us back. To do so, you need only harness the power of rational thinking. Your negative beliefs are not a result of facts or experiences, rather the conclusions you draw from them. Therefore, rational thinking – which is logical and conscious – can be used to control your unconscious mind. To start uprooting the beliefs that create your sense of inferiority, ask, “why?” Doing so will help you overcome irrational and false assessments like, “I failed yesterday; therefore, I'll fail today.” Instead, when faced with such a thought, you will be able to see that each day presents an opportunity to learn from the past.

The power of your imagination

People have often theorized about the body as a machine – a concept that is not too far from the truth, says Maxwell. While humans are not machines per se, we each have a machine that we can use when necessary. The author calls this phenomenon psycho-cybernetics, a conception of the human brain and nervous system as a servomechanism or automatic response that processes negative feedback to guide its course. This theory operates according to the principles of cybernetics, the study of machines and mechanics.

By applying psycho-cybernetics, we can uncover new insights into why and how humans behave the way they do. One such insight is that humans have a built-in mechanism for success. Consider how a baby might try to grab a rattle. He cannot call on any stored information based on prior experiences. Therefore, his hand has to swipe back and forth until he can reach the object. Once he succeeds in grabbing the toy or, in other words, achieves a successful response, he will store the memory for future reference. Over time, he can refine his skill at grasping, slowly remembering his successes and forgetting his failures.

Similarly, this kind of success mechanism is at play as we work toward our goals. Naturally, activating this mechanism is beneficial and, to begin doing so, we need to use our imagination. The human nervous system cannot tell the difference between experiences that we imagine and ones that actually occur. As a result, it reacts according to what we believe or imagine to be true. Research by Dr. Theodore Xenophon Barber at American University in Washington during the 1950's found that hypnotized subjects easily underwent surgery without anaesthesia after being told they could not feel pain. Or take Artur Schnabel, a world-famous concert pianist who rarely practiced on an actual piano. Instead, he would simply refine his art in his head.

We can stimulate creativity and make ourselves happy

Whether it is writer's block or a stalled brainstorming session, it is common to hit obstacles when pursuing a creative project. Most creative practitioners know that when such a roadblock presents itself, the only thing they can do is relax and wait for inspiration to return. This wisdom makes perfect sense since humans have a highly specific creative mechanism. It only activates when we become

interested in solving a particular problem, consciously consider the dilemma and gather every piece of relevant information.

Once we have struggled with the problem sufficiently, we reach the point at which further thinking only holds us back. Then our built-in creative instinct kicks in. As a result, we have our best ideas when we are not actively working. Take the famous inventor, Thomas Edison. Whenever he came up against an issue he could not resolve, he would take a short nap. After these brief respites, he often found the solution he sought.

So, while creativity is unreliable, we can reboot it by altering our actions and thoughts. And the same goes for happiness. Here is how; most people think of happiness in terms of the future. We think we'll be happy once we're married or get a better job. But happiness must be practiced in the present. We first need to recognize that happiness is an entirely internal feeling, a product of our thoughts and the attitudes we hold about them.

If we become unhappy when a driver honks at us, it is because we chose to respond with annoyance and frustration, which saps our happiness. We can develop a habit of happiness by fixating on positive points and letting go of negative ones. Edison provides another good example. He once lost his multi-million-dollar laboratory in a fire and had no insurance for compensation. Nonetheless, he made the decision to avoid unhappiness and instead began rebuilding first thing the next day.

Seven elements make up a successful personality

Success is not something you simply find any more than failure is something you "arrive at." Rather, failure and success are the result of forces buried deep within your personality. Both are produced by unique sets of elements. First up you will learn about SUCCESS, an acronym that explains the core elements of a successful personality.

First comes a Sense of direction. After all, every human is a goal-seeker and, just like a mountain climber, you need an objective to pursue. When you reach the proverbial top, you should simply forge ahead to the next peak. The second trait is Understanding. Most failures are a result of misunderstandings, as people often distort sensory perceptions with fear, anxiety or desire.

Just imagine you see two colleagues in conversation. Right as you walk by, they look up and stop talking. You might easily conclude that they were gossiping about you, but that is unlikely. It is just one example of how feelings can alter your perceptions. The third necessary trait for success is Courage. After all, only by taking courageous actions can you make your dreams a reality. You need the nerve to back up your ideas by taking calculated risks. If you delay acting until you are entirely certain, you will never accomplish anything.

The fourth characteristic is Charity since successful people are attentive to the problems, needs, dignity and respect of every human. Fifth comes Esteem because, if you think "I can't do it," you will never move ahead. As a result, a low self-opinion is never a virtue, but rather a threat to your success.

Sixth is Self-confidence. Such a feeling is built upon experiencing success, which makes it essential to remember your past triumphs and forget your failures, which threaten to wreck your confidence. And finally, Self-acceptance is the last pillar of success. Without coming to terms with yourself, your faults and weaknesses, you will never be able to attain what you desire. These seven elements compose a successful personality.

Being aware of what causes failure is key to achieving success

The factors that lead to failure can be readily summed up by an acronym of the word FAILURE itself.

First comes Frustration, which arises when you feel you cannot realize an important goal. This produces a self-fulfilling prophecy as you think of yourself as incapable and are therefore more likely to fail.

Next is Aggressiveness. This energy can help you achieve your goals, but in a failure-type personality, all that aggression is directed toward self-destructive tendencies like worry and rudeness, rather than a worthy aim.

Third comes Insecurity or feeling like you do not live up to requirements. Interestingly enough, insecurity is often caused not by a real lack of ability, but by a distorted system of measurement. In other words, if you compare yourself to an imaginary, likely impossible ideal, you will never feel self-assurance.

Fourth up is Loneliness, the feeling of being alienated from others. Lonely people cut themselves off from the roads that could lead to a healthy social environment, fail to act and struggle to achieve.

The fifth trait of failure is Uncertainty or avoiding mistakes by never making decisions at all. It is a failure to act and achieve goals, precipitated by the false premise that you shouldn't act if you're not certain you'll succeed. Since no certain path can be found, no decision is made, and you are safe from failure – or success, for that matter.

Sixth comes Resentment, an attempt to make personal failure more digestible by blaming it on unfair treatment.

And last is Emptiness, a symptom of failure itself. This feeling results from the sense that life is boring, and no pursuit is worth attaining. If you notice any or all of the above traits in yourself, it is time to make a change. Next up you will learn precisely how to go about it.

Attend to your emotions and unleash your real personality

When you incur a physical injury, your body forms a scar to protect the damaged area. In this way, scar tissue is nature's way of preventing further injuries to the same place. Similarly, people tend to form emotional scars to protect hurt feelings. However, such scars do not just protect you from the person who initially hurt you; they can also separate you from all other people. After all, they construct an emotional wall that keeps out friends and foes alike.

That being said, you can overcome this by offering yourself an emotional face lift. This process is like doing surgery on your emotions, but rather than a scalpel, forgiveness is your primary tool. Just like a sharp surgical implement, genuine forgiveness can cut away old hurts, allowing healing to occur. But to truly forgive, you must forget the feeling that you were wronged and even forget the act of forgiveness itself.

Then, once you have removed your emotional scars, you can let loose your real personality, which comes from within. Many people have inhibited personalities that prevent them from exercising their creative potential and expressing their true selves.

For instance, stuttering is often a result of inhibition, says Maxwell. This speech impediment is caused by an excessive tendency to self-monitor, which generates too much negative feedback. It is a good example of how inhibiting a fixation on what others think and want from you can be.

To get past this debilitating feeling, it is necessary to practice dis-inhibition, says Maxwell. Interestingly enough, while people like to say you should think before you speak, the exact opposite is required. By speaking before you think, you can banish self-conscious thoughts like "should I have done that?" This is the first step on your path to truly unlocking your creative personality.

Finding peace of mind in a world full of interruptions

Imagine you are at home, quietly reading a novel. Your phone starts ringing, and you instinctively jump out of your favourite chair, rushing to answer the call. In the blink of an eye, you went from a peaceful state of mind to one of unrest. And who can blame you? The ring tone is a signal that you have learned to obey. But the truth is, you do not have to answer the phone; you could just as easily ignore it.

Therein lies the first technique for achieving peace of mind; start avoiding the different bells that ring around you. This term refers to all the disruptive stimuli that populate your environment. Bells are things to which you have been conditioned to respond by sheer force of habit. For instance, parental warnings result in most children fearing strangers. While such a tendency might serve a reasonable function in kids, it gets carried over into adulthood, causing lots of people to feel uncomfortable around others they do not know.

Strangers have become bells to which the learned response is fear and avoidance. However, you can overcome these conditioned responses by practicing relaxation instead. In other words, if you want to, you can learn to let the bell ring, says Maxwell. A good way to ease into this practice is to delay your response, say by counting to three before answering the phone. From there you can slowly extend the time until you eventually ignore the bell altogether.

Another way to achieve peace of mind is to construct a mental quiet room that offers you a retreat from the world. You can furnish it with whatever you find relaxing – maybe a beautiful landscape, or your favourite piece of art. Then, whenever you have a few moments to spare between appointments or while riding the bus, calm your mind in your quiet room.

What I took from it

Humans may not be machines, but we can think of our mental processes as mechanized. By using cybernetic principles to understand this machine thinking, we can overcome negative ideas about ourselves, enhance our self-image and live a fulfilling, successful life.

The Laws Of Human Nature

Robert Greene

Who does not want to make better decisions? So asks Robert Greene in his book, *The Laws of Human Nature*, published in 2018. Well, the key to this is to better understand the influences involved and our underlying motivations. This book aims to highlight the aspects of human nature that go overlooked or are under-discussed and make sure that we understand just how influential they can be.

For the most part, we do not like to admit that we are envious, self-centred and prone to group mentality. However, we all have these tendencies, says Greene. Once we acknowledge these aspects of human nature, we can begin to make the best of it by curbing these impulses or even using them to our advantage.

Greene goes on to say that we are all complex individuals, but there are parts of the human experience that touch us all. With a better understanding of human nature, you can start to live a better life with more control over your impulses.

The three most powerful points I took from the book were;

1. Whenever possible, increase your reaction time so that you are not making decisions in the heat of an emotional moment. And meanwhile, try to consider all the possible biases influencing the decision.
2. It makes little sense to deny the inevitability of death, and when it is embraced, it can serve as a great motivator for leading a productive and vibrant life. It is also a great source of empathy, since death is the great equalizer that unites us all.
3. Understanding human nature is a way to understand the commonalities between all humans, which can provide a much-needed boost to your empathy levels.

Our irrational behaviour

We like to think that modern human beings are a clever and highly rational bunch. But the truth is we tend to make a lot of our decisions based on the emotions we feel at any given moment, which means we are often pretty irrational.

This struggle between our emotional and rational sides has gone on for ages. One of the early champions of rational behaviour was Pericles, a well-respected statesman in Athens around the fifth century BC. When Athens was under threat of attack by the Spartans, Pericles was able to convince leaders to show restraint and not engage in all-out war. Unfortunately, his wisdom did not prevail when Athens was struck by the plague and Pericles died. Instead, emotions took over and resulted in a costly and drawn-out war that brought Athens to its knees.

The secret to Pericles's wisdom was patience, and this is what we still need to rely on to curb our irrational decisions. If there was a problem or important decision to be made, Pericles would withdraw to his home and calmly think it over, consider all the potential consequences and make the decision that's in everyone's best interest, not just the leaders or wealthiest people.

So, whenever possible, increase your reaction time so that you are not making decisions in the heat of an emotional moment. And meanwhile, try to consider all the possible biases influencing the decision. There are a number of these, including confirmation bias, where we tend to seek out information that supports our prejudices, and conviction bias, that leads us to believe that the stronger our emotions are, the more something must be true.

Other biases include the appearance bias, which leads us to believe that someone who looks appealing, whether it is attractive or rich, must somehow be of good character. Then there is the group bias, which leads us to believe whatever the group we belong to suggests. For example, if you are a member of a right or left-leaning political party, you might agree with every one of the party standpoints without considering alternate views.

Our biases can easily lead to bad decisions, so it is always good to be sceptical, analytical and curious about differing viewpoints. Plus, it is wise to balance thinking with your emotions. You do not have to be an emotionless robot when deciding, but you are bound to make better decisions when you are feeling calm, says Greene.

There is a narcissist in all of us

Along with our tendencies to be irrational, human nature also carries with it the need for a certain amount of attention and self-absorption. In fact, by our very nature, we are all narcissistic to some extent. This means each of us exists on a spectrum, ranging from healthy levels of narcissism to deep narcissism.

Deep narcissists are usually people with a faulty sense of self, where they see other people as an extension of themselves. This can be traced back to childhood and the years between two and five years old, the age when a person stops seeing themselves as an extension of their mother and develops a sense of individual personhood.

At this point, deep narcissism can develop for two reasons; either the parent was too involved, preventing the establishment of an individual identity, or the parent did not give the child any attention, creating a sense of abandonment. This results in low self-esteem and feelings of insecurity. As a result, deep narcissists try to cope with their broken sense of self through behaviour patterns that include jealousy, attention-seeking, over-controlling, taking everything personally and being unable to handle criticism.

Ironically, narcissism is often associated with “self-love.” This is actually what many deep narcissists lack, a proper sense of self to love. Indeed, one of the best ways to gain a healthier level of narcissism is to create a sense of self that you can love, which will reduce insecurity and raise self-esteem.

Empathy is another thing that deep narcissists lack, and this is one of the best tools you can have in life. Empathy is the ability to sense what others are going through, thereby connecting us to the people in our lives. It is also great for recognizing people’s true character and having the insight to turn yourself into a person of superior character.

When it comes to being a judge of character, it’s important to understand that we all wear masks in our day-to-day life. We are always trying to win people over by presenting ourselves in what we think is the best light and saying things we think people want to hear. As Shakespeare famously wrote, “All the world’s a stage.” So, we should not accept what we see and hear as a reflection of a person’s true character. A person’s true character often reveals itself in how they face adversity, work with other people and whether or not they learn and adapt.

Strive to be of superior character

Each and every one of us has a character that is a mix of strong and weak qualities. Some of these qualities we gain genetically, others are from our upbringing. Then there are the ones we pick up later in life. For example, researchers have found evidence that some new-borns are more hostile than others, suggesting that our aggression levels are genetic.

But our innate traits are not a prison. We can control them, and even weak ones can be used to our

advantage. No matter the cards we have been dealt in life, we can strive to be of superior character. The first step is to be honest and admit that our characteristics are part of human nature and are nothing to be ashamed of. We can start by taking an honest look at ourselves, our past mistakes and our weaknesses and strengths.

For example, a hyper perfectionist, who feels the need to control everything and cannot delegate tasks, should not deny it and put herself into situations in which she will be smothering people or fighting for the spotlight. Instead, she should find work that allows her to be in charge of a workload that does not require delegation.

Another aspect of human nature that people do not like to admit to is envy. Yet, it is a simple fact that we all tend to covet what we do not have. As the sayings goes, the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence, and there is always a better place just over the horizon.

There are some biological reasons for our envious nature. For starters, we are not wired to be complacent, says Greene. Instead, we are competitive by nature and feel the same strong desire for things whether we encounter them in the real world or in our imagination. One of the reasons we tend to deny our feelings of jealousy is because admitting we feel covetous is also admitting that we feel inferior to someone else. Still, it does not do any good to ignore or deny our jealousy, and once we admit to the fact that everyone has these feelings, we can start putting it to work for us.

Knowing that we covet what is elusive, we can start to make ourselves more appealing to others by employing the traits of elusiveness. In other words, we can be a bit mysterious and hard to pin down. The more we make people use their imagination, the more fascinated they will be.

Everyone is prone to being short-sighted and defensive

You might wonder why so much money and attention go toward fighting terrorism while global warming, which affects all living things on the planet, is trivialized. The reason is very much tied to human nature. You are far more likely to react to something that is right in front of you here and now. This short-sightedness goes back a long way, to when survival was based on immediate concerns, such as finding food and water and avoiding violent predators like the sabre-toothed tiger.

To perform at your best, you need to recognize the tendency to neglect the big picture in favour of immediate concerns. However, it is far better to adopt a farsighted perspective. First, remember to take a step back when making decisions and calmly consider the problem at hand, what your options are and what the consequences are likely to be. When you also recognize that today's problems are likely the consequence of actions taken in the past, you will be better able to assess them.

You should also know that sometimes doing nothing is the best thing to do! Western culture often considers doing nothing a sign of weakness, but Japanese and Chinese cultures both recognize the strategic wisdom in waiting to see what happens and letting the enemy wear himself out. Another strategy is to know how to deal with people's natural defensiveness.

Everyone is defensive to some degree because everyone privileges autonomy and free will. That is why one of the best techniques for managing human nature is to make someone agree with our plan as though it was their idea. This is done by showing our appreciation of the other person, validating their individuality and intelligence and playing to their natural stubbornness.

Take the early career trajectory of the US politician and eventual president, Lyndon B. Johnson. When he first became a senator, he already had a reputation of being a hot-headed Texan, but Johnson knew he was not going to get far using the same rabble-rousing tactics he employed as a congressman.

Instead, he became fast friends with veteran democrat Georgian senator Richard Russell, outwardly admiring his experience and expertise. Russel, in turn, was impressed with Johnson's organizational

skills and helped Johnson get a seat on the Armed Services Committee after just a year and a half in the Senate, which is practically unheard of for such a prestigious committee. Johnson's shrewd but friendly tactics led him to become the youngest ever senate leader of the Democratic Party at the age of 44.

Cultivate a positive attitude

Do you ever feel like you are cursed, or perhaps doomed to failure? If so, it is likely due to certain unhelpful traits that you need to recognize and get under control, says Greene. When you look within and see what is repeatedly causing the same negative outcomes, then you can turn things around and avoid future calamities.

Believe it or not, one of the main contributors to self-sabotage is a negative attitude. Fortunately, that is something you can change. If you think your bad attitude is justified, just look at the life of legendary playwright Anton Chekhov. When he was a young boy, Chekhov lived with a father who regularly beat him and forced him to work at his shop rather than do his schoolwork. What is more, due to his father's bad business sense, his family had to flee to Moscow. In doing so they literally abandoned Chekhov when he was around sixteen years old, leaving him behind to fend for himself while he finished school. The only reason he survived was because he was able to find the odd job as a tutor.

It would have been understandable if Chekhov had developed a pessimistic attitude. Yet what Chekhov had was a remarkable sense of empathy that enabled him to pity his father, rather than be angry with him. When his family left, it gave him the opportunity to see them in a new perspective, and he recognized that his father had to cope with his own terrible upbringing and that he was really a lost, helpless old man.

When Chekhov felt forgiveness for his father, he felt as though his mind was finally free. He felt liberated from anger. Negative emotions must be let go. If you hold on to or repress feelings of anger or worthlessness, they are likely to lead to a prison of your own making, where things like drugs and alcohol become ways to numb the pain and repress your true feelings.

If you have a dark side to your personality, whether it is negative feelings or just selfish impulses, the first step is to acknowledge it. Then you can begin to use it in positive ways. The author refers to the dark feelings one represses as a "shadow self," and the more these feelings are repressed, the more destructive they can be when they come to the surface. Look at former US president Richard Nixon, who bottled up his feelings of resentment and abandonment until they led to destructive behaviour that destroyed his presidency.

You are not as important as you think

If you know someone who is experienced even a little success, you may have looked on in wonder as that success went to their head and they proceeded to lose touch with reality. This is known as the Law of Grandiosity. Take the career of Michael Eisner. In 1976, Eisner made the leap from successful TV executive to head of the Paramount film studio. During his tenure, Paramount had a string of hits, even becoming the leading studio in Hollywood for a period.

In 1984, Eisner then became the new CEO of Disney and proceeded to oversee the release of fifteen hit movies that revitalized the struggling brand. Eisner also came up with the idea of strategically using the company's back catalogue in the burgeoning home video market.

In Eisner's eyes, everything he touched turned to gold. But then he focused his attention on theme parks and building Euro Disney in France. It was far from a success, with attendances around half of what they had hoped for. But Eisner was quick to cast blame elsewhere. In 1994 he shocked the industry by firing his underling Jeffrey Katzenberg, who had been largely responsible for many recent

hits, including The Lion King.

Eisner also declined to purchase Yahoo! and instead orchestrated Disney's own internet portal called Go. It was another calamity that leaked vast amounts of money. Meanwhile, Katzenberg successfully sued Disney for \$280 million in unpaid bonuses while Pixar CEO Steve Jobs said he would refuse to work with Disney ever again due to Eisner's meddling. Finally, with Disney's stock prices dwindling, Eisner was voted out by board members in September of 2005.

As a TV and film executive, Eisner showed he had a keen grasp on the tastes of US audiences, but afterward, with Euro Disney and Go, he showed little understanding for the tastes of Europeans or what people want in an internet service. But Eisner had lost his sense of reality. In not accepting the limits of his expertise and instead feeling insecure and threatened by underlings like Katzenberg, he helped precipitate his own downfall.

Surely, a person with a grip on reality would have known that someone with Katzenberg's talents would become a competitor once fired from Disney, which is exactly what happened when Katzenberg helped found DreamWorks.

When you experience success, it is easy to forget that mentors and teammates, as well as timing and luck, likely helped you get there. So, it is important at the best of times to be aware of contributing factors and your own strengths, limits and weaknesses. Remember, be realistic.

Avoid gender repression

In 1463, Caterina Sforza was born into a powerful dynasty in Milan, Italy, giving her the chance to pursue whatever interests she had. From a young age, Caterina had been drawn to physical combat training as well as fashion and the arts, so she became a student of both. In other words, Caterina was free to indulge both her feminine and masculine sides, becoming a strong figure who fascinated both the men and women of Milan. This universal fascination is something that artists like David Bowie achieve as well when they explore both the masculine and feminine parts of their personality.

We attain masculinity and femininity both from our genes and our upbringing. Due to society's influence, men generally repress their feminine side and women their masculine side, but we are better off embracing this duality within us. For starters, it would improve our relationships, making us more empathetic to those of the opposite sex. It can also improve problem solving, creativity and confidence, says Greene.

Men and women tend to think of the world in different ways, with men looking closely to separate and categorize things and women stepping back to see patterns and connections. The best minds will have ready access to both ways of thinking. Another way to experience a big boost in life is to get closer to a sense of higher purpose. Since we are all complex people, we can easily slip into a sense of aimlessness and feel a general lack of cohesion. But if we take a calm look within, we can find what it is that really excites us.

Often, we can trace back our higher purpose to a moment in childhood. For Steve Jobs, it was seeing his first electronics store as a young boy. For Marie Curie, it was being immediately fascinated when seeing chemistry tools for the first time. For legendary film director Akira Kurosawa, it happened later in life when he worked as an assistant for another director, Kajiro Yamamoto. Until then, he had not recognized the full potential of film. But standing behind Yamamoto, he experienced a transcendent moment where everything suddenly became clear and made sense. It is these moments we should be searching for, as they are the ones that point to a higher purpose in life, says Greene.

Our false sense of entitlement

We like to think of ourselves as unique, civilized and sophisticated individuals with independent minds. But if we pay close attention to human nature, we see that we also spend a lot of time worrying about what others think and how well we fit into certain groups, says Greene. While it is true that we have come a long way from our tribal roots, we still tend to devolve into primitive, reactionary thinking when we are part of a group. It is not a pleasant thing to consider, but we'd all be better off to recognize that this tendency is within all of us.

One of the best examples of group mentality gone wrong is the Chinese Cultural Revolution under Chairman Mao Zedong. The revolution was intended to be a rebellion against the elitists and their unfair hierarchies, but in a group mentality, any nuanced thinking went out the window. Soon, anyone wearing clothing that resembled Western fashion was attacked in the streets as being part of the elite. As a result, a police state formed to try and control the chaos, and the revolution ended up achieving the opposite of what it set out to accomplish.

To avoid such things from happening, we should all be part of what the author calls a Reality Group. You can think of this group as the gold standard in teamwork, where everyone stays focused on the original goal, while also making sure the group does not get caught up in power plays or pointless disputes. This structure focuses on the beneficial aspects of teamwork and emphasizes that people can accomplish great things when they cooperate.

Another unpleasant aspect of human nature is entitlement. Although all of us will feel entitled from time to time, there is no institution that represents this unfortunate trait more than royalty. For centuries, people have been expected to honour and worship individuals just because they are born into a certain family. Though many royals demand respect and authority automatically, one monarch in particular can teach us how to really earn it.

Queen Elizabeth I stand out in history as one of the few who wanted to earn the respect and loyalty of her subjects. So, she declined her income and used that money to help the people of England, and she only made decisions she believed were in the best interest of her people. What Elizabeth understood is that the entitlement of earlier monarchs only leads to resentment. So, we should all prove ourselves worthy of admiration by working hard, owning up to our mistakes and making sacrifices when it is in the greater interest.

Controlled aggression can be put to good use

In the mid-nineteenth century, businessman Maurice Clark met an unassuming guy who came from a troubled background. This was John D. Rockefeller. Rockefeller's father had been a notorious con man who would often take off suddenly, leaving his family with barely enough money to keep from starving.

Clark did not know it at the time, but Rockefeller's childhood left him with an obsession for accumulating money and being in control of an orderly and predictable environment – the things he had grown up without. All Clark saw was a guy who was deeply religious and had a knack for irritating him to no end.

The two men had gone into business together, but Rockefeller was so irritating in pressuring Clark to expand the business that Clark agreed to sell his shares of the business at an auction, thereby playing right into Rockefeller's hands. Rockefeller bought those shares and turned that small initial business into the Standard Oil Company, one of the most powerful companies ever created.

Rockefeller was an aggressive businessman, but he was a sophisticated aggressor. He knew how to read people's motivations and recognize what people would accept in order to get what he wanted.

We all have some level of aggression in us – our aggressive nature helped make us the dominant

species on the planet – and we should not try to repress this part of our personality, as it will lead to passive aggression. Repressed anger can also show up as an internal voice that projects the aggression inward, toward yourself. It is better to accept healthy levels of aggression and find ways to put it to good use.

The first step is to recognize where the aggression comes from. It might be due to insecurities, domineering parents, trauma from childhood or wanting to control your environment. Once we understand our aggression, we can direct it toward productive ends, like using it to fuel ambitions and realize goals. We can use it as energy to be tenacious and fearless in pursuing a higher purpose.

Plus, when we better understand aggression, we can recognize it in others and know how people use it to hide their own vulnerabilities. This can help us defeat an aggressor, and there are few things in life more rewarding than outwitting a bully, says Greene.

Embrace the fact that you are going to die

Back in the fourteenth century, the Egyptian historian Ibn Khaldun suggested that generations run in a cycle of four different types. The first is a revolutionary generation that brings about great change, which is followed by a generation of order and stability. The third generation focuses on pragmatism and comfort, while the fourth generation is one of inquiry and cynicism. The trends in this pattern are not set in stone, but we can see how each generation is influenced and responds to the one that came before it.

For example, in the first half of the twentieth century, the US had the Silent Generation, who grew up in the shadow of the Great Depression and fought in World War II. By and large, they practiced conservative values. They were followed by the Baby Boomers who rebelled against their conservative parents and blossomed in the counterculture movement of the 1960s and '70s. They were followed by Generation X, who chafed against the perceived hypocrisy of their parents and championed pragmatism and self-reliance. Then came the Millennials, who in turn champion teamwork rather than individualism, and generally oppose conflict and confrontation.

Understanding how generational values influence decision-making is more important than ever. Nowadays, the world is highly connected, and it is very likely that we will see trends that span the globe in future generations. So, by understanding today has historical context, we will be well positioned to understand the zeitgeist of tomorrow.

Finally, one of the biggest influences on our decisions has always been our sense of mortality. It is easy to understand why a person would prefer not to think about death. However, its incredible influence on us is precisely why we should think about it. It makes little sense to deny the inevitability of death, and when it is embraced, it can serve as a great motivator for leading a productive and vibrant life. It is also a great source of empathy, since death is the great equalizer that unites us all.

When twentieth-century American writer Flannery O'Connor discovered she had the fatal disease of lupus, she did not despair. In fact, she became more empathetic, open-minded and enthusiastic about life. The Russian writer Fyodor Dostoyevsky had a similar reaction after a near-death experience – he felt reborn, with a renewed sense of wonder.

So, stop going through life on autopilot, with an inward, distracted gaze. Recognize how amazing it is that we exist on this planet to begin with and commit to doing something beautiful to honour this remarkable gift, says Greene.

What I took from it

Human nature is full of laws that greatly influence our day-to-day lives. These include the laws of irrationality, narcissism, envy, short-sightedness, aggression and the denial of death. Some of these laws are aspects of the human condition that are not easy to accept. Once you do accept their existence, though, you can begin to improve your life.

With a better understanding of human nature, you can recognize when emotions are leading to irrational decisions, or when your opinions are too influenced by groups and organizations. Understanding human nature is also a way to understand the commonalities between all humans, which can provide a much-needed boost to your empathy levels.

Be motivated by the sublime. Take a moment to consider all that happened in order for life to occur on this planet. Your life is a wondrous thing and you should never lose sight of this.

The Road To Character

David Brooks

Your Facebook newsfeed is full of it; your Twitter feed, too. Selfies on the beach on holiday, self-obsessed complaints about minor problems, videos and pictures and comments about “me.” Social media mirrors our current state of society, and that state is all about the cult of “me.” Everything we do, see or consume is boiled down to the promotion of me and what I want. So says David Brooks in his book, *The Road to Character*, published in 2015.

It was not always this way. Society once valued people who embodied the virtues of honesty, humility and faithfulness. To promote oneself as special or all important was just not done. So, when did it become all about “me?” How can we return to a time in which society’s noble qualities ensured that everyone was valued, together? In this book we will learn what George Eliot can teach you about opening yourself to others; why we should be honest about our imperfections; and where we have gone wrong in how we raise children.

The three most powerful points I took from the book were;

1. The scales of our society have precariously shifted toward self-obsession and success, leaving the virtue of humility and the struggle toward character in the past. But life’s joys are not found in a dream job or home, they exist in the moral battle of becoming a more loving, humble person.
2. Today raising children has become just another tool for self-promotion, with report cards and team wins another badge of honour for the parent.
3. Pride makes us cold-hearted and cruel, while deluding us into thinking that we are the masters of our own lives. Pride pushes us to prove our superiority to others, and the aid it prevents us from receiving can be a major block on the road to character.

Today’s society values the “me,” the extrovert that lives in each one of us. But this was not always so

The idea of multiple, conflicting personalities within each person has long been the subject of philosophical investigation, captivating thinkers throughout history. Each person is composed of two competing personality types, called Adams. Depending on society’s prevailing culture, people lean toward one or the other type.

Our “Adam I” type is an “alpha,” a personality that projects outward, most comfortable in a success-obsessed society. He wants a career, social status; he is a winner and will fight to remain so. In contrast, our “Adam II” type is an introvert. Today’s society wants nothing to do with him. He has a strong moral compass and strives to become more virtuous. Think of Adam II as the core of what makes a human “human,” displaying traits such as kindness, bravery, honesty and devotion. So, while each person embodies these two basic types, one is often overshadowed by the other.

In the past few decades, American society has made a shift from the moralistic world of Adam II to the self-centred one of Adam I. Consider how in America, public figures used to emphasize traits such as humility. For instance, George Bush Sr., who grew up in the era of Adam II, barely spoke about himself, even during his presidential campaigns. In fact, he was so keen to avoid self-promotion that he crossed out the word “I” in all his campaign speeches! But this age has come and gone. Today people are pushed to obsess over themselves and live only for their own desires. This message is evident in everything from movies to self-help books to celebrity commencement speeches. You are unique! Follow your dreams! Do not accept any limits, and never change.

Society has made a shift, from a focus on humility and reservedness to a focus on individual desire

When the news got out that American troops had killed Osama bin Laden in May 2011, the streets of many US cities were packed with cheering citizens. Politicians and celebrities openly rejoiced. Now consider a similar event from a different era: Victory in Europe (VE) day, 1945. With the end of World War II, Americans were certainly happy, yet victory celebrations were far more reserved.

What changed from then to now? Society used to emphasize that humans were not strong but essentially weak, a climate in which Adam II types thrived. For instance, Christian thinkers such as Augustine rejected worldly success to teach about sin and human error. At the same time, humanists stressed the limits of our understanding and viewed pride with suspicion. Both schools of thought had the same point, stressing that individualism was not a virtue.

All this changed with the rise of romanticism in the eighteenth century, an era marked with the increasing prevalence of Adam I types and ideas of human goodness and the power of the individual. After this period, our two Adams remained more or less in balance in society. That is, until the mid-twentieth century.

After the Depression and World War II, people were ready to cut loose, relax and enjoy life. Consumption, and its counterpart, mass advertising, grew considerably as people searched for ways to make life easier and more fun. In general, society sought to break free from the shackles of self-restraint and claim a new and upbeat, positive lifestyle.

The 1950s and 1960s were about pride and empowerment, a time when marginalized communities, from women to minorities, sought justice. But this age of empowerment also saw the power of individualism and personal desire overshadowing humility. While this might seem like a good thing on the surface, the truth is, our self-obsessed society has cost us a lot.

Modern society has lost its connection to the moral values that lead to true joy and satisfaction

So as society has become more individualistic and self-promoting, how has this shift affected our culture and our individual lives? Today's Adam I-dominated zeitgeist encourages us to follow our desires wherever they may lead us. But as we chase our wants, we lose sight of deeper principles.

For example, the belief that you can accomplish anything you set your mind to means that every situation is easily reduced to a simplistic equation of cost and opportunity. As a result, as a society we no longer invest in things out of love or loyalty, but only to climb the social ladder. In other words, our lives revolve around how we achieve, and no longer why. The effect is profound, says Brooks.

Huge aspects of our lives have been subsumed by Adam I traits, even the way we raise our children. For instance, the connection between a parent and child previously was one of love, with the goal of fostering a profound relationship. Today raising children has become just another tool for self-promotion, with report cards and team wins another badge of honour for the parent.

Parents are not invested in their children becoming well-rounded, balanced people but instead push them to learn skills that look good on a resume. So, children are constantly praised and told how special they are, while being honed through private educations designed to push them to success.

In an annual poll of incoming freshmen to the University of California, Los Angeles, some 80 percent of those surveyed in 1977 said they were seeking a meaningful philosophy of life. Today fewer than half that number say that they are seeking the same goal. In 1966, some 42 percent of incoming freshmen said that wealth was an important life goal; yet by 1990, that number had leapt to 74 percent!

The long road to character begins with understanding that all humans are flawed creatures

So as society fills itself with self-centred individuals, it becomes divorced from humanity's deeper morals. But how do we change this? By embracing the flaws inherent in all of us. Consider this; experiencing suffering makes you more grateful by helping you realize that you do not deserve most of the love you receive. When you realize this, you become more grateful for the affection and attention of others. Therefore, doing things like being honest about your flaws can help you overcome self-centeredness and embrace deeper social values, like love and connection to others.

Dorothy Day was an aspiring young author, but she struggled with alcoholism and depression. It was only after admitting her flaws that she got her life back by shifting her focus from herself to others. How did Day do this? In 1933, she founded a newspaper called *The Catholic Worker*, which aimed to aid people suffering amid the Depression and to use Catholic social values to create a society for the greater good.

As today's society is already obsessed with "sharing," living like Day is not so difficult. All we need to do is to turn our focus from narcissistic self-love to sharing our struggles and use these lessons to process and overcome individual flaws. In this way, we might just find some space for Adam II again. For example, in 1952 Day published her autobiography, *The Long Loneliness*, telling the story of how a life of sadness became a life of service when she converted to Catholicism. It was not just a tale of self-revelation, but an attempt to affirm the notion that we all, more or less, have the same problem; a natural tendency toward overconfidence and selfishness. A problem with which we need to struggle, each one of us, to redirect our lives on a moral compass and not a hedonistic one.

Toss pride by the wayside. Only by freeing yourself from pride can you walk the road to character

On the road to character, you will need the support of an external force to help you cope with your internal struggles. Your support base could be family, friends, mentors, or God. For instance, George Eliot, the pen name of famous writer Mary Anne Evans, would never have found such literary and personal success without the support of her partner, George Lewes.

Eliot was self-conscious and needy, and sadly known for being "magnificently ugly." Despite her intellectual maturity, she was emotionally weak and found herself stuck in a vicious cycle in which she fell in love with men who never loved her back. She consumed her suffering, stuffed full of personal dramas that she interpreted instead as emotional depth.

That is, until she found salvation in the love of Lewes. He supported her career and became an essential facet of her eventual success. And he did it all by helping her build confidence in her writing and shed the insecurities that had burdened her all her life.

Reaching out for help can be difficult; we often fail to do it because of our central vice, pride. Why is pride such a problem? Pride makes us cold-hearted and cruel, while deluding us into thinking that we are the masters of our own lives. Pride pushes us to prove our superiority to others, and the aid it prevents us from receiving can be a major block on the road to character.

There is only one solution. If we are going to thrive, we must free ourselves from pride! By throwing off pride, embracing the assistance of others and admitting our own flaws, we can begin balancing our internal Adam I and Adam II and be happy, fulfilled and worthy.

What I took from it

The scales of our society have precariously shifted toward self-obsession and success, leaving the virtue of humility and the struggle toward character in the past. But life's joys are not found in a dream job or home, they exist in the moral battle of becoming a more loving, humble person.

Check your chatter. The next time you are compelled to share a thought on social media, consider first why you want to do so. Are you seeking approval or gratification? Trying to assert your knowledge to feel accepted by your peers? If you find these ulterior motives present in your impulse to share, try to quell your desire and choose modesty over self-aggrandizement.

Biography

“If you haven’t cried at least once while writing a chapter of your life’s story, then you have to ask yourself if you’re writing fiction.”

— Shannon L. Alder

A Brief History In Time

Stephen Hawking

It is hard to imagine a more arresting and thought-provoking sight than a starry night sky. Something about the twinkle of the cosmos compels us to pause and ponder the deepest mysteries of the universe. A Brief History of Time; first published in 1988, will help illuminate these secrets by unlocking the laws which govern the universe.

Written in accessible language, phew, it will help even the non-scientifically minded, like myself, to understand why the universe exists, how it started and what it will look like in the future. You will also find out about strange phenomena; like black holes which suck everything (well, almost everything) toward them. What is more, you will also discover the secrets of time itself; as this book provide the answers to questions like “how fast is time going?” and “how do we know it’s going forwards?”

The three most powerful points I took from the book were;

1. Theories are always disprovable, meaning they are open to reform if new evidence that does not fit the theory is found
2. It does not matter how fast something else is going, the speed of light always remains the same
3. Time is relative. Even though it is barely noticeable, this has a big impact on your everyday life! If you were to take a trip through space at such a speed and then return to Earth, they would arrive thousands of years in the future and barely have aged

Theories can help predict the future

You have probably heard of the theory of gravity or the theory of relativity? But have you ever paused to think what we really mean when we talk about theories? A theory, in its most basic terms, is a model that accurately explains large groups of observations. Scientists collect data from observations they see in, for example, experiments, and use it to develop explanations of how and why phenomena happen.

For example, Isaac Newton developed the theory of gravity after observing many phenomena, from apples falling from trees to the movements of planets. Using the data, he collected he was able to describe gravity in a theory.

Theories have two great benefits:

First, they allow scientists to make definite predictions about future events. For example, Newton’s theory of gravity allowed scientists to predict the future movements of objects like planets. If you want to know, say, where Mars will be six months from now, it is possible to predict this precisely using the theory of gravity.

Second, theories are always disprovable, meaning they are open to reform if new evidence that does not fit the theory is found. For example, people once believed in the theory that everything in the universe revolved around the Earth. Galileo disproved this theory when he noticed moons orbit Jupiter; he could therefore show that actually not everything orbits the Earth.

So, in effect, a single future observation can always invalidate a theory, no matter how reliable it seems at the moment. This means theories can never be proven correct, and this makes science a constantly evolving process.

Isaac Newton

Before Isaac Newton, people thought an object's natural state was at absolute rest. This means that if no force was acting on it, then the object would remain completely still. In the 1600s, Newton thoroughly disproved this long-held belief. In its place, he introduced a theory which stated that all objects in the universe, instead of being still, were in fact in constant motion.

Newton determined this through his discovery that the planets and stars in the universe were constantly moving in relation to each other. For example, the Earth is constantly orbiting the Sun and the entire solar system is rotating around the galaxy. Therefore, nothing is ever still. To describe how all objects in the universe move, Newton developed three laws:

The first of Newton's laws states that all objects will continue moving in a straight line if not acted on by another force. This was demonstrated in an experiment by Galileo in which he rolled balls down a slope. As gravity was the only force acting on the balls, they rolled in a straight line.

Newton's second law states that an object will speed up at a rate proportional to the force acting on it. For example, a car with a more powerful engine will accelerate faster than one with a less powerful engine. This law also states that the greater the body's mass, the less a force affects its motion. For example, if there are two cars with the same engine, the heavier car will take longer to accelerate.

Newton's third law describes gravity. It states that all bodies in the universe attract other bodies with a force proportional to the mass of each object. This means that if you double the mass of one object, the force will be twice as great. If you double one object's mass and triple the other, the force will be six times as great.

Measuring speed

We have seen how Newton's theory did away with absolute rest and replaced it with the idea that the movement of an object is relative to the movement of something else. Yet, the theory also suggested the speed of an object is relative. For example, imagine you are reading a book while sitting on a train travelling at 100 mph. How fast are you travelling? Well, to a bystander watching the train speed past, you are travelling at 100 mph. But relative to the book you are reading, your speed is zero mph. So, your speed is relative to another object.

Yet, one major hole developed in Newton's theory - the speed of light. The speed of light is constant, not relative. It is always 186,000 miles per second. It does not matter how fast something else is going, the speed of light remains the same. For example, if that train were speeding towards a beam of light at 100 mph, the speed of light would be 186,000 miles per second. Yet if that train stopped at a red signal, the beam of light would still be 186,000 miles per second. It does not matter who is viewing the light or how quickly they are traveling, its speed will always be the same.

This fact causes problems for Newton's theory. How can the speed of something be constant regardless of the state of the observer? The answer was discovered in the early twentieth century when Albert Einstein postulated his theory of relativity.

The theory of relativity

The speed of light being constant was problematic for Newton's theory, because it proved that speed was not always relative. Therefore, scientists needed an updated model that took the speed of light into account. Albert Einstein developed such a theory, the theory of relativity. The theory of relativity states that the laws of science are the same for all freely moving observers. This means that no matter what someone's speed might be, they would observe the same speed of light. This might seem quite straightforward at first glance, but one of its central suggestions is actually very difficult for many to

comprehend; it states that time is relative.

What this means is that because the speed of light does not change for observers moving at different speeds, observers traveling relative to one another would actually measure different times for the same event. For example, say a flash of light is sent out to two observers; one is travelling toward the light while the other is traveling at a quicker speed in the opposite direction. For both observers, the speed of the light would be the same, even though they are traveling at relatively different speeds and going in different directions.

Unbelievably, this would mean that they each experience the flash event as if it happened at two different times. This is because time is determined by the distance something has travelled divided by its speed. The speed of light is the same for both observers, but as the distance is different, time is relative to each observer.

If both observers carried clocks to record when the pulse of light was emitted, these would confirm two different times for the same event. So, who is right? Neither observer; time is relative nor unique to both observers' perspectives!

Quantum state

All matter is made up of particles such as electrons or photons. In order to learn more about the universe, scientists want to measure them and study their speed. However, particles do something very strange when you try to study them. Bizarrely, the more precisely you try to measure the position of a particle, the more uncertain its speed becomes; and the more exactly its speed is measured, the less certain its position becomes! This phenomenon, first discovered in the 1920s, is called the uncertainty principle.

Because of the uncertainty principle, scientists had to use other ways of looking at particles, so they began to look at a particle's quantum state instead. Quantum state combines many likely possible positions and speeds of a particle. Since scientists cannot pinpoint a particle's definite position or velocity, they look at the many likely positions particles might occupy and velocities they might have. As a particle moves about, scientists track all the likely places it could be and determine which of these is the most likely.

To help them determine this, scientists treat particles as if they are waves. The multitude of different positions that a particle can be in means that they appear like a series of continuous, oscillating waves. Imagine a piece of vibrating string. When it vibrates, the string will arc and dip through peaks and troughs. A particle also behaves like this, although its possible path is a series of such overlapping waves, all happening at once.

Looking at particles like this helps scientists figure out where a particle is most likely to be. The likeliest positions of the particle occur where the arcs and dips on the many waves correspond with each other, and the least likely positions are where they do not. This is called interference, and it shows which positions and speeds are most probable for the particle wave's path.

Gravity

When you view the world around you, you are seeing it in three dimensions, i.e., you can describe any object by its height, width and depth. Yet there is also a fourth dimension, although we ourselves cannot see it; it is time, and it combines with the other three dimensions to form something called space-time.

Scientists use this four-dimensional model of space-time to describe events in the universe. An event is something that occurs at a particular position in space and time. So, when calculating an event's

position along with the three-dimensional coordinates, scientists add a fourth coordinate to indicate time.

Scientists have to take time into consideration when determining the position of an event because the theory of relativity states that time is relative. It is therefore an important factor in describing the nature of an event. An amazing consequence of the combination of space and time is how it changed our conception of gravity.

Gravity is the result of massive objects curving space-time. A huge mass, like that of our sun, curves and actually alters space-time. Think of it like this; imagine space-time to be a blanket stretched out and held in the air. If you place an object in the middle of the blanket, the blanket will curve, and the object will sink a little. This is what massive objects do to space-time.

Other objects then follow these curves in space-time. This is because an object always takes the shortest journey between two points, which is a circular orbit around a larger object. You can see this if you look at that blanket again. If you put a large object like an orange on the blanket and then try to roll a smaller one – say, a marble – past it, the marble will follow the indentation made by the orange. Gravity works in the same way!

Black holes

During their lifetimes, stars need enormous amounts of energy to produce heat and light. Yet, this energy does not last forever; eventually it runs out, leaving the star to die. What happens to a star when it dies depends on its size? When a very large star runs out of energy, something spectacular is created; a black hole.

A black hole occurs because the gravitational field of most massive stars is so strong. While the star is alive, it is able to use its energy to keep itself from collapsing. But when the star runs out of energy, it can no longer overcome the gravity and its decaying body collapses in on itself. Everything is pulled inwards toward an infinitely dense, spherical point called a singularity. This singularity is the black hole.

When a black hole forms, space-time is curved so steeply by its gravity that even light bends along it. Not only does a black hole pull in everything nearby, it also prevents anything that crosses a certain boundary around it from escaping again; this point of no return is called the event horizon, and not even light, which travels faster than anything else in the universe, can escape back over it.

This raises a question; if a black hole absorbs light and anything else that crosses its event horizon, how can we know they are there? Scientists search for black holes by looking for their gravitational effect on the universe and for the X-rays produced by their interaction with orbiting stars.

For example, scientists look for stars orbiting dark and massive objects that could be black holes. They also look for the X-rays and other waves that are commonly produced by matter when it is being sucked in and torn up by a black hole. There is even a source of radio and infrared waves at the centre of our galaxy that could be a super massive black hole.

If the gravitational pull of a black hole is so strong that not even light can escape it, then you would think nothing else could escape either. But you would be wrong. In fact, black holes must release something; otherwise they would break the second law of thermodynamics. The universal second law of thermodynamics states that entropy, the tendency toward greater disorder, always increases. And as entropy increases, so must temperature. An example of this is the way a fire-poker, after being in a fire, glows red-hot and releases radiation as heat.

According to the second law, since black holes suck in disordered energy from the universe, the entropy of the black hole should also increase. And with this increase in entropy, black holes should have to let heat escape.

The escape of heat is possible because, although nothing that has passed a black hole's event horizon can escape, virtual pairs of particles and antiparticles near the event horizon conserve the second law of thermodynamics. Virtual particles are particles that cannot be detected but whose effects can be measured. One of the partners in the pair has positive energy and the other has negative energy.

In a black hole, gravitation is so strong it can suck the negative particle into the black hole and in doing so give its particle partner enough energy to possibly escape into the universe and be emitted as heat. This allows the black hole to emit radiation, and thus follow the second law of thermodynamics.

The amount of positive radiation emitted is balanced by the negative particles being sucked into the black hole. This inward flow of negative particles can reduce the black hole's mass until eventually it evaporates and dies. And if its mass becomes small enough, the black hole will most likely end in a massive final explosion, as large as millions of H-bombs.

Time

Imagine a scenario where the universe began to contract, and time started running backward. What would that be like? Perhaps clocks would run backward, and the course of history would reverse. Scientists have not completely ruled it out, but there are three strong indicators that suggest time only moves forward. The first indicator showing that the passage of time goes from past to future is the thermodynamics arrow of time. According to the second law of thermodynamics, entropy – the disorder of a closed system – tends to increase with time. This means that time can be measured by the tendency of disorder to increase.

For example, if a cup rolls off a table and breaks, it has become less ordered, and its entropy has increased. Since a broken cup would never spontaneously reassemble and increase its order, we see that time is only going forward. The broken cup and the thermodynamic arrow of time are also aspects of the second indicator of forward time: the psychological arrow of time, which is dictated by memory. After that cup has broken, you can remember it being on the table; but before this, when it was still on the table, you cannot "recall" its future position on the floor.

The third indicator, the cosmological arrow of time, refers to the expansion of the universe, and this also follows along our perception of the thermodynamic arrow of time. This is because as the universe expands, entropy increases.

If the disorder in the universe were to reach its maximum point then the universe could start contracting, reversing the cosmological arrow of time. However, we would not know about it because intelligent beings can only exist as disorder increases. This is because we rely on the process of entropy to break down our food into energy. Therefore, as long as we are around, we will observe the cosmological arrow of time as going forward.

Electromagnetic, weak nuclear and strong nuclear forces

What kinds of forces are at work in the universe? Most people will have heard about only one: gravity, the force that attracts objects to one another and which is experienced in the way that Earth's gravity pulls us to its surface. However, most people are unaware that there are actually three additional forces that act on the smallest particles.

The first is electromagnetic force, which can be observed in everyday life when a magnet sticks to a refrigerator or when you recharge your cell phone. It acts on all particles with electric charges, such as electrons and quarks. Electromagnetic force, like the north and south poles on a magnet, can be attractive or repulsive: positively charged particles attract negative particles and push away other positive particles, and vice versa. This force is much stronger than gravity and dominates at the small level of the atom. For example, electromagnetic force causes an electron to orbit around the atom's nucleus.

The second is weak nuclear force, which acts on all the particles that make up matter and which causes radioactivity. This force is called “weak” because the particles that carry it can only exert force at short distances. At higher energies, the strength of weak nuclear force increases until it matches that of electromagnetic force.

The third is strong nuclear force, which binds protons and neutrons in the nucleus of an atom and binds the smaller quarks within protons and neutrons. In contrast to electromagnetic force and weak nuclear force, strong nuclear force gets weaker at higher energies.

At a very high energy called grand unification energy, electromagnetic force and weak nuclear force get stronger and strong nuclear force gets weaker. At that point, all three forces reach equal strength and become different aspects of a single force: a force that might have played a role in the creation the universe.

The big bang

Most scientists believe that time began with the big bang – the moment when the universe went from an infinitely dense state to a rapidly expanding entity which is still growing today. Scientists, however, do not exactly know how this big bang occurred, although a number of theories have been proposed to explain how this huge expansion might have happened.

The most widely accepted theory of the universe’s beginning is the hot big bang model. In this model, the universe started with zero size and was infinitely hot and dense. During the big bang, it expanded, and as it grew its temperature cooled as its heat was spread. In the first few hours of this expansion, most of the elements in the universe today were created.

As the universe continued to expand, gravity caused denser regions of the expanding matter to start rotating, creating galaxies. Within these newly forming galaxies, clouds of hydrogen and helium gases collapsed. Their colliding atoms caused nuclear fusion reactions, which created stars. When these stars later died and collapsed, they created huge stellar explosions that ejected more elements into the universe. This provided the material for the birth of new stars and planets. Although this is the generally accepted version of the big bang and the birth of time, its not the only model.

Another model is the inflationary model. This model proposes that the energy of the early universe was so enormously high that the strengths of the strong nuclear force, weak nuclear force and electromagnetic force were equal. As the universe expanded, however, the three forces took on different strengths very quickly. As the forces split, an enormous amount of energy was released. This would have had an anti-gravitational effect, causing the universe to expand rapidly, and at an increasing rate.

Unifying general relativity and quantum physics.

In their desire to understand and describe the universe, scientists have developed two major theories. The first is general relativity, which concentrates on a very large phenomenon in the universe; gravity. The second is quantum physics, which describes some of the smallest known objects in the universe; particles smaller than atoms.

While both theories provide great insights, there are big differences in what is predicted with the equations of quantum physics, and what is predicted and observed with general relativity. This means that currently there is no way of combining them together to make one complete unified theory of everything. One issue that prevents the two theories being brought together is that many of the equations scientists use in quantum physics result in seemingly impossible infinite values. For example, according to the equations, the curve of space-time would be infinite, something observations have shown to be false.

To cancel out these infinities, scientists try to introduce other infinities into the equation. Unfortunately, this keeps scientists from being able to predict accurately. As a result, instead of using the equations from quantum physics to predict events, the events themselves have to be added and the equations tweaked to make them fit!

A second, similar problem is that quantum theory suggests that all the empty space in the universe is made up of virtual pairs of particles and antiparticles. However, the existence of these virtual pairs causes difficulties for general relativity. Since there is an infinite amount of empty space in the universe, the energy of these pairs would have to have infinite energy.

This is problematic because Einstein's famous equation $E=mc^2$ suggests that the mass of an object is equal to its energy. So, the infinite energy of these virtual particles would mean that they would also have infinite mass. And if there were infinite mass, then the whole universe would collapse under the intense gravitational pull and become a single black hole.

What I took from it

Many people are put off physics because they see it as an impenetrable world of lengthy equations and complex theories. And, to a certain extent, this is true. But the complexity of physics should not stop us non-experts from learning how and why the universe works. There are a number of rules and laws that help us understand the mysteries of the universe around us. Rules and laws that most of us can comprehend. And once we understand them, we can begin to see the universe in a new light.

Theories help you test ideas and make predictions. In order to make predictions, it can be helpful to use a theory. One can devise a theory by making a couple of simple testable rules and then seeing if they hold up. If they are not disproved by experimentation, one can be confident that they will hold up in future situations; they can therefore be applied to future situations to make predictions.

Time is relative. Even though it is barely noticeable, this has a big impact on your everyday life! Time is relative, and this has very interesting consequences in physics. For example, someone travelling near the speed of light would age much slower. If they were to take a trip through space at such a speed and then return to Earth, they would arrive thousands of years in the future and barely have aged. There are also a few ways the relativity of time affects us right here on Earth.

For example, GPS systems need to incorporate relativity or they would end up off by miles. Another interesting effect is that a twin living on the top of a mountain would age ever so slightly faster than a twin who lives at sea level due to the difference in their relative positions. You can only measure your position relative to something else.

Where are you? In your house? On Earth? Orbiting the Sun? Rotating within one of the spiral arms of the Milky Way galaxy? The answer is all of these. As bodies move around the universe, including you, they can only be measured in relation to one another. It is therefore good to take a break and consider where you are as you fall through the universe along with the planets, stars and galaxies!

Elon Musk

Ashlee Vance

Elon Reeve Musk; born June 28, 1971 is a technology entrepreneur, investor, and engineer. He holds South African, Canadian, and U.S. citizenship and is the founder, CEO, and lead designer of SpaceX; co-founder, CEO, and product architect of Tesla; co-founder and CEO of Neuralink; founder of The Boring Company; co-founder and co-chairman of OpenAI; and co-founder of PayPal.

In December 2016, he was ranked 21st on the Forbes list of The World's Most Powerful People. He has a net worth of \$22.3 billion and is listed by Forbes as the 40th-richest person in the world. There are only a few businesspeople in the world as well known and admired as Elon Musk. His successes in a range of areas – from electric cars to space travel – have established him as a household name. But what is it that makes Elon Musk so special? In this book baring his name; Ashlee Vance lays bare his interests and passions – the forces that drove him to become the man he is today. They also outline Musk's unique passion; the desire to save mankind from destruction.

It is this goal that fuelled his work on solar power, electric cars and space exploration, and, ultimately, led to his prodigious success.

The three most powerful points I took from the book were;

1. Elon Musk is an exceptional man. Ambitious, passionate and driven, he never takes no for an answer. His deep concern for humanity's survival is coupled with a large ego and difficult personality.
2. No matter what others think of him, Elon Musk has propelled sustainable technology to astonishing new heights, and he will continue to do so, as one of the leaders, if not the leader, of the aerospace, automotive and solar industries.
3. Think big. Next time you have an idea, do not worry about how crazy it sounds. Take a page out of Elon Musk's book. Fornicating mice on Mars, all electric cars faster than Ferraris, marrying the same woman twice? Nothing is too absurd. Think the impossible and then make it happen.

It is all about saving the human

Achieving success in the sustainable-technology industry is not easy. Many try and most fail. And yet Elon Musk, founder of Tesla Motors and SolarCity, has managed to succeed not once, but twice. How did he manage it? It comes down to the way he sees the world. Musk is not your average money-obsessed, Silicon-Valley entrepreneur. Uniquely, he possesses a kind of universal empathy. Harboring a deep care for the whole of humanity, Musk is driven by a single goal: to save us, the human race, by relocating humanity to Mars. In Musk's view, the Earth, vulnerable to asteroids and with dwindling resources, is no longer a tenable home.

This concern never leaves his mind and has instilled in him an unshakeable determination to get things done. Of course, this does not always manifest itself well. Musk is notorious for setting unrealistic goals, assigning incredible workloads and verbally abusing his employees. Musk even berated an employee who, instead of attending a company event, chose to be present for the birth of his child. Musk demanded that he consider where his true priorities lay. The way Musk sees it, you can either commit 100 percent to changing the history of the world, or not at all.

Love him or hate him, Musk is nevertheless respected by employees for his sense of mission. They know it brings success. And he is no hypocrite, either. Musk's sense of purpose is plainly evident in his gruelling weekly schedule. Monday begins at SpaceX, in Los Angeles, where he works until Tuesday night. He then jets to Silicon Valley, where he spends Wednesdays and Thursdays at Tesla. Then it is

a flight back to L.A. There is no way someone could commit to such a lifestyle without believing in what they were doing.

Musk's past shaped his innovative and ambitious character

Thanks to a unique and powerful sense of purpose, Elon Musk is one of the most successful entrepreneurs in modern society. But how did he come to see himself and the world the way he does? Well, it all started with a difficult upbringing in South Africa.

The young, near-friendless Elon Musk had a difficult relationship with his father, Errol. And yet when Musk's parents separated, Musk chose to live with his dad to give him some much-needed company. But life with his father was difficult. In addition to the turmoil at home, Musk was often bullied by classmates, once receiving a beating so severe that he could not attend school for a week.

To escape this, Musk retreated into reading and study. Possessed of an astonishing photographic memory, Musk was able to read two encyclopaedias – and remember everything. The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy was one book that deeply influenced Musk; it led him to realize that answering a question is easy, but that asking the right question is much harder.

At this early stage, Musk was already pondering questions that might expand and improve human civilization. By the time he started high school, he had strong opinions about solar power, conquering other planets, paperless banking and space rockets. He was also becoming entrepreneurially aware, selling his video game creation, Blastar, for \$500 when he was just 12.

Musk's confidence grew while in Canada

In 1988, Elon Musk decided that he did not want to do military service in South Africa. So, he left the country. Though he dreamed of moving to the US, Musk first went to Canada. His first year was tough, as he went from relative to relative and drifted between odd jobs. Then he enrolled at Queen's University, where, as his self-confidence began to soar, his character took definite shape.

Musk was more ambitious in college than in high school. He entered public speaking contests, studied business, and even successfully wooed the woman of his dreams, Justine Wilson, who later became his first wife and the mother of his 6 sons. Their courtship was romantic and competitive. To begin with, Wilson had no interest in Elon Musk. But he would not take no for an answer. When he got stood up for their first date at an ice cream parlour, he found out where she was studying and asked a friend of hers what her favourite ice cream was. He then showed up carrying two chocolate-chip ice creams. This tactic of success-through-determination came to be a distinct approach in all areas of Musk's life.

After two years at Queen's, he transferred to the University of Pennsylvania and continued to flourish. As he grew more comfortable among his fellow physics students, Musk made friends who proved valuable – and not just personally, but monetarily as well. Musk and Adeo Ressi, a good friend, hosted house parties in a 14-bedroom house they had rented; admission was \$5, and Musk, strait-laced and sober all the while, raked in considerable profits. One night even brought in enough money to pay a month's rent!

Musk has success early on

Eager to jump on the dotcom bandwagon, Musk created his first company. In 1995, he and his brother founded Global Link Information Network, which was later renamed Zip2. Their aim was to help businesses clueless about the internet to get online for the first time. Few small businesses understood the consequences of the internet; they had little idea how to get on and saw little value in listing their business online or in having their own website. Things were tough at first, Musk and his brother worked

very hard and still did not sell. They received a lot of rejections, the most amiable ones declaring that the internet was “the dumbest thing they’d ever heard of.” Things began to change when Mohr Davidow Ventures, the venture-capital firm, invested in the start-up after being impressed with Musk’s energy and drive. They moved Musk down and hired Rich Sorkin as CEO. And, as the money started coming in, they hired better engineers, who changed and shortened much of the bulky coding. This got on Elon’s nerves. He was, after all, a self-taught coder.

However, Mohr Davidow also brought a more refined structure and outlined more realistic goals. Jim Ambras, the vice president of engineering at Zip2, knew that when Musk said a task should be completed in an hour, that actually it would take a day or two. When Musk said something would take a day to complete, it would actually take a week or two.

Finally, in February 1999, PC-maker Compaq Computer offered to pay \$307 million in cash for Zip2. But Musk never considered sticking around at Compaq and was already thinking of new projects. He wanted to become a successful CEO.

Selling PayPal left Musk with millions

Musk, with his newfound money, joined the big-boys’ club. He used his earnings from Compaq to buy a McLaren sports car, a condo and a small prop plane. But the rest of his money went straight into his next business: X.com. In those days, people were reluctant to buy books online, let alone share bank account details. But by partnering with Barclays, Musk succeeded in establishing X.com as one of the world’s first online banks, backed up with FDIC insurance and three mutual funds for investors to choose from.

Things were going well, but, soon enough, some major competition arrived. Max Levchin and Peter Thiel had been working on their own payment system at Confinity, before creating the first version of PayPal. After a brief battle, the companies decided, in March of 2000, to join forces. Confinity possessed the sexier product (PayPal), and X.com had the money and superior banking products, so the merge made sense.

But Musk was soon to be pushed aside in his own company once again. Two months after the merge, Thiel resigned, Levchin threatened to do the same, and Musk found himself in charge of a divided company. Though most of his coworkers favoured PayPal, Musk persisted in promoting the X.com brand. Meanwhile, computer systems failed regularly, and the website crashed weekly.

Then followed one of the meanest coups in Silicon Valley’s history: as Musk and his wife Justine boarded a plane for their overdue honeymoon, the executives went to the company board and asked Thiel to come back as CEO and to demote Musk. The coup succeeded, and Musk was left as an advisor. The company changed its name from X.com to PayPal and was finally sold to eBay, in July 2002, for \$1.5 billion. Musk netted \$250 million, enough to make his wildest dreams possible.

Musk entered the space industry through SpaceX

After his 30th birthday in 2001, Musk decided to escape the rat race. He relocated his family to Los Angeles, right around the corner from the hub of space industry. Musk had always been keen to get involved in space. At the time, the Mars Society was developing a plan to test the feasibility of putting life on Mars by sending fornicating mice into orbit. Musk thought the plan was good; the only improvement, he thought, would be sending the mice straight to Mars.

In the end, the plan was dropped, but it did not stop Musk from entering the space industry. He decided to make his debut by exploring how one might construct cheaper rockets. In June of 2002, Space Exploration Technologies (SpaceX) was born, with the mission to emerge as the South-West Airlines of Space. At a time when sending 500-pound payload started at \$30 million, Falcon 1 would carry

a 1,400-pound payload for \$6.9 million. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Musk's demands were unrealistic. His original timeline forecasted a completed first engine by May 2003; a second engine in June; the body of the rocket by July; and everything assembled in September. The first launch was planned for November – a mere 15 months after the company started!

Unsurprisingly, it took about 4 years for SpaceX to successfully launch a rocket. Although Musk dislikes the lack of a clear plan of attack, he understands that things do not always work out first time, failure is just a part of the process. The reality is that most launches fail. He knew that 9 out of 20 Atlas launches had succeeded, so failure was the norm. But, come hell or high water, he was determined to use his skills to ensure that SpaceX succeed in the end. His passion and drive, however, proved inspirational. SpaceX's became the first commercial company to carry the Dragon capsule to space and retrieve it safely after an ocean landing.

Under Musk, Tesla Motors gave the electric car a future

Electric cars used to have a less-than-cool reputation; they were certainly no match for high-power brands like Jaguar and Ferrari. But if you have seen any of the new Formula E cars, you will know things are changing. One man pushed harder than the rest to make electric cars cool and desirable, and that was Elon Musk.

Musk helped the world recognize electric-car technology for what it was; exciting, and always progressing. It all started when J. B. Straubel and, unbeknownst to him, Martin Eberhard and Marc Tarpenning, were working on electric cars powered by lithium-ion batteries. On July 1st, 2003, Eberhard and Tarpenning founded Tesla Motors; Straubel joined later.

The idea was to license the technology that AC Propulsion developed to power the tzero (a full electric car that accelerates faster than a Ferrari!), and to use the Lotus Elise chassis for the body of the car. But venture capitalists did not invest and did not see beyond the shoddy plastic finish of the tzero. Musk, however, chose to invest \$6.5 million, becoming the sole shareholder and chairman. He thought the project could revolutionize electric cars, making them popular and efficient, and the world a less polluted place.

Despite a slow and unceremonious beginning, Tesla emerged as a great success. In mid-2012, Tesla's Model S sedan changed transportation forever. With continuous internet access and a sensor that allowed the driver to start the engine without touching a single button, it is been referred to as a "computer with wheels."

In November of 2012, Motor Trend named it car of the year, and later, Consumer Reports gave the car the highest rating in its history (99/100), declaring it probably the best car ever built! America had not seen such a successful car company since the emergence of Chrysler, in 1925. This achievement is rather astonishing, as Silicon Valley had been little involved in the automotive industry, and Musk had not even manufactured cars before. But when we consider Musk's determination, this success is perhaps not such a big surprise after all.

From SolarCity to Tesla, Musk's companies are unified

Musk's star power stems from three ventures simultaneously: SpaceX, Tesla, and SolarCity. This is because they all ultimately help him pursue his real, and unifying, goal; the survival of the human species. Musk had long wanted to go into solar, but prior to creating SpaceX, he had not thought there was any money in it. So, when his cousins, the Rive brothers, were brainstorming about a new venture, Musk suggested solar.

The brothers spent two years studying the solar-power industry before hitting upon their idea. Though solar panels were slowly becoming more affordable, the cost and effort of installation was enough to

drive many consumers away. So, the Rive brothers decided to give customers what they really wanted someone to take care of the whole process, from selection to purchasing to installation.

Musk helped his cousins come up with the structure and became the chairman and largest shareholder. Six years later, SolarCity has become the largest installer of solar panels in the US, living up to its goal of making solar panel installation painless. It is expanded from individual customers to businesses like Walmart and Intel and, in 2014, it was valued at close to \$7 billion. Musk's businesses, while successful individually, also strategically complement each other. Tesla makes battery packs that SolarCity can sell to end customers, and SolarCity supplies Tesla's charging stations with solar panels.

This is because, despite being passionate about cars and solar panels and batteries, they are all just side projects for Musk. His main goal remains to ensure that humans start living sustainably now so that humanity has a future. In this way, all his endeavours are united by one ambitious goal.

Hyperloop and other projects

Musk has always had grand plans – so grand that people often find them a little far-fetched. In August 2013, he unveiled more of these plans: the Hyperloop, as well as other developments at Tesla and SpaceX. The Hyperloop is a new mode of transportation for fairly short distances. It is a large-scale pneumatic tube, just like the ones used to send mail around offices, but, in this case, it is for transporting people and cars in pods.

Similar ideas have been proposed before, but Musk's is different. His design runs under low pressure, while the pods float on a bed of air. Each pod is thrust forward by an electromagnetic pulse, and motors throughout the tube give the pods an added power-boost when needed. These solar-powered mechanisms could keep pods going at 800 miles per hour; at that speed, you could get from Los Angeles to San Francisco in 30 minutes.

For Tesla and SpaceX, Musk has other plans. Tesla's primary focus in 2015 will be bringing the SUV Model X to the market. Then, planned for 2017, is the highly anticipated Model 3. This car will cost just \$35,000, instead of over \$100,000 – the price of a typical Model S. In 2014, Musk also announced plans to build a Gigafactory, the world's largest lithium-ion manufacturing facility. That will increase the batteries available in the marketplace, a crucial part of the strategy to make Tesla cars driveable over long distances, even without access to a recharging station.

In the near future, SpaceX will begin testing its ability to take people into space. SpaceX aims to perform a manned test flight by 2016, and to fly astronauts to the International Space Station for NASA in the following year. SpaceX is also likely to move into building and selling satellites, one of the most lucrative areas in the industry. Musk is reportedly daydreaming about perhaps becoming the first man to set foot on Mars!

Musk's success comes with a turbulent personal life

Throughout the book, we see that Musk is not always an easy person to get along with. Even his marriages are a testament to this. Married three times, twice to the same woman, Musk is romantic and hot-headed. His first marriage was passionate. However, he was not always a compassionate husband – Justine recalls how she once reminded him, in exasperation, that she was his wife, not his employee. Musk responded by telling her that if she were his employee, he would have sacked her.

According to Justine, Musk gave her an ultimatum in June 2008; they would either fix their marriage that day or he would file for divorce the next morning. Justine asked to wait another week, so Musk bulldozed ahead and filed for divorce the following day.

Nevertheless, Musk suffered emotionally following the divorce, and his friend Bill Lee tried to lift his

spirits with a holiday to London. There, Musk met the then 22-year-old actress Tallulah Riley who became his second wife. He divorced Riley in 2012, stating that he “would always love her but wasn’t in love with her anymore.” They remarried directly after the divorce was finalized, when he found it impossible to date while maintaining his unbelievably busy schedule. (By his calculations, a woman requires a minimum of 10 hours per week.). In late 2014, they divorced again.

Many think Musk can be tough to the point of being mean and capricious. Some even say he lacks empathy completely citing the dismissal of his most loyal assistant, Mary Beth Brown, as an example. Practically doing everything for him, she had long been the only link between Musk and all his interests. Yet, when she asked to be compensated on par with other SpaceX execs, he told her to take two weeks off and that he would take on her work to gauge whether the request had merit. When she came back, he told her that he did not need her anymore.

Yet, despite these personal failings, those closest to Musk say that he is a loving and caring person at heart. And Riley claims that, despite his incredibly busy schedule, he always tried to get home to have dinner with his family and play computer games with his children.

What I took from it

Elon Musk is an exceptional man. Ambitious, passionate and driven, he never takes no for an answer. His deep concern for humanity’s survival is coupled with a large ego and difficult personality. No matter what others think of him, Elon Musk has propelled sustainable technology to astonishing new heights, and he will continue to do so, as one of the leaders, if not the leader, of the aerospace, automotive and solar industries.

Think big. Next time you have an idea, do not worry about how crazy it sounds. Take a page out of Elon Musk’s book. Fornicating mice on Mars, all electric cars faster than Ferraris, marrying the same woman twice? Nothing is too absurd. Think the impossible and then make it happen.

Isaac Newton

James Gleick

Isaac Newton is perhaps the most famous scientist of all time. But fame attracts myth – and much of Newton's life is somewhat obscured by the anecdotal mistruths that are told about him. Whether it's the story of his naughty dog Diamond accidentally setting Newton's laboratory ablaze or the legend of how a falling apple led to Newton's discovery of gravity, we're all familiar with the basics. But Newton is more than a story. So says James Gleick in his book, *Isaac Newton*, published in 2003.

His theorizing and discoveries remain as pertinent as ever. Even to this day, Newton's theories of motion remain one of the first things we learn in science class at school. But Newton is a fascinating character in his own right. And you will only understand what his ideas really meant when you learn a bit about the world he inhabited and how he changed it forever.

It was a time of mystery and dark magic. Even Newton, as he rationalized the world around him, was not immune to the powers of the occult and mysticism. His theories shook the world, but he was never uncontroversial, and he faced resistance at every turn.

The three most powerful points I took from the book were;

1. As a child, Newton was especially interested in the movements of the sun. By using a string, he measured how the sun traverses across the sky and even sketched three-dimensional sundials and other geometric figures. He noted too that the moon's movements were similar to those of the sun
2. Newton's first law states that bodies in motion stay in motion unless met with resistance; his second, that force generates motion. The final law famously declares that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.
3. Newton died a superstar on March 31, 1727. He had been knighted and was even buried at Westminster Abbey, in London, alongside many of Britain's monarchs

Isaac Newton; the early days

Isaac Newton was born on Christmas Day, 1642, in a modest English farmstead in Woolsthorpe, in the county of Lincolnshire. Newton's father, a man who had never learned to read or write, died before he was born. England in the 1640s was in a state of chaos. The English Civil War was in full swing, with the Royalists, who supported the king, on the one side and the Parliamentarians, who challenged the king's despotic tendencies and his belief in the divine right of monarchs, on the other.

The world was still riddled with belief in alchemy, magic, the occult and mysticism. When people spoke of "gravity," they were likely referring to a person's bearing, not a force of nature. In short, it was a world ignorant of the most basic laws of science – information that we now take for granted. Few imagined that a child born to this world would go on to alter it inexorably through mathematics and empirical observation.

But Newton would do just that, and he managed it in large part because of his curious mind, which was apparent from his earliest years. As a child, Newton was especially interested in the movements of the sun. By using a string, he measured how the sun traverses across the sky and even sketched three-dimensional sundials and other geometric figures. He noted too that the moon's movements were similar to those of the sun.

He went to school in nearby Grantham. At the King's School, he grappled with the basics of Latin, Greek, Hebrew and theology. In arithmetic class, he learned how to measure areas and shapes,

and methods for surveying land. Soon enough, he put this knowledge to use by creating lanterns, watermills and windmills at home. But then, like all teenagers, Newton was struck with a little angst. He was plagued by deep existential despair; he was unsure what he should make of his life. His family and community thought that he would stay in the country, doing little more than tending sheep on his family's farm. But Newton knew his calling was elsewhere.

Newton's days at Cambridge University

Thanks to the support of his schoolmaster at Grantham, as well as his uncle, a respected churchman, Isaac Newton was found a place at Cambridge University. In June 1661, Newton matriculated at Trinity College, which is widely considered the best of Cambridge University's sixteen colleges.

From the moment of his arrival, Newton was driven to study. He needed no more than his new 140-page notebook, a few candles, ink and a chamber pot; his driven, inquisitive mind did the rest. The works of Greek philosopher Aristotle formed the basis of the curriculum, especially his theories concerning substances, form, time and motion. But more modern scientific ideas, like those of the Italian astronomer Galileo, were not ignored.

To take one example of what Newton was confronted with, let us consider the idea of motion, says Gleick. It sounds strange now, but before the seventeenth century, motion was thought of as a process as much as a state. In other words, just as an object could be in motion if it were pushed or pulled, a once-fresh apple in the process of rotting was also thought to be in motion. Equally, a stone being sculpted into a statue was also considered to be in motion.

However, it was Galileo – who, incidentally, died in 1642, the same year Newton was born – who first argued that motion should only be a state and not a process. The nature of science was changing, too. Previously, geometry, observation and measurement had no place in examinations of nature's laws. But in Newton's time, the study of science based on empirical research came more to the fore. For instance, accurate clocks became more available during the course of Newton's education. This meant that time could be more practically measured and, consequently, time-based experiments could be conducted more easily and more rigorously. Newton himself was built for experimentation. His patience was seemingly without limit, and he positively embraced solitude.

Proof of this came in 1664. That year the outbreak of plague was so severe that Cambridge University was forced to close its doors. Most students would have used the opportunity to ease off on studying a bit. But Newton was no ordinary student. Newton returned home and continued his research with fervour. His experiments focused on optics, light and colour. One especially dangerous experiment involved staring at the sun through a looking glass. He also began his revolutionary work in applying mathematics to questions of motion.

Over dozens of pages, Newton sought "to resolve problems by motion." He depicted various scenarios. One involved points moving toward the centre of a circle, while another depicted point moving parallel to one another. It became increasingly clear to Newton that everything was in motion. In other words, everything was in "flux."

The Royal Society and his professorship at Cambridge

By the time the plague had dissipated, and Cambridge University had recommenced its teaching, Newton had already put the major pieces in place for a full theory concerning the science of motion.

This included thoughts on the nature of gravity and its effect on objects in motion. The apocryphal story goes that Newton was inspired when he saw an apple fall from a tree. But, in reality, the process of discovery involved dropping objects, rolling them down slopes and recording his observations.

In October 1667, the year he returned to Cambridge, Newton was summoned by his mathematics professor, Isaac Barrow, who asked the 24-year-old to help him prepare his lectures. Before too long, Newton was himself giving lectures. By the end of 1669, Barrow vacated the highly respected Lucasian Chair of Mathematics, which was awarded to Newton soon after.

Lucasian Professor was not a mere empty title. Thanks to the position, Newton now had his own laboratory at Trinity. There he sequestered himself away and conducted countless experiments. Before his twenties were over, Newton had engineered a prototype for the first reflecting telescope. Prior to Newton, telescopes had been refracting. These tended to produce images that were small, dim and distorted. In contrast, Newton's handmade telescope let much more light in and meant that planets such as Venus or Jupiter could be observed with greater ease.

Before too long, the Royal Society, the foremost scientific institution in Britain, got wind of Newton's invention and he was invited to publish his work on light and colour in 1672 in this paper, Newton described the experiment he had conducted, in which he had directed sunlight through multiple prisms and thereby been able to isolate different colours.

Based on these results, Newton posited that light was made up of particles. It had previously been thought that the prisms themselves produced colours, but Newton was convinced that they were only separating white light, which was itself comprised of a mixture of colours. The paper ruffled a fair few feathers at the Royal Society. In fact, one of its members, Robert Hooke, was especially aggrieved and became a lifelong critic of Newton's work.

Newton had his fair share of critics

Despite the impact of his paper on colour and light, it did not take long for Newton to regret publishing it. He did not like his work being attacked, especially by old fogies who arrogantly assumed their status meant they could talk down to the young professor.

Leading this pack of sceptics was Robert Hooke. He had rubbished Newton's findings on colour and light and even gone so far as to label his theory a mere "hypothesis." Once he had got over a sulk that lasted for months, Newton went on the attack. He laid into Hooke and defended the robust mathematical proof of his work.

But even this did not resolve his sense of aggrievement. Newton buried himself away in isolation for another two years before he emerged with another paper. This was to be read before the Royal Society in December 1675, instead of being published immediately. The topic was, again, the properties of light, but he also discussed his thoughts on motion and clarified some earlier observations on static electricity.

Once more, Hooke was resistant to Newton's ideas. And it surely did nothing to resolve the conflict when Hooke was elected Secretary of the Royal Society in 1677. However, there is a good argument that Hooke's hostility was actually beneficial. It certainly pushed Newton to go further in some fields than he might otherwise have gone.

Most importantly, Hooke's constant pressure on Newton to produce mathematical proof meant that Newton worked harder and more diligently on the fundamentals of his theories. His work on the Earth's orbit is a key example of this method. The end result was the landmark 1684 paper, "On the Motion of Bodies in Orbit."

Counterbalancing Hooke's scepticism, Newton also had a staunch supporter, a man named Edmond Halley. He was a renowned English astronomer and mathematician, famous today for the comet named after him. Halley was able to support Newton financially in the publication of his first book in 1686, arguably the most important book ever published on mathematics – the *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica*.

This book contains Newton's three fundamental laws, which are still taught to children the world over to this day. Newton's first law states that bodies in motion stay in motion unless met with resistance; his second, that force generates motion. The final law famously declares that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.

Newton finally got the respect he deserved

Newton's first book was still warm from the presses when he began preparing the next updated edition. He desired to make the work more accessible so that the whole world could benefit from his mathematically verified observations.

His great rival Robert Hooke died in 1703, and Newton soon took over as the head of the Royal Society. In part, it was because of Newton's efforts that the Society ceased to concern itself with mysticism and the occult, instead, turning its focus to proving nature's laws through mathematics. Despite these accomplishments, Newton still felt he had more work to do. However, he also was not in a position to publish yet another earth-shaking paper.

Newton had already worked out a mathematical formula for universal gravitation, and demonstrated that it was indeed a universal force, but he had not yet proved what caused gravity. This lack of proof was perfect ammunition for his antagonists. Questions were soon raised as to whether Newton perceived gravity as some sort of mystical force.

However, Newton's presidency of the Royal Society meant he had less to fear from such naysayers. His new post lent him a greater authority and he became less worried about detractors. Britain was no longer ruled by a Catholic monarch whose church regarded Newton's work as borderline blasphemous. What is more, his work was being received well and widely across Europe thanks to advances in publishing. The might of new printing presses had won Newton an international audience.

Around this time, Newton added another feather to his cap. He was appointed the head of the Royal Mint. In other words, he was in charge of England's currency. This was not such an odd development as it might seem. Mathematics was becoming increasingly important in all manner of world affairs, including shipping, population statistics and economics. A sound and functioning currency was an important component in this new world of political arithmetic.

Newton had previously spent a few years as Warden of the Mint, but in 1700 he was officially appointed to the post of Master of the Mint. He embraced the post and its duties involving currency and accounting. In particular, he set about creating a new currency that would be harder to counterfeit. The job was prestigious and well remunerated. It even came with a certain amount of international celebrity.

At last, Newton's respectability was beyond question. People were finally listening to him and taking his ideas seriously. Late in his life, Newton had his efforts challenged by Gottfried Leibniz, and the dispute outlived them both. The death of Robert Hooke had relieved Newton of his greatest critic, but he still kept on attracting controversy.

Most famously, he squared off against the German mathematician Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. Each claimed to have been the inventor of calculus and that the other had copied his own work. The debate outlived them both, simmering on for decades after. Indeed, it proved mighty difficult to work out exactly what each had adapted from the other and what qualified as independent developments.

What really complicated the issue, though, was that Newton's claims were based on work that he had produced but not published. In fact, his initial work on infinitesimal calculations had begun during those fruitful years he had spent away from Cambridge during the plague. Finally, John Wallis, one of Newton's fellow mathematicians at Cambridge, implored Newton to release some ground-breaking work he had been holding onto since the 1660s.

While some of this work was used in Newton's second book, *Treatise on the Reflections, Refractions, Inflexions and Colours of Light*, other elements were referenced in statements released by the Newton-led Royal Society. Unsurprisingly, Newton was using his full institutional power to attempt to disprove Leibniz's accusations and demonstrate that he was no thief.

In spite of Newton's efforts, his rivalry with Leibniz showed no sign of abating. In fact, Leibniz was vocal in his criticisms of Newton's inability to find a cause for gravity. The German also scoffed at Newton's belief that the laws of attraction obtain even in the vacuum of space. The rivalry remained on Leibniz's mind to the bitter end. As he neared his death in 1716, he wrote to a friend, "Adieu the vacuum, the atoms, and the whole philosophy of M. Newton."

However, unlike Newton's rivalry with Hooke, there was little to celebrate about this struggle. It was a shameful and petty chapter in Newton's life. It did nothing to advance science. Calling the business ugly hardly does its justice.

Newton's legacy remained secure

Newton died a superstar on March 31, 1727. He had been knighted and was even buried at Westminster Abbey, in London, alongside many of Britain's monarchs. Though he had been in great agony, suffering from a kidney stone, the story goes that he never cried out or complained. It's also thought that Newton remained celibate his entire life – he certainly left no heirs. But his legacy was great enough without that. He had brought the world out of the dark ages. The modern world was to be one where nature was understood in terms of rules and laws.

However, the poets and the romantics of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were far less welcoming of Newton's advances. For poets like William Blake, the mysteries of the universe were no longer subjects for literature but had been rationalized and blunted. To him, Newton had turned the world into a "dull catalogue of common things."

But the romantics could do little to take the shine off Newton's work. Newton's legacy was secure. In fact, it went from strength to strength, with a few unexpected surprises along the way. According to one of Newton's theories, the Earth bulged at the equator, due to gravity and the Earth's movement. And this was proved by a ten-year-long French expedition in 1733. What is more, when Albert Einstein led the way for the next wave of advances in physics in the twentieth century, he did so on a foundation of Newtonian physics.

Beyond his love of science and mathematics, another side of Newton's personality was eventually unearthed. When volumes of Newton's research were discovered in the 1930s after a distant relative's estate sale, it came to light that Newton had been practicing alchemy – the less scientific precursor to chemistry – for his entire life. In other words, he had been obsessed with the occult. Clearly, Newton was not merely the purveyor of cold rationalism as depicted by the romantics. When you think about it, it makes sense, says Gleick. Newton sought to enforce order where there had once been chaos. His defence of mathematics and reason may be his most famous contribution to that project, but that same spirit meant he was just as willing to embrace the unknown, however eccentric.

What I took from it

Isaac Newton is one of the most influential people who ever lived. By relying on mathematical proof, he forever changed the way we test observations and deduce the workings of the world. Part of Newton's influence is attributable to the fact that he lived during the Enlightenment, a time in history when much of the world was leaving behind superstition and belief in magic. His math-based methodology, as well as the scale of his fundamental discoveries, set the standard for scientific inquiry for generations to come.

Leadership In Turbulent Times

Doris Kearns Goodwin

If you go into just about any bookshop, you will find an abundance of books claiming to hold the secrets of how to become a great leader. Many of these books are speculative and/or consist of scattered anecdotes. Readers seeking a more empirically grounded, systematic approach to understanding leadership will find relief in this book.

Based on detailed biographies of four of the most transformational presidents in US history, the book, Leadership in Turbulent Times, identify some key factors in the development of leadership. By comparing and contrasting Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin Roosevelt and Lyndon Johnson, we will see the similarities and differences between their paths to the White House.

This, in turn, will allow us to discern what is and is not required for someone to become a great leader. Along the way, we will find answers to some of the crucial questions of leadership studies; are great leaders made, or do they make themselves – and if so, how?

The three most powerful points I took from the book were;

1. The only certainty on the path to leadership is uncertainty.
2. For each of the presidents, one of the most crucial steps in the path to leadership hinged on how they responded to their setbacks
3. These presidents formed themselves by taking their fallible strengths, fusing them with ambition and a sense of greater purpose, augmenting them with the strengths of their team members and refining them as they weather their own personal crises.

Great leaders can come from very different backgrounds

If great leaders were just the products of their circumstances, then we might expect their backstories to share certain key features. But when we look at the lives of the transformational presidents, we see they come from dramatically different backgrounds. Born to an illiterate father who eked out a living on one dirt farm after another, Lincoln grew up in the backwoods of Illinois in a cabin that was initially doorless, floorless and bedless. When he was about nine years old, his father disenrolled him from school so he could work on the farm.

Lincoln then had to educate himself. He walked long distances across the countryside to borrow books from people, then read them in his few spare moments. He did this without external support; indeed, if he was caught reading when he was supposed to be working, his father would sometimes beat him and destroy his books. Upon entering adulthood, Lincoln was basically a nobody. Striking out from home to make a fresh start in life, he settled in the town of New Salem, Illinois. Because of his height and shabby appearance, the townsfolk regarded the newcomer as a bit of a freak.

Through his friendliness and good deeds, like chopping wood for widows, he eventually won them over, but it took months of building relationships to earn enough of a reputation to run for a seat in the Illinois state assembly, which marked the beginning of his political career. Lincoln's lack of wealth, access to education, parental support and connections stand in stark contrast to the circumstances of Theodore Roosevelt. He was born with a trust fund bequeathed to him by his grandfather, a banker, merchant and real estate mogul who was one of the five richest individuals in New York.

His father was a well-respected philanthropist who provided him with a rigorous formal education and access to an extensive family library. If there was a book he did not already have, his father would help him procure it. When Theodore Roosevelt reached early adulthood, he did not need to convince local

citizens of his merit to enter politics. Thanks to the power already attached to his family's name, he was recruited to run for the state assembly of New York by the local Republican Party. If two people from such disparate circumstances could both become transformative presidents, the keys to becoming a great leader must lie somewhere else than in one's background.

Great leaders can have very different personal characteristics

Another place to look for the key to becoming a great leader might be shared personal characteristics. But the influential presidents under consideration suggest we look elsewhere. Their personal characteristics were as different as their backgrounds. Franklin Roosevelt and Lincoln, for example, had drastically different temperaments. Growing up with loving parents who provided him with a warm, stable, peaceful and nurturing home environment, Roosevelt was blessed with a sunny, optimistic outlook on life. Lincoln, in contrast, was prone to melancholy, which began to appear at an early age, when his lofty ambitions and lowly circumstances seemed totally at odds with each other.

Between Lincoln and the other Roosevelt, Theodore, we can also see a diametric opposition between their physical characteristics. Lincoln was remarkably tall, strong, athletic and healthy – qualities that brought him respect from his male companions starting from a young age. He was never sick, according to his relatives, and as a young man, he was able to carry heavy loads that would be difficult for three ordinary men to lift, according to a friend. Theodore Roosevelt, in contrast, was plagued by frequent bouts of illness, fragility and asthma that necessitated days of bed rest.

With their mental characteristics, Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt provide another set of contrasting examples. As a child, Lincoln was praised for his exceptional feats of memory – but they did not come to him naturally. He had to put considerable effort into memorizing things – copying out whole passages from books multiple times, for instance. Roosevelt, by contrast, was blessed with a photographic memory; he could read a passage only once and remember it for the rest of his life.

Even the presidents' attitudes toward work and free time were different. Given their achievements, you might expect them all to have been workaholics, but this was true only of Johnson. He rarely saw movies or plays, almost never read anything besides the news and could not even attend a baseball game or a social event without turning it into an opportunity to talk about politics. In contrast, the other three presidents each had their diversions: poetry and drama for Lincoln, birds and novels for Theodore Roosevelt and sailing and poker for Franklin Roosevelt.

Great leaders have differing strengths and weaknesses, which are often linked

In popular imagination, great leaders are sometimes portrayed as larger-than-life figures with almost superhuman strength. However, when we examine the transformational presidents, we see that this is an oversimplification. The presidents were undeniably gifted, but they were also undeniably human, with strengths that were remarkable but not miraculous, and with weaknesses as well.

Let us start with their strengths. Like their circumstances and personal characteristics, these too were varied. Yet again, Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt provide contrasting examples. One of Lincoln's great strengths was his ability to learn through patient observation. When he first joined his state assembly, he quietly waited on the side-lines so he could watch and learn how it worked from a distance before involving himself in the fray.

Roosevelt, on the other hand, had a much more gung-ho approach: he dove right into action and aggressively interrogated his fellow legislators about how their assembly worked – often violating procedural rules and irritating his colleagues in the process. His doing so was expressive of one of his great strengths and a potential weakness: his uncontainable energy and lack of inhibition. Like Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin Roosevelt also had a double-edged strength that could turn into a weakness. He had a willingness to bend, bypass or even break the rules when convinced that the

ends justified the means.

For instance, as Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Franklin Roosevelt figured out a clever way of getting around regulations against selling weapons to merchant ships. Namely, offer them as loans instead of sales. On another occasion, he felt so certain of the need for new guns, supplies and equipment worth millions of dollars that he put in an order for them before Congress had approved the funds.

A particularly vivid illustration of a strength turning into a weakness comes from Johnson, who was masterful at using cunning procedural tactics in Congress to accomplish his agenda. For example, to rescue his civil rights bill from legislative limbo in the House of Representatives, he craftily made use of an arcane procedure known as a discharge petition, in which a bill stuck in committee was brought to the floor for a vote. However, he also used such tactics to ramp up the Vietnam War without full public awareness – by manipulating the federal budget to conceal its escalating defence costs, for instance.

Ambition is one of the decisive factors in becoming a great leader

Despite their differences, the transformative presidents all had one thing in common: ambition. The crucial role that ambition plays in the path to leadership can be clarified by contrasting Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt's very different upbringings. If you described Lincoln's impoverished, formally uneducated background on paper, he would not exactly sound like he had the makings of becoming a successful politician, let alone arguably the greatest president in US history.

Thanks to his ambition, however, he was able to overcome the challenges of his upbringing and develop his talents – particularly in regard to education. We can see this even at the beginning of his educational journey. Upon learning how to print the letters of the alphabet, he started practicing his writing on every surface he could find – even charcoal, dust, sand and snow.

Fast-forward to his young adulthood, and we see the same tenacity in his independent study of the law. He would stay up late into the night after his long working day to read legal cases. He would have to borrow the law book one at a time after hiking 40 miles back and forth to get each one.

Now, cut to Theodore Roosevelt. Given his privileged upbringing, it might seem like Roosevelt had the world served to him on a silver platter and therefore did not need ambition. But, by the same token, it would have been all too easy for him to have rested on his laurels and simply coasted into a life of comfort, especially given his frailty.

However, instead of dampening his ambition, his frailty actually helped to kindle it. Prevented from joining the physically demanding games of his siblings, Roosevelt became a voracious reader of books, which deepened his knowledge, sparked his imagination and left him with a thirst for adventure – a thirst that would later lead him to explore the backwoods of Maine and lead a regiment in the Spanish-American War.

But as long as his body remained frail, that thirst for adventure would remain unquenched. Recognizing this, he devoted himself to a strenuous exercise regime from the age of ten through college, providing himself with first-hand experience in overcoming hardship and gaining the ability to pursue many exploits later in life.

Having a greater purpose is another decisive factor in becoming a great leader

One of the crucial elements in the transformation presidents' ascendance to leadership was their abilities to combine their strengths and ambitions with a sense of greater national purpose. Lyndon Johnson clearly shows the importance of the latter, as his successes and failures largely hinged on the presence or absence of such a purpose.

One of Johnson's strengths was his mastery of clever procedural tactics. This strength could lead him to very positive accomplishments, as in his promotion of Civil Rights. However, it could also lead him to very negative results, as in his escalation of the Vietnam War.

Let us start with one of his main successes. His promotion of Civil Rights was part of his larger agenda, known as the Great Society. This referred to a set of programs aimed at eliminating not just racial injustice but also poverty. Guided by this lofty goal, he achieved an enormous amount, including the creation of a national health insurance program for the elderly, called Medicare, and the passage of the Voting Rights Act, which prohibited racially discriminatory voting laws.

Now let us turn to one of his main failures. In his escalation of the Vietnam War, he had no higher purpose guiding him. His aim was simply to avoid losing face, both personally and nationally. He thought that if North Vietnam defeated US-backed South Vietnam, it would be a humiliating blow to both his presidential legacy and America's stature in the world.

Without the guidance of a higher purpose, he went stumbling from one short-term decision to another – each one simply geared towards trying to contain the problem that the war represented. For example, in response to North Vietnamese raids on US barracks, he ordered airstrikes in February of 1965. The airbases from which the strikes were launched needed protection, so he sent in troops to guard them. Those troops then needed protection themselves, so he sent in even more troops. By April, there were more than 50,000 US troops in South Vietnam. Eventually, that number would exceed 500,000.

Johnson's mixed legacy reflects his mixed sense of higher purpose. Guided by such a purpose, he accomplished the promotion of Civil Rights and the Great Society. Lacking such a purpose, he also laid the groundwork for one of the greatest tragedies of both the '60s and the '70s: the Vietnam War – one of the most disastrous conflicts in US history.

The path to leadership takes many twists and turns, with major setbacks along the way

When he was 25 years old, Franklin Roosevelt envisaged a linear, step-by-step path that would take him straight to the White House – a path that combined his political ambitions with his lifelong interest in naval history. Step one, New York state legislator; step two, assistant secretary of the Navy; step three, governor of New York; step four, president of the United States.

Having achieved the first two steps by age 31, he seemed well on his way to the Oval Office. But then, the most devastating event of his life happened. At the age of 39, he developed polio, leaving him unable to walk or stand on his own. As Franklin's story illustrates, the only certainty on the path to leadership is uncertainty. Each of the other three transformative presidents provide ample illustrations of this truth as well.

Lincoln lost his first run for office in the Illinois state assembly. After he won his second run, he staked his reputation on spearheading a push for a massive overhaul of the state's infrastructure. Facing the headwinds of a multi-year recession, the push collapsed, leaving incomplete bridges, canals and railroads in its wake.

Lincoln was so devastated by the push's failure that his friends confiscated his razors, fearing he might commit suicide. He became increasingly depressed, to the point where he became bedridden for days on end, neither eating nor sleeping, which left him emaciated and delirious. His doctors feared he was on the verge of lunacy.

Theodore Roosevelt and Johnson suffered periods of severe depression as well. For Roosevelt, it was triggered by a devastating personal loss: both his wife and his mother unexpectedly died on the same day when he was 25 years old.

For Johnson, it was precipitated by a heart attack that occurred as he was gathering steam for a

presidential run after becoming the youngest ever majority leader of the US senate. With the media all but running obituaries for his political ambitions just when they seemed to be reaching their peak, he retreated to bed, laying still as a corpse in a state of despondency. Each of the four eventual presidents found himself flat on his back, both figuratively and literally. The most pivotal moments in their paths to the White House hinged on how they got back on their feet.

Great leaders use crises as opportunities to retreat, reflect and rebuild, eventually re-emerging stronger than before

For each of the presidents, one of the most crucial steps in the path to leadership hinged on how they responded to their setbacks. For all four men, this meant retreating from politics for a while – not just to recover but also to reflect and rebuild themselves. As a result, these setbacks allowed them to forge the stronger selves that would eventually propel them to greatness.

Lincoln returned to a career as a lawyer, during which time he assiduously studied the law and developed his public speaking skills in front of juries – skills that would enable him to become one of the greatest orators in American history. Theodore Roosevelt built a ranch in the Badlands of South Dakota and lived the life of a rugged Westerner for a couple of years – transforming his frail, boyish body into that of a muscular man and replacing his timidity with unshakable courage in the process.

Johnson withdrew to his ranch in Texas Hill Country, where he devoted six months to improving his diet, exercising, spending more time with his family, learning to treat his staff in a less demanding manner, reconnecting to his political values and re-evaluating his political goals. Johnson emerged from his convalescence with a renewed sense of purpose, which led him to champion a series of boldly progressive policy proposals immediately upon his return to the Senate. These proposals included expanding Social Security and eliminating poll taxes, which were a major impediment to black citizens' abilities to vote.

Franklin Roosevelt devoted seven years to regaining his physical strength. However, his disease-imposed limits on the extent to which he could recover on his own. To circumvent these limits, he gathered a small team of confidants who could act as surrogates for him – attending public events, giving speeches on his behalf and keeping his reputation alive in political circles. This small team was a harbinger of the larger teams he would assemble later when he became governor of New York and president of the United States. These teams would prove crucial to his success.

Great leaders are supported by great teams

Franklin Roosevelt's restricted mobility serves as a stark reminder of the reason why every leader needs a team for support: even with Lincoln-esque mobility, no one can be everywhere or do everything at once. Everyone needs help to establish relationships and obtain information. Everyone needs strong team members to augment his or her limited powers.

This was certainly true of the transformative presidents, and it was especially true of Lincoln, who knew he needed a supportive team right from the start of his presidency. Even before his inauguration, the southern states were already seceding and forming the Confederacy, posing the gravest national crisis in the history of the United States.

To contend with this crisis, Lincoln assembled a diverse cabinet that wove together every disparate faction of his Republican Party, ranging from conservatives to radicals, and including all three of his main former rivals: Edward Bates, Salmon Chase and William Seward. With the nation in dire straits, he felt he needed to gather its most politically talented citizens to help him steer its course, regardless of their differences.

However, he derived strength from his team not just in spite of but because of its differences, which enabled him to view his decisions from multiple angles, consider alternative courses of actions and weigh his choices until the optimal ones emerged. For example, his cabinet gave him a range

of opinions on the Emancipation Proclamation, which declared the freedom of slaves living in the Confederacy. “Move forward with it right away,” said some. “Hold back to avoid alienating the border states, England and France,” said others. “Be careful about the optics of issuing it now,” warned his Secretary of State, William Seward, who was concerned it would seem like an act of desperation in the midst of the North’s recent losses to the South.

Ultimately, Lincoln piloted a cautious middle course. He waited for a significant victory against the South before issuing the Proclamation. That victory came with the Battle of Antietam, which led to the retreat of Robert E. Lee’s army from Maryland and Pennsylvania. Reflecting on the timing of the Proclamation later in life, Lincoln considered his decision to wait absolutely crucial to its success. He felt certain that if it had been issued even just six months earlier, it would have failed to find public support.

Great leaders respond to general crises by leveraging the strengths they have honed from their personal crises

As we have seen, each of the transformative presidents faced a significant personal crisis from which they ultimately grew as leaders. Upon reaching the White House, each of them also faced a grave national crisis: for Lincoln, the Civil War; for Theodore Roosevelt, the Coal Strike of 1902; for Franklin Roosevelt, the Great Depression; and for Johnson, the assassination of President Kennedy.

Of the four presidents, Franklin Roosevelt provides the clearest illustration of the point at hand. That is in part because there were many parallels between the economic calamity behind the national crisis he faced and the physical affliction behind the personal crisis he weathered. Like his body struck by polio, the economy was paralyzed by the Depression. Industry was grinding to a halt, and a quarter of workers were unemployed. Money stopped circulating; the banks started shutting down.

To overcome polio, Franklin had experimented with one recovery method after another – testing out dozens of new-fangled contraptions, such as an electric belt and an oversized tricycle. Ultimately, he built his own rehabilitation centre in Warm Springs, Georgia. Faced with the Great Depression, he knew that a similar spirit of experimentation and willingness to pursue bold programs was needed. In both cases, he did not know a secret solution to the problem, but he knew the only way to find one was to try things out and see what stuck.

From this spirit and willingness sprung a multitude of innovative governmental agencies designed to get people back to work, pump life back into the economy and raise the nation’s spirits – programs such as the Civil Works Administration, the Works Progress Administration, the Public Works Administration and the Civilian Conservation Corps, among 16 others.

The latter was one of his first initiatives, and it set an early precedent for the boldness of his vision. Setting up 1,500 camps in America’s neglected national forests, the Corps provided jobs to a quarter of a million young men at one point, who worked on clearing dead trees and shrubs, planting new trees, clearing paths and building firewalls. His Secretary of Labour, Frances Perkins, thought the plan was a crazy pipe dream, but Roosevelt persisted, knowing all too well that desperate times called for dramatic measures.

What I took from it

Great leaders are not simply made by their circumstances or the personal characteristics with which they were born, nor are they lifted into their positions and accomplishments by some sort of superhuman ability to lead. They form themselves by taking their fallible strengths, fusing them with ambition and a sense of greater purpose, augmenting them with the strengths of their team members and refining them as they weather their own personal crises. By doing so, they are then able to rise to the occasion when confronted by larger crises on the world stage.

Draw leadership lessons from your own personal crises. Like the transformational presidents, everyone has had their own “dark nights of the soul,” which they have overcome in one way or another. Try asking yourself, how did you overcome yours – and how can you apply what you did then to the professional crises you may face now or in the future?

Meditations

Marcus Aurelius

A famous quote by Rene Descartes stated that; “The reading of all good books is like a conversation with the finest minds of past centuries”. Don’t you just love reading good books? Here I was ‘having a conversation’ with the famous Marcus Aurelius; reading notes written by his hand over 2100 years ago. It can make you take for granted reading the Bible.

Meditations is one of the most significant books ever written by a head of State. The Meditations are a collection of philosophical thoughts by the Emperor Marcus Aurelius (121 - 180 Ce), covering issues such as duty, forgiveness, brotherhood, strength in adversity and the best way to approach life and death. The Meditations have inspired thinkers, poets and politicians since their first publication more than 500 years ago.

The Meditations is basically Marcus’s personal journal. It has a record of thoughts that is carefully composed, but it was never intended for a wider audience. Marcus Aurelius is considered one of the most important Stoic (a person who can endure pain or hardship without showing their feelings or complaining) philosophers. What today we call the Meditations take the form of a personal notebook, Aurelius called them “Writings to Myself.”

The three most powerful points I took from the book were;

1. All things fade into the storied past, and in a little while are shrouded in oblivion. Live in the here and now.
2. Get up each morning and do good work. We should act naturally and contribute to society, unconcerned about the reproach of others
3. It is a mistake to value the opinion of other over the love for ourselves

Meditations was written over 21 centuries ago, yet its relevance somehow increases when we know how ancient it is. A student of the Stoic philosophy, Marcus Aurelius refused to be made miserable by the difficulties of life. Stoicism was a Greek school of thought originating around 300 BC. In simple terms, it taught that submission to the law of the universe was how human beings should live, and emphasized duty, avoidance of pleasure, reason, and fearlessness of death. A Stoic would also have full responsibility for his actions, independence of mind, and pursue the greater good over their own.

Marcus proclaimed that “All things fade into the storied past, and in a little while are shrouded in oblivion”. Even to men whose lives were a blaze of glory this comes to pass; as to the rest, the breath is hardly out of them before, in Homer’s words, they are ‘lost to sight alike and hearsay’...To what, then, must we aspire, asks Marcus? This, and this alone: the just thought, the unselfish act, the tongue that utters no falsehood, the temper that greets each passing event as something predestined, expected, and emanating from the One source and origin.

The Meditations tells us that to despise, avoid or judge a person is simply an obstruction of nature’s law. The realization that to move human relations to a higher level we must do the opposite of these things, formed the basis of the emperor’s thought. On every page of the book is this theme of accepting things and people how they are, not what we would like them to be.

The great worth of the Stoic philosophy is its ability to help put things into perspective so you can remember the things that matter; the Meditations is, if you like, an ancient and noble Don’t Sweat The Small Stuff. The person who can see the world as it really is also carries the ability to see beyond that world. Yes, we are here and we have a job to do, but there is the feeling that we came from another place, and will eventually go back to it. Life can be sad and lonely, one thing seemingly after another,

but this should never dull the basic wonder at our existence in the universe. Below is a short summary of each book of Meditations.

Book I Aurelius thanks those to whom he is indebted. He thanks his grandfather for teaching him to be candid, modest, and even-tempered; his father for teaching him to be humble, calm, and frugal; his mother for teaching him to be generous and non-materialistic; and his teachers who taught him the value of hard work, self-discipline, equanimity, rationality, humour, and tolerance. From his teachers he also learned to love practical philosophy, instead of metaphysics, logic and the vanity of the Sophists. He also thanks his wife for being affectionate.

In Book II Aurelius reminds us that each day we will meet some terrible people. But we have faults too, so we should not be angry with them. For we are all just bits of blood, bones and breath; our life is fleeting; our bodies will decay. As for death, it is nothing to fear; it cannot hurt us. But the most important part of us is our minds. We should not let them be slaves to selfish passions, quarrel with fate, or be anxious of the present or afraid of the future. We cannot guarantee fame or fortune, but we can keep our minds calm and free from injury, a state superior to both pleasure and pain. Freedom is the control of our minds.

In Book III Aurelius tells us to be mindful of little things like cracks in a loaf of bread, the texture of figs and olives, and the expressions of wild animals—even mundane things have charm he says. But we should not gossip or speculate about what others say or do. Instead, think and talk only of things you would not be ashamed of if they were found out. Think and talk with sincerity and cheerfulness, and there will be a kind of divinity within you. There is nothing more valuable than a mind pursuing truth, justice, temperance, fortitude, rationality and the like. So be resolute in pursuit of the good.

In Book IV Aurelius tells us that we can always find solitude in our own minds. If our minds are serene, we will find peace and happiness. As for how others view us, we have little control. But virtue is still virtue even if it is not acknowledged. Remember, one day we live, the next we are dead. So, act virtuous, use your time well, and be cheerful. Then, when you drop from life's tree, you will drop like a ripe fruit.

In Book V Aurelius says we should get up each morning and do good work. We should act naturally and contribute to society, unconcerned about the reproach of others. And do not ask or expect payment or gratitude for doing good deeds. Instead, be satisfied with being like a vine that bears good fruit. Virtue is its own reward.

In Book VI Aurelius disavows revenge—better not to imitate injury. We should do our duty, act righteously and not be disturbed by the rest, for in the vastness of space and time we are insignificant. Think of good things and control your mind.

In Book VII Aurelius advocates patience and tolerance. Nature works like wax, continually transforming—so be patient. People will speak ill of you no matter what you do but be tolerant. Evil people try our patience and tolerance, but we can remain happy by controlling our response to them.

In Book VIII Aurelius argues that being disconnected from humanity is like cutting off one of your own limbs. Instead, live connected to nature and other people. No matter what you encounter maintain a moderate and controlled mind. If you are cursed by others, do not let it affect you anymore than your cursing the spring affects the springtime.

In Books IX, X and XI Aurelius argues that we should be moderate, sincere, honest, and calm. If someone reports that you are not virtuous, dispel such notions with your probity, and use humour to disarm the worst people.

In Books XII Aurelius asks why we love ourselves best, but so often value the opinion of others over our own. This is a mistake. Remember too that the destiny of the greatest and worst of human beings

is the same, they all turn to ashes. Do not then be proud but be humble. Die in serenity. As Aurelius wrote from his tent, far from home and never to return: "Life is warfare and a stranger's sojourn, and after fame, oblivion."

What I took from it

The Meditations is not just another self-help book with easy answers - the very theme of it is imperfection. We can never know exactly why things happen, why people act the way they do, but it is not up to us to judge anyway; there is a larger meaning of events and lives which escapes us.

This knowledge itself is a comfort. This is old world philosophy still relevant in today's modern world and the human condition. It is an excellent reading and best enjoyed in a quiet room sitting comfortably on a good chair in order to get into the appropriate, reflective state of mind. Loved it!

Napoleon The Great

Andrew Roberts

The notion that history is made, and its outcomes influenced only by “great men” is rightly considered old fashioned these days. However, there are still a few historical figures who seem to have driven and dictated events almost single-handedly during their lifetimes.

Napoleon Bonaparte was certainly one of these. From his humble beginnings on the island of Corsica, Napoleon rose through the French army’s ranks to become Emperor of France and conqueror of much of Europe. Not only that, he also revolutionized French government, law and military tactics.

In his book, *Napoleon The Great*; Andrew Roberts will take you on a journey through Napoleon’s life, with all of its momentous ups and downs. It is a truly fascinating story and one that continues to define European history and identity to this day.

The three most powerful points I took from the book were;

1. He supported the revolutionaries because he disliked the monarchy and the power it gave to the clergy, but he also believed in the ideas of the Enlightenment, including the writings of Rousseau and Voltaire, both of whom were proponents of liberty and opposed to monarchy
2. Most people know Napoleon as an accomplished general. But he was also a prolific letter-writer, even during his military campaigns
3. On May 5, 1821, after years of horrific pain, Napoleon died in his bed aged 51 years. But it was not until December 2, 1840, on the anniversary of the battle of Austerlitz, that Napoleon was given a proper funeral in Paris. When he was finally laid to rest, a million people came to celebrate the life of this heroic leader.

Despite being born into a lower-class family, Napoleon rose to become one of the French army’s youngest officers

If there is one thing, we all know about Napoleon, it is that he was as French as they come, right? Well, the truth is he wasn’t even born in mainland France; rather, the life of this great conqueror began on August 15, 1769, on the island of Corsica, a Mediterranean island freed from Italian control in 1755 – and which only became part of France in 1768.

In other words, Napoleone di Buonaparte, as he was named at birth, came from Italian roots. And although his family had a respectable position in Corsican society, his father had to apply for nobility to ensure his son’s prosperity. Napoleon’s parents were Carlo and Letizia Buonaparte and, although Carlo was a proud Corsican, he jumped at an opportunity to obtain a secure government job. Around 1769, Carlo pledged his loyalty to Louis XV of France.

The Buonaparte family was large, and Letizia bore 13 children, eight of whom survived childhood. So, in 1771, to provide for his family, Carlo applied for the Buonaparte’s to be recognized as Corsican nobility, in order to open up all the benefits that would afford his children. This application was successful and among those benefits was that Napoleon was able to attend the Royal Military School of Brienne-le-Château.

Once there, he studied hard and was soon excelling in his classes. He was often teased by his classmates for being one of the first Corsicans to attend the school, and considered as fake nobility, but that only made Napoleon work harder to prove himself. He studied eight hours a day, learning all he could about math, Latin, history, weaponry and the arts. It was during this time that he also learned

to speak French, though he would speak it with a Corsican accent his entire life. In the end, his hard work paid off; at the age of just 16, he became one of the youngest French army officers, and the only Corsican at that time to hold a prestigious artillery commission.

Amid the chaos of the French Revolution, Napoleon proved himself on the battlefield and quickly advanced in military rank

During his youth, Napoleon was always a proud Corsican. But as he began his military career, French politics were being turned on their head and he soon found himself pledging unconditional allegiance to France. When the French Revolution began in 1789, Napoleon supported the ideals of the revolutionaries; yet, his position in the military meant that he was a part of the effort to stop the uprising against the monarchy.

He supported the revolutionaries because he disliked the monarchy and the power it gave to the clergy, but he also believed in the ideas of the Enlightenment, including the writings of Rousseau and Voltaire, both of whom were proponents of liberty and opposed to monarchy. So, when King Louis XVI was dethroned, Napoleon supported the overthrow and joined the anti-royalist Jacobins. It was during this chaotic transition from monarchy to republic that Napoleon rose through the military ranks, eventually becoming a lieutenant in 1791. Little did he know at the time, but a much more significant promotion was just over the horizon.

Napoleon's loyalty to the Jacobins helped him secure the position of artillery commander, fighting the pro-royalist forces of Britain, Prussia and Austria, all of whom were trying to take the strategic port city of Toulon. Reports from the battle for this naval city describe Napoleon as an astoundingly intelligent officer and his letters to superiors show signs of a meticulous and natural-born leader. For instance, during the battle for Toulon, Napoleon helped lead an assault to capture the key position of Fort Mulgrave, having his horse shot out from beneath him in the process. From this position, he aimed his cannons on enemy ships, ensuring a French victory. It was because of the vital role he played in this battle that he earned his next promotion – this time to the rank of general. He was just 24 years old.

An impressive Italian campaign made Napoleon a French hero

Having been promoted to general, Napoleon became second-in-command of the Army of the Interior. During this charge, he was tasked with protecting Paris during a violent uprising on October 5th, 1795. His ability to boldly and mercilessly suppress the uprising prevented a civil war and further elevated his status.

It also won him command over a division called the Army of Italy, setting the stage for a military campaign that would soon earn his name legendary status. Napoleon took up his new post on March 26, 1796 – but he had already been preparing for the opportunity for three years. He had studied the landscape and general situation in northern Italy, forming plans for how to advance through the northern state of Piedmont, push back the Austrians in the area and capture their fortresses.

If that were not daring enough, he planned to carry out this bold campaign while outnumbered; he would have just 50,000 French forces under his command, while his Austrian and Piedmontese enemies would be 80,000 strong. Despite these stacked odds, as soon as he got his promotion, Napoleon put his scheme into action, and to brilliant effect. The French, after transporting their supplies over the mountains of Liguria, would win a series of decisive victories by exploiting their divided enemies' communication issues.

First, the town of Milan fell following a tremendous display of courage. In this historic battle, on May 10, 1796, a mere 3,500 French soldiers defeated 9,500 Austrians. The battle took place on a bridge in the town of Lodi, and it would go down as Napoleon's first significant victory. But this was just the beginning of his campaign. One month later, in June of 1796, the next battle, known as the Siege of

Mantua, began. The siege would last until February of 1797 and Napoleon's eventual victory would make headlines in Paris. From there, he crossed the Alps in March of 1797, ready to threaten Vienna and force a peace agreement with Austria. In so doing, he became a hero to the French people.

An Egyptian campaign cost Napoleon many men

Napoleon was winning battles left and right, earning the admiration of the French people. But the country's new leadership was not so keen on the young general – in fact, they saw his rise in popularity as a potential threat. So, they sent Napoleon off to Egypt in a campaign to disrupt British power in the Mediterranean. He set sail on May 19, 1798 with about 38,000 Frenchmen and, while the campaign got off to a good start, it would not last.

When the French forces landed in Egypt, they easily captured Alexandria. But as they marched toward Cairo on July 7, 1798, Napoleon's soldiers began to suffer the harsh conditions of the desert. This was the first time a Western army had attempted a desert crossing and 200 of his men were literally blinded by the sun. Other soldiers would contract malaria, while still others would kill themselves rather than march on. To make matters worse, those soldiers who fell behind the rest were easily killed by small bands of Mamluks, Egyptian soldiers on horseback, who wore medieval armour and were led by Ibrahim Bey and Murad Bey, the rulers of Egypt.

In hindsight, the campaign probably should have stopped right then – but instead, Napoleon, spurred on by his earlier victory in Alexandria, advanced to Jaffa in modern-day Israel, where he would pay the price for his overconfidence. Once in Jaffa, Napoleon sent a message to the governor, urging surrender. The messenger was promptly beheaded, and, in response, Napoleon's soldiers violently pillaged the city, taking thousands of lives. This horror show was compounded by the fact that many French soldiers caught the plague in Jaffa and died horrible deaths within a mere 24 hours.

From there, the remaining French soldiers moved on to Acre where they battled the Turks, Mamluks, Afghans and British at a fort defended by the latter. This conflict took place on the coast of modern-day Israel and would last for months. Finally, in May of 1799, Napoleon, unable to break through the fort's defences, and knowing that no more reinforcements were coming, ended the campaign and returned to France.

While his marriage was off to a rocky start, Napoleon was spreading Enlightenment thought through his military campaigns

Most people know Napoleon as an accomplished general. But he was also a prolific letter-writer, even during his military campaigns. Some of this correspondence was to ensure proper equipment and supplies for his troops, but during his Italian and Egyptian campaigns, he also wrote many letters to his wife, Josephine.

Napoleon was married and it was quite a rocky relationship as well, especially in its early years. Napoleon and Josephine married on March 9, 1796, just days before he left for Italy, but this union was not as romantic as it might sound. In fact, many historians believe that although Josephine may not have initially loved Napoleon, she saw the marriage as a smart move given her situation; she was a widow, a mother and six years Napoleon's senior.

Napoleon, on the other hand was deeply in love with Josephine from the start. He also adored her son, Eugene, and would take him along on his Egyptian campaign as an aide-de-camp. There was, however, a small problem; Josephine loved another man. His name was Lieutenant Hippolyte Charles and he carried on a secret affair with Napoleon's wife for years.

That is, until July 19, 1798. It was on that day when, while in the Egyptian desert, Napoleon

learned of Josephine's infidelity. He was devastated, but there was not much he could do while fighting a campaign, especially since his focus was on trying to combine his military campaign with Enlightenment thought. To proliferate Enlightenment ideas, Napoleon had brought along, in addition to his stepson and 38,000 soldiers, a group of 167 different scientists, artists, botanists, zoologists and geographers.

In Cairo, armed with this intellectual army, Napoleon founded the Institut d'Égypte for the research of science and art. His goal, as a supporter of Enlightenment ideas, was to create a place that would promulgate scientific advancements world-wide. And the institute in Cairo certainly did that. For instance, in 1799, his researchers discovered the legendary rock stele, the Rosetta Stone.

Napoleon participated in a risky coup against the French government, securing even greater power

Following his campaigns in the Middle East, Napoleon returned to Paris on October 16, 1799 where he received a hero's welcome, cheered by a public who saw him as their saviour. Indeed, one could not have blamed the French people for wanting a saviour. After all, while Napoleon was away, the political situation in France had not improved.

The government was riddled with corruption, and economic inflation and pro-royalist uprisings were roiling the country. Not only that, but the military had suffered multiple other defeats while Napoleon's forces were being beat back in the Middle East. Amid this political turmoil, Napoleon and a group of other men set out on a risky mission to topple France's government.

Napoleon joined a group of conspirators to seize political power. Among the group's members were the chief of police Joseph Fouché; former foreign minister Charles Maurice de Talleyrand; and Napoleon's brother Lucien Bonaparte, who held a high-ranking position within the Council of the Five Hundred, the country's legislative body.

On November 10, 1799, the group launched its daring plan. Napoleon entered the council chambers and tried to convince them to sign on to the coup – but when the council realized what was happening, they charged at Napoleon in fury, calling him an outlaw and a dictator. After being expelled from the council chambers, Napoleon and his brother Lucien approached the council guards, announcing that fanatics, influenced by the British, had infiltrated the council. Lucien drew his sword, pointed it at his brother's chest and told the guards that if he were acting against the interests of French liberty, he'd stab his brother in the heart.

The guards, moved by this display and story, forcibly removed the council members from their chambers, effectively eliminating any threat from the council. Immediately following this, the co-conspirators assembled and drew up a new constitution, replacing the existing Directorate with a Consulate, and Napoleon was given the most powerful position as First Consul.

Napoleon fought off an Austrian attack, winning large parts of Italy for France

From his new position at the head of the government, Napoleon issued a series of popular reforms that centralized government, gave greater rights and protections to the people and reinvigorated French business, all while cutting taxes. The economy soared and things were going very well; that is, until April 19, 1800, when Austrians laid siege to a French fort in the northern Italian city of Genoa.

So, Napoleon would head back into battle. Napoleon set out across the Alps once again, this time in the company of 51,000 men, thousands of horses and mules and a large stock of supplies and cannons in an epic crossing that took 11 days. Meanwhile, the French forces in Genoa were under siege and suffering badly. The Austrians had cut off their supply chain and the French soldiers were being forced to eat cats and dogs. But instead of advancing directly on Genoa as the Austrians

expected he would, Napoleon attempted to draw the Austrian forces to the West, thereby trapping them.

He divided his army in an attempt to block off all enemy lines of retreat, but in so doing, deviated from his reliably successful strategy of maintaining a concentrated force. As the battle of Marengo began, he immediately recognized his mistake: 30,000 Austrians had secretly assembled and the French troops standing against them were outnumbered by 2:1.

Early on June 14, 1800, the Austrians opened fire and Napoleon quickly called for reinforcements. He had no choice but to carefully retreat until four in the afternoon, when fresh troops arrived. With the addition of 11,000 soldiers, the battle shifted sides as French forces pushed a surprised Austrian army out of Marengo and back to the city of Alessandria where they agreed to an armistice. This peace treaty gave France all of Piedmont and Genoa, and most of the Lombardy region; northern Italy would remain securely within Napoleon's empire for 14 years.

Although some would fail, Napoleon secured historic peace deals

In the early 1800s, following the battle of Marengo, France and Austria entered lengthy peace talks. At the same time, Napoleon continued to work on his Code Napoleon, a political project that included eliminating the privileges of royalty, separating the church from the state and standardizing education.

The peace talks lead to eventual alliances, albeit shaky ones, between European nations. On February 9, 1801, the Treaty of Luneville was officially signed, ending nine years of continuous war between Austria and France. But peace is not all the treaty secured for France – it also gave them additional territories in Italy, Belgium and the Rhineland, and made Britain the country's last major enemy; that is, until Britain found new allies. Shortly after the Luneville treaty was signed, Russia, Denmark, Sweden and Prussia all signed treaties with Britain. As a result of this powerful opposition, France agreed to peace with Britain by signing the Treaty of Amiens on March 25, 1802.

The problem with this short-lived treaty was that it was silent on a couple of key issues, namely future commerce between the two nations, and the matter of strategic territories. The failure to deal with these important factors meant that Britain would declare war on France just a year later. Yet, however quickly it collapsed, the Treaty of Amiens was considered a political triumph for Napoleon, as he had temporarily made peace across all of Europe, an unprecedented move that made the French ruler wildly popular. He was declared France's First Consul for life, and, on December 2, 1804, a coronation led by Pope Pius VII officially anointed Napoleon and Josephine Emperor and Empress.

That same month, Britain formed what is known as the Third Coalition. In so doing, the country united Sweden, Russia and Austria against France. Then, by August of 1805, Austria again mobilized its troops, crossing the Bavarian border and capturing the city of Ulm. Responding to this act of aggression, Napoleon sent 170,000 men on a march from the northern coast of France down across the Rhine, in the largest campaign of its time.

With impressive victories at Austerlitz and Jena, Napoleon aimed to force a British surrender

On September 25, 1805, Napoleon's army crossed the Rhine and, on October 6, shifted its front 90 degrees to the south, planning to cut off the Austrian forces. This manoeuvre constituted the most massive change of front ever known and it would lead to a series of victories as Napoleon surrounded and secured Ulm, forcing another Austrian surrender.

But his work did not end there; two of Napoleon's most impressive victories were still to come in Austerlitz and Jena. After marching on Vienna, Napoleon's forces faced the army of Tsar Alexander at Austerlitz. In this battle, the French leader benefited from a mistake by his Russian counterpart, the

Tsar himself, who spread his formidable army too thinly over an uneven battlefield.

So, on December 2, 1805, as a misty morning gave way to sunny skies, Napoleon launched a decisive attack. By one in the afternoon, he had divided the Russian army in two and forced their retreat back to Hungary. From there, Napoleon turned his attention to King Frederick William of Prussia who had made a formal declaration of war against France, seeking autonomy for his country from both France and Austria.

To settle this matter, William's and Napoleon's forces met on the battlefield of Jena on the foggy morning of October 14, 1806. Following hours of brutal warfare, Napoleon formed a major line of assault that pushed the Prussians back six miles. Truthfully, however, Napoleon did not want to be at war with Prussia, Russia or Austria; what he really wanted was to force a British surrender. After all, the British were the ones financing the Austrian, Prussian and Russian military campaigns against France. Napoleon figured that if he could cut Britain off from the rest of Europe, he would lock the nation into an economic stranglehold.

It took a series of brutal battles for Napoleon and Russia to finally reach a peace agreement

Although Napoleon pushed back the Prussian forces at Jena, Frederick William was not ready to surrender just yet; instead, he retreated and hoped to receive Russian support. As a result, there would be more brutal fighting before Napoleon could finally reach a peace accord with Prussia and Russia.

In December of 1806, Napoleon was moving through Warsaw and the Russian army was retreating. But as the French forces moved east, the impending winter meant increasingly harsh conditions, with French soldiers trudging through snow and mud up to their knees, while suffering from hunger and exhaustion. The conditions were so bad that hundreds of French soldiers took their own lives.

On February 7, 1807, the French soldiers finally caught up to the Prussians and Russians. What followed was the two-day battle of Eylau, a horrific fight between forces totalling 115,000 soldiers both sides taking massive casualties; the French lost as many as 5,000 men within the battle's first 15 seconds.

By the end of the first day, Napoleon was moved to tears by the immense loss of life, and on the second, he led one of the greatest cavalry charges of his career, securing victory. His move was so bold and impressive that the Russian cavalry were forced all the way back to the infantry line. However, while Napoleon may have daringly won the battle of Eylau, it would take yet another to end the war. The next fight took place at Friedland, where the Russians lost more than 40 percent of their troops before suing for peace.

That second battle resulted in the signing of the Tilsit Peace Treaty and the adoption of the Continental System, as well as a surprisingly friendly interaction between Napoleon and Tsar Alexander, who spoke late into the night about politics and philosophy. Among the agreements were that Russia and Prussia would join the Continental System, Napoleon's European trade agreement, which was designed to economically blockade Britain and force them into peace negotiations.

Napoleon hoped that the Continental System would unite nations – but all it did was produce another deadly campaign

Napoleon intended to exert further pressure on the British by capturing Portugal, but instead, the fighting that ensued in Spain spiralled into a deadly disaster known as the Peninsular War. This war might have turned out better if Napoleon had been more focused on it; but, unfortunately, he had other problems to handle in Europe, many of which related to his insistence on making the Continental System work.

The problem was that for this to happen, countries like Russia and Austria would need to resist the temptation to profit from illegal British trade – which they certainly did not. During this time Napoleon divorced Josephine, and married Marie Louise, the daughter of Austria's emperor. But not even a royal wedding could overcome Austria's issues with France and the Continental System.

Austrian resistance was not the only problem. Russia also detested the Continental System. This disdain resulted in Alexander siding with Britain against France in 1810 and produced the incredibly violent Russian campaign.

At the campaign's start, in June of 1812, Alexander's army fell back deep into Russian territory, while Napoleon's army of 600,000 men marched right after them. In the months to come, 140,000 French soldiers would lose their lives in Russia to typhus or dysentery and, by the time of the Battle of Borodino on September 7, 1812, Napoleon's forces numbered just 103,000.

During the battle, the French would suffer another 28,000 casualties while the Russians would lose 43,000 men. Despite these massive losses, Napoleon eventually reached Moscow, but only after the Russians abandoned their city, which was in flames, shortly after the arrival of French troops. With that, Napoleon was left with little choice but to attempt the journey home before winter arrived.

This French retreat out of Russia was hell for Napoleon and his forces. The Russians closely tracked the French soldiers, capturing those weakened by the freezing weather. These captured soldiers were tortured, skinned alive or left naked to freeze to death, while the starving soldiers ate dead horses, some of them even resorting to cannibalism.

Unable to protect Paris from the Coalition Forces, Napoleon was exiled to the Mediterranean

It is a truly shocking figure. Napoleon lost somewhere in the neighbourhood of 524,000 men in Russia. Only 40 percent of those casualties were suffered in combat, while the rest were the result of disease, starvation and suicide.

Napoleon would never truly recover from what happened during that campaign in 1812, nor would he be able to keep the Coalition Forces, an alliance of all of the armies fighting against Napoleon, out of Paris. Upon returning to Paris on December 18, 1812, he tried to rally as many new troops as possible, but some of these soldiers were only 15 or 16 years old.

In the end, he managed to pull together another 151,000 soldiers whom he hoped would be able to prevent Russia, Austria and Prussia from tearing apart the past seven years of French achievements. But despite retaking sections of Saxony and narrowly prevailing in the Battle of Dresden on August 27, 1813, Napoleon found himself surrounded, outnumbered and suffering a catastrophic defeat at the Battle of Leipzig of October of 1813.

Riding the momentum of that victory, the Coalition Forces were ready to march on Paris. But in an absolutely amazing display, Napoleon, with just 30,000 men, left the capital and raced his army through the French countryside, defeating one allied army after another in a series of 13 battles.

His success was so rapid that, in the month of February, he won four battles in just five days. However, it simply could not last, and on March 30, 1813, 60,000 Allied soldiers marched into Paris, threatening to raze the city. Napoleon rushed back to the capital only to be met with betrayal; one of his marshals had surrendered.

In the end, Napoleon was forced into exile on the Mediterranean island of Elba, and the royalists put Louis XVIII in charge of France. Napoleon would spend about nine months on Elba, keeping himself busy by making improvements around the island, but he was deeply saddened by being separated from his wife Marie Louise and their young child, both of whom had returned to Austria.

Escaping from Elba, Napoleon made an audacious move to reclaim his throne and save his empire

While confined to Elba, Napoleon was kept under the watchful eye of British Colonel Sir Neil Campbell. The two men actually got along quite well, and Campbell admired Napoleon's intelligence as well as his charm. Nonetheless, on February 16, 1814, when Campbell left the island on a short trip, Napoleon jumped at the opportunity to reclaim his throne. He had been following French affairs closely and knew that things were going back to the pre-revolutionary ways of the monarchy.

Not only that, but the allied forces had failed to keep their part of the deal with Napoleon; he wasn't receiving the expenses they had agreed upon, and he'd even heard rumours that they would force him into an Australian penal colony or to the remote British island of St. Helena. Rather than leave it to chance, Napoleon set sail for France on February 26, 1815 with three generals, 607 men and a bold plan that put him back in control of France. Here are how the events unravelled;

On March 1, 1815, Napoleon landed on the southern coast of France and commenced a northward march, now known as the Route Napoleon, which would take him over mountains and through villages, covering 190 miles in just six days. In the course of this journey, he encountered pro-Bonapartist soldiers who gladly joined his advance before arriving in Paris on March 20, 1815. Upon his arrival, Napoleon was met with zero resistance from the monarchy. Rather, a concerned and overweight Louis XVIII literally had his loyal subjects carry him to his carriage, in which he fled to Ghent.

The next day, Napoleon went back to work, drafting a new constitution that would make it even more difficult for royalist families to seize power again. He abolished all forms of slavery, ended censorship, divided power between the emperor and legislature and renounced all ambitions of empire.

After a crushing defeat at Waterloo, Napoleon was sent to the island of Saint Helena where he would live out the rest of his days

Napoleon's return to power may have been swift, but it came to an end just as quickly. On May 15, 1815, following his return, the Coalition Forces declared war on France once again. And, by straying from some of his most effective strategies, Napoleon would come to suffer a decisive defeat at the battle of Waterloo.

He managed to put together an army of 280,000 men and, in contrast to his successful strategy of centralized troops, he divided his forces, sending one group after a retreating Prussian army. Then, at 11 in the morning on June 18, 1815, he began his attack on the allied forces, led by the Duke of Wellington.

Napoleon's attack, however, was also delayed, giving Wellington time to position his troops and receive Prussian reinforcements. As a result, Napoleon did not send orders for his other troops to return until noon. Unlike the majority of Napoleon's battles, Waterloo was absolutely disorganized. Infantry attacks were spread thinly rather than set in columns, cavalry charges were left unsupported by artillery due to miscommunication and, by nightfall, French soldiers were fleeing in all directions. The battle ended with 25,000 to 31,000 French soldiers killed or wounded and the loss of 26 generals, one of whom was literally cut in half by a cannonball while standing next to Napoleon.

To compound matters, the British Navy blocked any opportunity for Napoleon to escape and, on July 15, took him into custody, escorting him to the British island of Saint Helena. There, in the isolated waters of the south Atlantic ocean, Napoleon would live out his years, working on memoirs and eventually succumbing to stomach cancer. On May 5, 1821, after years of horrific pain, Napoleon died in his bed aged 51 years. But it was not until December 2, 1840, on the anniversary of the battle of Austerlitz, that Napoleon was given a proper funeral in Paris. When he was finally laid to rest, a million people came to celebrate the life of this heroic leader.

What I took from it

Napoleon Bonaparte, the founder of modern France, was one of history's greatest leaders. He transformed his country, brought a long-sought-after – albeit fleeting – peace to Europe, and many of the reforms he instituted can continue to play an important role in French and European society to this day.

Steve Jobs

Walter Isaacson

It is almost impossible to overstate the role that Steve Jobs played in the creation of our contemporary, computer-mediated world. A single-minded perfectionist, Jobs was a visionary who wanted to change the world through technology.

In this best-selling biography, you will discover that while Jobs' perfectionism and intensity pushed him to achieve great things, those same traits were the cause of friction and conflict. In his relationship with employees and collaborators, Jobs' behaviour was often seen as brattish – even though Jobs might argue that he was simply trying to push people to deliver their best.

In the book, titled by his name; Walter Isaacson details the fascinating life of one of the most influential tech icons of our time, Steve Jobs, and tell the amazing story of a teenage prank that cemented a partnership that would eventually create one of the most valuable technology companies in the world.

The three most powerful points I took from the book were;

1. If Job's decided that something should happen, then he would simply make it happen by bending reality to his will
2. Jobs approached the problem of his cancer the same way he approached a design problem; he ignored all conventional wisdom and decided on his own method for fighting it.
3. Shortly before his death, Jobs was able to witness Apple finally surpassing Microsoft as the most valuable technology company in the world.

A handyman father instilled in Jobs a love of engineering and design

On February 24, 1955, a boy was born to Abdulfattah Jandali and Joanne Schieble. However, Jandali and Schieble would not raise their child. Since Schieble came from a strict Catholic family who would disown her for having a child with a Muslim man, the pair were forced to give the baby up for adoption.

And so, the child was adopted by Paul and Clara Jobs, a couple living in Silicon Valley, who named him Steven. Paul Jobs was an engine technician turned car mechanic, and he introduced Steve to the world of engineering and design.

From an early age, Paul tried to pass along his love of mechanics to Steve, who recalls being impressed by his father's focus on craftsmanship. If the family needed a cabinet, for example, Paul would simply build one, letting Steve help him in the process. Additionally, the family's smart yet inexpensive Eichler house – an "everyman" modern home, with floor-to-ceiling glass walls and an open floor plan – sparked Steve's obsessive interest in clean, elegant design.

Later, in high school, Steve Jobs met Steve Wozniak; the two immediately clicked. Wozniak was five years older and already a talented computer technician, from whom Jobs learned a lot about computers. In many ways, Jobs and Wozniak were typical young boys and liked to play pranks. But they also loved to explore the world of electronics and see what they could create.

Combining both interests, in 1971 they launched their first product: the "Blue Box," a device that allowed users to make long-distance phone calls for free. Wozniak supplied the design and Jobs turned the innovation into a business, taking \$40 worth of parts and selling the device for \$150. The pair sold almost 100 boxes, giving them a taste of what they could do with Wozniak's engineering skills and Jobs' vision; and paving the way for what would become their joint venture – Apple.

Jobs' interest in spirituality, LSD and the arts shaped his aesthetic sense and extreme focus

In the late 1960s, the interests and curious cultures of geeks and hippies began to overlap. So, it was perhaps inevitable that, in addition to his passion for math, science and electronics, Jobs would immerse himself in the counterculture and begin experimenting with LSD. Jobs later attributed his refined aesthetic sense and extreme focus to his experiences with psychedelic drugs and spirituality.

In 1972, Jobs enrolled at Reed College, a private liberal arts school in Oregon, and there became very serious about both meditating and experimenting with LSD with friends. He felt that his drug experiences helped reinforce his sense of what was important in life, by showing him that there is "another side to the coin." In Jobs' case, this meant realizing that creating great things was more important than anything else.

Eager to explore Eastern spirituality, Jobs even travelled to India, where he ended up staying for seven months. Zen Buddhism in particular became a deeply entrenched aspect of his personality, influencing his minimalist aesthetic approach and introducing him to the power of intuition.

Both interests – LSD and spirituality – helped him to develop a certain kind of focus, which became known as Jobs' reality distortion field. If he had decided that something should happen, then he would simply make it happen by bending reality to his will. Another factor that shaped Jobs' minimalist aesthetic was his enthusiasm for the arts. Throughout his career, Jobs would emphasize over and over that the design of Apple products should be clean and simple.

This ideal was formed during his college years. Even though he dropped out of college, Jobs was allowed to continue taking classes, which he did solely for the purposes of self-enrichment. One of these was a calligraphy class, his skill in which later became a key element in the Apple Mac's graphical user interface.

A visit to an apple farm gave them a name; a counterculture vision and hard work made a company

It seems an odd match: a spiritually minded, LSD enthusiast and the staid computer industry. Yet in the early 1970's, many people were starting to see computers as a symbol of individual expression. So, while Jobs was immersed in drugs and Zen, he was also dreaming of starting his own business. And around the same time, his friend Steve Wozniak came up with an idea for the modern personal computer.

In the early days of the Silicon Valley technology revolution, Steve Wozniak joined the Homebrew Computer Club – a place where computer "nerds" met to exchange ideas and where the overarching philosophy was that the counterculture and technology were a perfect marriage.

It was here that Wozniak had his idea. Computers at the time required several, separate hardware components to work, making them complicated to manage and difficult to use. Wozniak imagined a device as a self-contained package, with a keyboard, screen and computer "all in one."

Initially, Wozniak considered giving away his design for free, as this was the ethic of Homebrew. However, Jobs insisted that they should profit from Wozniak's invention. So, in 1976, with just \$1,300 of start-up capital, Wozniak and Jobs founded Apple Computer. On the day they had to come up with a company name, Jobs had visited an apple farm, and – because it was simple, fun and familiar – the name "Apple" stuck.

Wozniak and Jobs toiled away for a month building 100 computers by hand. Half of the total was sold to a local computer dealer and the other half to friends and other customers. After just 30 days, Apple's first computer, the Apple I, was on the verge of being profitable. Together, Jobs and Wozniak made a

powerful team – Wozniak was the engineering wizard while Jobs was the visionary, who saw that the personal computer could change the world.

Jobs had an uncompromising passion for perfection

Those who knew Jobs personally would agree that he was an erratic, even quirky individual. If work did not meet his high standards, he would throw temper tantrums and verbally assault people. But why was Jobs so controlling and temperamental? In short, he was an unforgiving perfectionist. Jobs wanted the Apple II to be a perfectly designed, fully featured computer that was integrated end to end. But while his drive helped make the Apple II a success when it was released in 1977, it also drained the energy and will of those in the company.

If Jobs felt an employee's work was poor, he would tell them it was "shit," and would be furious if he noticed even the tiniest imperfection. As Apple grew as a company, Jobs only became more erratic. Mike Scott was eventually appointed as Apple's president, with the main task of keeping a tighter rein on Jobs.

Scott basically had to confront Jobs with the thornier issues that other employees just did not have the energy to do. This often resulted in disagreement, sometimes with Jobs breaking down in tears, as he found relinquishing any control over Apple extremely difficult.

Jobs found it especially frustrating that Scott tried to put limits on his perfectionism. But, for his part, Scott did not want Jobs' perfectionism to take precedence over pragmatism. For instance, Scott stepped in when Jobs thought that none of the 2,000 shades of beige were good enough for the case of the Apple II, and also when Jobs spent days deciding just how rounded the corners of the computer case should be. Scott's focus was to get the case manufactured and sold. However, because the company was doing so well, these personality clashes were somewhat manageable. But this was not to last.

The Macintosh put Jobs on a pedestal as a tech icon, but his vitriol got him knocked off

The Apple II, with some six million computers sold, was considered the spark that led to the creation of a personal computer industry. But for Jobs, it was not a complete success, as the Apple II was Wozniak's masterpiece, not his own. Jobs wanted to create a machine that would, in his words, "make a dent in the universe." Driven by this ambition, Jobs began work on the Macintosh – a successor to the Apple II that would further transform personal computing and establish him as a technology icon.

Yet the Macintosh was not solely Jobs' invention, as he actually stole the Macintosh project away from its founder, Jef Raskin, an expert on human-computer interfaces. And so, Jobs took the idea and created a machine that ran on a microprocessor powerful enough to accommodate sophisticated graphics and could be largely controlled by a mouse.

The Macintosh became an unparalleled success, partly due to a lavish marketing campaign that included a sensational TV commercial – now known as the "1984" ad – directed by Hollywood filmmaker Ridley Scott. Tied in with the commercial's popularity, the Macintosh launch caused a kind of publicity chain reaction, for Jobs as much as for the product.

Crafty as ever, Jobs managed to land a number of high-profile interviews with several prominent magazines, by manipulating journalists into thinking the interview he was giving them was an "exclusive."

His strategy worked, and the Macintosh made Jobs wealthy and famous. He had achieved the kind of celebrity that could get singer Ella Fitzgerald to entertain at his extravagant 30th birthday party. However, those same personality traits that had enabled Jobs to make the Macintosh a success also

soon got him fired.

His perfectionism and oppressive behaviour toward Apple employees continued unabated. He would constantly call people out for being “assholes” if he thought they did not care about perfection. Jobs’ brattish behaviour led to a showdown with the company. In 1985, the Apple board of directors decided to let Jobs go.

Jobs flopped with NeXT yet struck gold with Pixar, a company at the cutting edge of animated films

After Jobs recovered from the blow of being fired from Apple, he realized he could now do things exactly the way he wanted to – indulging both his good and bad sides. He first created a new business venture aimed at the educational market; a computer called NeXT. With the NeXT project, Jobs got to indulge his passion for design. He paid a \$100,000 flat fee to get the logo designed and insisted that the NeXT computer case should be a perfect cube. But Jobs’ perfectionism made the computer hard to engineer and manufacture. For one thing, the sides of the cube casing had to be produced separately, using moulds that cost \$650,000.

Jobs’ uncompromising vision was essentially NeXT’s death knell. The project almost ran out of money, the release was delayed by several years and in the end, the machine was far too expensive for the end consumer. And because of its high price and small software library, NeXT barely made a wave in the larger computing industry.

During the same period, however, Jobs also bought a majority share in a company called Pixar. In his role as chairman, Jobs revelled in being part of a venture that was the perfect synthesis of technology and art. By 1988, Jobs had sunk almost \$50 million into Pixar while also losing money in NeXT. But after years of financial struggle, the studio released *Tin Toy*, a film that showcased Pixar’s unique vision for computer animation. *Tin Toy* went on to win the 1988 Academy Award for Best Animated Short Film. Jobs thus saw that he should shift his focus from software and hardware products, which were losing money, to Pixar, a company that was making cutting-edge, potentially lucrative animated films.

Eventually, Pixar partnered with Disney to produce its first feature film, *Toy Story*. Released in 1996, *Toy Story* became the top-grossing movie of the year. When Pixar went public, the shares that Jobs held (80 percent of the company) were worth more than 20 times his initial investment: a whopping \$1.2 billion.

Away from Apple, Jobs made amends in his private life

In addition to learning a lot professionally during his 12 years away from Apple, Jobs also developed in his private life. In 1986, after the death of his adoptive mother, Jobs became curious about his roots and decided to search for his biological mother. When he finally found Joanne Schieble, she was emotional and apologetic for giving Jobs up for adoption. Jobs was also surprised to learn that he had a sister, Mona Simpson. Both he and Simpson were artistic and strong-willed, and eventually became close.

In 1996, Simpson would publish a novel called *A Regular Guy*. Its protagonist was based on Jobs and shared many of Jobs’ unflattering character traits. However, since he did not want to feel any anger toward his newfound sister, Jobs never read the novel.

Around the same time, Jobs met Laurene Powell. The pair married in 1991, with the blessing of Jobs’ old Zen guru. Powell was already pregnant with their first child, Reed Paul Jobs. The couple would go on to have two more children, Erin and Eve.

With Powell's encouragement, Jobs also attempted to spend more time with Lisa Brennan, a daughter from his first relationship with whom he had initially been estranged. Jobs tried to be a more proactive father to Lisa; and eventually, she moved in and lived with Jobs and Powell until she went to college at Harvard.

Lisa would grow up to be as temperamental as Jobs, and since neither was good at reaching out and making amends, the pair could go months without saying a word to each other. In a broad sense, Jobs' way of engaging with people in his private life was similar to his behaviour at work. His approach was binary: either he was extremely passionate or extremely cold.

As Apple's fortunes dimmed, Jobs returned like a prodigal son to lead the company as CEO

In the years following Jobs' dismissal, Apple started to fail as a company. To halt this decline, Gil Amelio was appointed CEO in 1996. Amelio knew that to get Apple back on the right path, it needed to team up with a company with fresh ideas. And so, in 1997, Amelio chose to acquire NeXT's software, effectively making Jobs an adviser to Apple.

Once he was back at Apple, Jobs grabbed as much control as he could manage. To this end, he quietly began building his power base by installing his favourite NeXT employees into Apple's top ranks. During this period, Apple's board realized that Amelio was not going to be Apple's saviour. But they thought that the company might have a chance again with Jobs.

So, the board offered Jobs the CEO position at Apple. Surprisingly, Jobs declined. Instead, he insisted on remaining in his position as adviser, and helped lead the search for a new CEO. Jobs used his status as adviser to increase his influence within Apple. He even forced the board to resign – the very same board that had recommended he take the CEO role – as he felt they were slowing his progress in transforming the company.

As adviser, Jobs also managed to establish a partnership with rival Microsoft, getting the company to create a new version of Microsoft Office for the Mac, thus ending a decade of legal battles and making Apple's stock price skyrocket.

Eventually, and after much hesitation, Jobs became CEO and demanded that the company refocus on making fewer products. Jobs ended the licensing deals that Apple had made with several other computer manufacturers and decided to focus the company on making just four great computers: a desktop and a laptop for both the professional and consumer market. In 1997, Apple recorded a loss of \$1.04 billion. But in 1998, after Jobs' first full year as CEO, the company recorded a profit of \$309 million. Jobs had effectively saved the company.

Bold ideas and visionary design made the iMac and the first Apple Store successes

When Jobs discovered the visionary talent of designer Jony Ive, he made Ive the second-most powerful person at Apple, after himself. Thus, began a partnership that would come to be the most important industrial design collaboration of its era. The first product that Jobs and Ive designed together was the iMac, a desktop computer priced at around \$1,200 and designed for the everyday consumer.

With the iMac, Jobs and Ive challenged the conventional idea of what a computer should look like. In choosing a blue, translucent case, the pair reflected their obsession with making the computer perfect, both inside and out. This design also gave the computer a playful appearance. Launched in May 1998, the iMac became the fastest-selling computer in Apple's history.

However, Jobs began to worry that Apple's unique products could be lost among the generic products of a technology megastore. His solution was to create the Apple Store as a way to allow the company

to control the entire retail process. As Gateway Computers suffered financially after opening its own retail stores, the Apple board was understandably opposed to Jobs' idea. However, convinced that he was right, Jobs stuck to his guns and the board approved a trial run for four Apple Stores.

Jobs began by building a prototype store, furnishing it completely and obsessing over every detail of the service experience and general aesthetic. He insisted on a sense of minimalism throughout the process, from the moment a customer enters the store to the moment they go through checkout.

In May 2001, the first Apple Store opened. It was a massive success, as Jobs' careful design had pushed retailing and brand image to a whole new level. In fact, the Manhattan store would eventually become the highest-grossing store of any store in New York, including such historic outlets such as Saks Fifth Avenue and Bloomingdale's.

Wanting to control the entire digital experience, Jobs created the iPod, the iPhone and the iPad

Following his success with the Apple Store and the iMac, Jobs came up with a new, grand strategy. His vision was a personal computer at the centre of a new digital lifestyle. He called this his digital hub strategy. The strategy envisioned the personal computer as a kind of control centre that coordinates a variety of devices, from music players to video cameras. As the first step in realizing his vision, Jobs decided that a portable music player would be the next Apple product.

In 2001, Apple released the iPod, a streamlined device which combined the now-famous click wheel with a small screen and new hard disk technology. Critics were sceptical that people would spend \$399 on a music player, but consumers made the iPod so successful that, by 2007, iPod sales accounted for half of Apple's revenues.

The next step was to design an Apple cell phone, since Jobs was worried that soon, mobile phones with built-in music players would make the iPod redundant. In 2007, Apple released the first version of the iPhone. Two important technologies made the iPhone possible: the touch screen, which could process multiple inputs simultaneously, and the incredibly robust cover glass, called Gorilla Glass.

Again, critics were sceptical of Apple's strategy, arguing that no one would pay \$500 for a cell phone – and again Jobs proved them wrong. By the end of 2010, profits from iPhone sales accounted for more than half of the total profits generated in the global cell phone market. The final step in Jobs' strategy was the release of a tablet computer, the iPad.

Apple officially launched the iPad in January 2010. However, because Jobs had unveiled the product before it was publicly available, the press trashed it before they even tested it. Still, when the iPad was officially released, it was a great success. Indeed, Apple sold over one million iPads in the first month, and 15 million in the first nine months. With the release of the iPod, iPhone and iPad, it was clear that Jobs' bold digital hub strategy had succeeded in transforming the consumer technology industry.

Jobs' insistence on perfect, closed systems mirrored his fanatical obsession with control

Throughout his entire career, Jobs maintained that a closed, tightly integrated system produced the best consumer experience. This ideal reflected Jobs' desire for control, since by sealing his systems shut, he prevented consumers from modifying them. This obsession with control generated some major conflicts – especially with Microsoft and Google.

Microsoft's Bill Gates had a vastly different approach to business and technology, in that he was open to licensing his company's operating system and software to a variety of third-party manufacturers. In fact, Gates had even written software for the Macintosh. However, what was once an amicable business relationship between Jobs and Gates turned into a life-long rivalry.

When Gates produced the Windows operating system, Jobs accused him of copying the Macintosh's graphical interface. The truth, though, was that both systems had "borrowed" the idea from another technology company, called Xerox.

At the end of his career, Jobs also led a crusade against Google. In the company's design of its Android operating system, Jobs argued, Google had copied many of the iPhone's signature features. While both Microsoft and Google believed that open computer systems and natural competition should determine which technology should prevail, Jobs maintained until the very end that both companies had stolen ideas and concepts from Apple.

But the targets of Jobs' vitriol were not only competing companies. Jobs also fought relentlessly for perfection within Apple, leading to employees either burning out or getting fired. Under Jobs, there was zero tolerance for underperforming at Apple. Whenever he thought that someone was not an "A-player," and did not work 90 hours a week, he'd often not bother to ask them to improve. He would just fire them on the spot. And when a company was having trouble delivering enough computer chips on time, Jobs stormed into a meeting, screaming that they were "f--king dickless assholes." This sort of behaviour was quite symptomatic of Jobs' aggressively intense perfectionism.

Jobs ignored all conventional wisdom regarding his cancer diagnosis and died prematurely in 2011

Jobs first learned that he had cancer during a routine urological exam in October 2003. Unfortunately, Jobs approached the problem of his cancer the same way he approached a design problem; he ignored all conventional wisdom and decided on his own method for fighting it. He refused surgery for a period of nine months, and instead tried to cure himself with acupuncture and vegan diets. As time passed, the cancerous tumour grew and eventually, Jobs had to have invasive surgery to remove it.

Yet even when the cancer returned in 2008, he again insisted on a strict diet of certain fruits and vegetables, which led him to lose over 40 pounds. Eventually, Jobs was convinced to have a liver transplant; but following this, his health took a serious dive from which he would never recover. Jobs died in 2011. Behind him, he left a legacy in one of the most valuable tech companies in the world.

Everything that Jobs did in his life was a product of his incredible intensity, and before he died, he said, "I've had a very lucky career, a very lucky life. I've done all that I can do." Like practically no other individual, Jobs' personality was fully reflected in his creations, as every Apple product was a tightly closed, integrated system of hardware and software.

And while the open strategy employed by Microsoft – allowing its Windows operating system to be licensed – led them to dominate the operating system industry for many years, Jobs' model proved advantageous in the longer run, as it ensured a seamless, elegant end-to-end user experience. Shortly before his death, Jobs was able to witness Apple finally surpassing Microsoft as the most valuable technology company in the world.

What I took from it

Steve Jobs grew up in Silicon Valley at the intersection of arts and technology, drugs and geekiness. There he would cement a friendship that would lead to the birth of Apple as well as a profound shift in the world of technology. During his life, Jobs managed to transform our relationship with technology, creating a range of digital products with a clean design and user-friendly interface.

The Audacity Of Hope

Barack Obama

All Americans share a fundamental set of values reflecting the founding fathers' intent. The founding fathers had the foresight to write two masterpieces, which directly reflect how they envisioned the American ideal; the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. At the very core of these documents is the idea that every man and woman is born free, with the same rights and chances in society. Still, the founding fathers faced the reality that liberty was not without its challenges. Never before in human history had a stable democracy worked for a large nation for any long period of time.

Thus, personal freedom seemed only possible in a society which also upholds communal values, such as family, religion, patriotism. Another prerequisite was that power be diffused and all absolute authority rejected. Never in America's history should a king, general, or pope alone be able to shape the path of the American people. Still today, all Americans subscribe to two main notions; the idea of individual liberty and affording every citizen the same chances, regardless of race, religion, or class and communal values bringing people together, keeping their democracy alive.

The attitudes of Americans today continue to be strongly shaped by the founding fathers' spirit. These shared values are often considered so natural that people take them for granted.

The three most powerful points I took from the book were;

1. The Republican party promotes an ownership society which tells its citizens "You're on your own," rather than, "We're all in it together." This worldview reflects the lack of empathy that America is suffering from today.
2. Many of America's biggest problems would cease to exist if people would simply make more of an effort to see the world through each other's eyes
3. Politicians quickly learn that civility and honesty will not get them airtime. The media want politicians to disagree with each other, so that is what they do to get more exposure.

America is currently suffering from a lack of empathy

The Republican party promotes an ownership society which tells its citizens "You're on your own," rather than, "We're all in it together." This worldview reflects the lack of empathy that America is suffering from today. Instead of acknowledging each other's needs and focusing on values shared by all Americans, an ownership society highlights individual differences and promotes conflict. Sadly, it is the weakest groups in American society that suffer the most from this lack of empathy. Would Americans accept the hopeless state of inner-city schools if they had to ask themselves how they would feel about their own children attending them?

Would CEO's consider raising their own wages while cutting back the company's health-care benefits if they considered themselves equal to their employees? Would politicians fight so fiercely over every issue across the political spectrum if they considered admitting that the opposing side might also have a valid point?

Many of America's biggest problems would cease to exist if people would simply make more of an effort to see the world through each other's eyes. To create a better democracy and tilt politics toward the needs of weaker members of society, all Americans, whether they are politicians, businessmen or ordinary people, should commit to a stronger sense of empathy and ask each other more often "How would this make you feel?"

Politics are strongly influenced by money, interest groups and the media

In the United States, a successful political campaign requires a lot of money. Thus, politicians either need to have a lot of money themselves, or they must ask the wealthy to sponsor their campaigns.

One consequence of fund-raising is that politicians become more like their donors. They simply have to spend a lot more time talking to the people in the top 1 percent of the national income distribution, and the longer they are in politics, the more limited their interactions become. Their donors are rich, most of their fellow politicians are rich, and crossing the country in private jets makes the problems of ordinary Americans far less tangible for them.

At the same time, politicians are dependent on special interest groups such as labour unions for Democrats, and big business and the NRA for Republicans. Naturally, these groups are interested in their own agendas, meaning that politicians must learn how to please interest groups and satisfy their specific needs in order to maintain their support.

Finally, there is the media. Politicians are entirely dependent on the media to reach their audiences. For many voters, the media's narrative forms their reality, hence politicians are perceived exactly as the media portray them.

The media like simple, absolute truths, and dislike consensus because it makes for boring news. Politicians quickly learn that civility and honesty will not get them airtime. The media want politicians to disagree with each other, so that is what they do to get more exposure. We could reduce the extreme influence of powerful special interest groups and the media by mandating public campaign funding and providing free TV and radio time.

The challenges of the globalized economy are mainly shouldered by ordinary workers

During the last few decades, the global economy has changed drastically. While globalization has brought prosperity to many societies, it also brings its share of challenges, particularly to the ordinary American worker.

The American economy is still strong today, leading the world in important sectors like software. This is thanks to the world-class American education network of colleges and universities which generate a skilled elite of leaders, businesspeople and engineers.

Nevertheless, today American companies face global competition. Every product sold by US companies has to compete with thousands of products from all over the world. To stay competitive in this global marketplace and to keep their shareholders happy, companies often outsource and automate labour while cutting back on their benefit and health care programs. While living costs have steadily increased, the average income of the ordinary worker has not. Between 1971 and 2001 their median wage showed literally zero increase.

Why is this so? It is partly due to global competition, but also to the current "winner takes all" economy. Ordinary workers take the risks and bear the burden, but once a company succeeds, the rewards are usually not distributed equally. A swell of profits does not mean more wealth for all, it means more wealth for those already rich.

America needs a social security system and tax code which ensure risks and benefits are spread equally in society

Americans are hard-working people, willing to take personal risks. Their culture is a business culture. At its core is the idea that through work and virtue anyone can achieve wealth and prosperity. Since Americans value hard work, they believe that anyone working full-time should be able to make a living

and support a family.

But in the last few decades, ordinary American workers have grown poorer. While the top 1 percent of the income distribution has consistently grown wealthier, the average American finds it harder to make ends meet every month.

Still, Republicans keep calling for corporate tax breaks, real estate taxes that are tailored for the top 1 percent, and reductions in social security and health care programs. Thus, they ignore the fact that those who benefit the most from the economy should also shoulder their share of its obligations.

They also neglect the idea that capitalism only works as long as it has the consent of the people, and as long as its benefits and risks are shared equally. This is not the case in an ownership society.

Faith plays a key role in America's diverse society, helping Americans overcome some of their most pressing problems

America's laws are based on Judeo-Christian moral tradition. Most of America's great reformers were motivated by faith and they used religious language to fight for their cause. Today, America is no longer just a Christian nation. It is a diverse society encompassing all kinds of religions as well as nonbelievers.

In this pluralistic society, it is important to acknowledge the power of faith and discuss its role within society. Reason and faith are different ways of thinking. In politics, it is important to argue on the basis of principles that are accessible to all members of society, whether religious or not. It is not enough to simply point out the teachings of one's church to argue for a cause.

On the other hand, religion still teaches the values that Americans share; honesty, sympathy and discipline. The majority of Americans rely on faith to assure themselves of a deeper purpose. Without this guiding force, many people are led astray morally, which can be seen, for example, in vicious gang-killings.

Religious organizations like churches help overcome some of the most urgent problems in American society. They sponsor day-care and senior centres. They mobilize members against cuts in social programs and growing inequality. They teach us to think in terms of "thou" and not just "I".

True equality can be reached through non-discriminatory laws, scholarships and more emphasis on social justice

Predictions show that shortly after 2050, whites will no longer be the majority in America. Even though many Americans are sceptical about large-scale immigration from Latin America, they should remember that not too long ago immigrants from Italy, Ireland and Eastern Europe faced the same scepticism.

The ability to welcome and absorb newcomers has always been a key part of America's greatness. The core idea of the Constitution is that every citizen is equal, and America's economic system has always provided opportunities to anyone willing to work hard.

A lot of progress has been made in terms of equality within a single generation: For example, black poverty has been cut in half and the black middle class has grown consistently. Still, black and Latino Americans are underrepresented in corporate boardrooms and politics, and their wages are generally only 75 percent of the salaries their fellow white citizens enjoy. To provide them with the same chances as white Americans, non-discriminatory laws must be enforced. Wherever whites are consistently preferred when applying for jobs, housing or loans, the government must intervene.

Also, scholarships for minorities can help America tap into a broader pool of talent. In the technology-based economy of the 21st century, America cannot afford keeping talented, but poor children out of universities. But one of the biggest problems blacks and Latino Americans face is not race-specific at all. Working and middle-class people across all races are suffering from a lack of social justice; wage stagnation, poor social security and public schools that do not teach children the skills they need.

The problems of poor inner-city neighbourhoods can be solved through education and equal opportunities

Many Americans look at the situation in poor inner-city neighbourhoods with frustration. The situation is often seen as a hopeless cause and change seems impossible. Rising frustration often leads to people calling for an end to welfare, a stricter police force and harsher judges. The logic seems to be that if the problem cannot be solved, then at least its effect on the life of the working taxpayer should be minimized.

But change is possible. The problems of inner-city neighbourhoods are mostly due to a lack of opportunities. People who are born into poor neighbourhoods suffer from broken families, a dismal education and often do not have access to proper health care. They stay poor and far too often end up as teenage mothers and criminals.

One of the best ways to break out of this vicious cycle would be to encourage teenage girls to finish high school and avoid becoming teenage mothers. Since most inner-city kids are already behind their peers when entering the school-system, they also need access to medical care, pre-school programs and mothers who are educated enough to know what their children need.

Despite the fact that many believe a life of crime and drugs is a viable option for young inner-city men, it is not. Dealing drugs is a low-wage business and most of those involved would switch to lawful work if it were available. If the inner-city poor were provided with the same opportunities as people outside their neighbourhoods, improved education and job prospects would help many young men lead lives of structure and dignity, instead of becoming criminals.

Because the structure of the family-unit has changed, America needs better school programs and more support for parents

Many people are talking about the decline of American family values. A lot of changes have occurred in the last 50 years. Marriage rates have declined, more children are growing up without their biological fathers and parents in general have less time to spend with their children.

Since the cost of living has risen while wages have remained stagnant, the average family can no longer live on a single income. The fact that most women are working these days is not only a sign of increasing equality, but also indicates the growing need for two breadwinners in most households.

For many people this means being a good parent has become much harder. They have too little time for their children and can't afford proper day-care or pre-schooling. So, if Americans are serious about family values, they need policies that make good parenting easier. Everybody should have access to pre-schooling, after-school programs and summer schools.

And since children raised by single mothers in poor neighbourhoods are especially vulnerable to the vicious cycle of poverty, teenage motherhood and crime, they should be given the same access to high-quality education as their more fortunate peers.

A vibrant free market needs governmental regulation to ensure the same opportunities for everyone

The Republican idea of an ownership society tells us that the American economy needs less regulation, less taxes, less government. However, laissez-faire economic policies lead to a divided American society, where a prosperous elite, the knowledge class, secures increasing shares of the economic pie, while the lower-paid majority struggles to make ends meet.

The simple belief that a free market should not be regulated so that it can magically take care of itself is wrong. It leads to a layered society, where people are born wealthy or poor and stay that way. The ownership society mindset neglects the fact that a working free market is always the result of a painful process of trial and error, where the government attempts to balance fairness and efficiency.

It also neglects the fact that both a working free market and American society are based on the idea of opportunity, meaning that everyone should be able to succeed through their own efforts, regardless of their background.

Opportunity is only possible when the free market is government-regulated to ensure the economic pie is equally distributed. Only if all people have the opportunity to succeed, can they contribute to a vibrant free market. Just as the government stepped in after the financial crash of 1929 to help structure the social contract between employers and employees, it should always intervene when the free market is not functioning fairly.

To become more competitive, America must invest in education, science and technology

If America wants to be competitive in the global economy, it should not cut costs or create trade barriers. Instead it should strive to create a vibrant free market in which great companies can develop innovative products.

For such a free market to work, the government must lay a strong foundation for it. To succeed, a free market needs the right infrastructure as well as educated people who have a legitimate chance to succeed through their own efforts. Only people with this kind of social mobility can contribute to a thriving economy.

In the 21st century, social mobility is only possible when everyone has access to high-quality education. This is not the case in America today. High-school drop-out rates are higher than ever; college fees are rising steadily, and most inner-city schools are in an almost hopeless state.

Congress has made it both harder and more expensive for students to get a high-quality education. And since a good education is so expensive, the well-educated go into high-paying jobs to pay off their debts. None of them wind up being teachers in inner-city schools, and far too few become engineers or researchers.

To be competitive, America needs more engineers and better teachers, not more lawyers. To develop more companies like Google, it must invest in its education system, fund research and train more scientists and engineers.

America should invest in alternative energy sources and higher fuel efficiency standards to become energy independent

Dependency on foreign oil drastically undermines the future of the American economy and threatens national security as well. While America controls only 3 percent of the world's oil reserves, it accounts for 25 percent of total global consumption. Since worldwide demand is rising and supply disruptions

are more likely than ever, an economy depending on foreign oil is extremely vulnerable. Terrorists who want to harm America can simply do so by attacking oil fields anywhere in the world.

Additionally, a large share of the 800 billion dollars America spends on foreign oil every day actually directly subsidizes unstable regimes. Even though oil companies are making record profits, the government has subsidized them in the past, instead of acknowledging the fact that the only way to energy independence is through investing in cleaner 21st century energy sources.

America should also invest in higher fuel efficiency standards. Even China has higher standards than the US, and US automakers have waited far too long before shifting focus to more efficient cars. Investing in new energy sources and higher standards in fuel-efficiency can also lead to thousands of new jobs in the US and help create new industries for the 21st century.

America's 21st century foreign policy must focus on the current global battle of ideas and rely more on multilateral action

American foreign policy has been strongly influenced by the threats of the Cold War. But today, it is not threatened by countries with large armies like the Soviet Union, but rather smaller, militant organizations such as international terrorist networks.

In the aftermath of September 11, America should have completely reframed its foreign policy. Instead, the government revived its Cold War strategy, but instead of the Soviet Union, the new enemies were small, despotic countries like Iraq.

The war in Iraq has not only generated tremendous costs, both in military spending and in casualties, it has also fuelled anti-American sentiment across the world. Since in the 21st century, threats are no longer caused by rival states but rather by ideologies, America has to engage in a "battle of ideas" with these ideologies to promote the American ideals of democracy and liberty. This is a battle which cannot be won through military interventions: Democracy is always a result of a social awakening and cannot be forced upon a nation.

In this battle of ideas, America has to lead by example, by perfecting its own democracy. It is hard to press for human rights as long as America detains suspects without trial. In cases where a military intervention is absolutely necessary, America should rely on multilateral rather than unilateral actions, the same way it did in the First Gulf War. Multilateral action not only helps reduce anti-American sentiment; it also brings down the costs America must bear.

What I took from it

The key message in this book is that the fundamental values Americans share are the basis for achieving more social justice, a healthy economy as well as establishing a 21st century foreign policy.

What is America's status quo and what are its problems? All Americans share a fundamental set of values reflecting the founding fathers' intent, but America is currently suffering from a lack of empathy.

Politics are strongly influenced by money, interest groups and the media. The challenges of the globalized economy are mainly shouldered by ordinary workers.

How can increasing equality and social justice help solve these problems? America needs a social security system and tax code which ensure risks and benefits are spread equally in society.

Faith plays a key role in America's diverse society, helping Americans overcome some of their most pressing problems. True equality can be reached through non-discriminatory laws, scholarships and more emphasis on social justice.

The problems of poor inner-city neighbourhoods can be solved through education and equal opportunities. Because the structure of the family-unit has changed, America needs better school programs and more support for parents.

How can America reinvigorate its economy and create a 21st century agenda for its foreign policy? A vibrant free market needs governmental regulation to ensure the same opportunities for everyone. To become more competitive, America must invest in education, science and technology.

The Snowball

Alice Schroeder

Warren Buffett is probably the most famous investor of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries – maybe even of all time. So says Alice Schroeder in her book, *The Snowball*, first published in 2008. Known as the “Oracle of Omaha” or the “Sage of Omaha,” he can frequently be seen in the media sharing his opinion on business and politics. But few know what it is he actually does and even fewer how Buffett came to occupy the position he is in today.

As a child, Warren Buffett found comfort and joy in statistics and numbers, says Schroeder. Warren Buffett was born in Omaha, Nebraska, on August 20, 1930 – a mere ten months after Black Tuesday, the stock market crash that sent the country plummeting into the Great Depression.

His father, Howard, was a well-liked stockbroker who managed to sell reliable securities and bonds during this bleak period. As a result, unlike many other families, the Buffett’s were able to bounce back from the crash and live comfortably during the 1930s. However, this did not mean things were easy for the young Warren.

His mother, Leila, was an overbearing parent, quick to fly into a rage, an unfortunate tendency that resulted in her needlessly shaming and blaming her children.

The three most powerful points I took from the book were;

1. When a company’s intrinsic value is far higher than its perceived value, then there is a good chance that perceived value will eventually rise to meet intrinsic value.
2. Buffett would tell his potential partners how he only invested in undervalued stocks, and that any earnings would then be reinvested in these same stocks. In a way it was like rolling a snowball down a hill: what starts as a small handful eventually grows bigger and bigger.
3. Though Buffett could calculate a company’s monetary value quite quickly, he found success by paying attention to the human element of a business.

Stuck at home with this abrasive and unpredictable parent, Warren was eager to find an escape. More often than not, his older sister Doris was the target of their mother’s rage, but Warren also sought ways to avoid his mother’s temper, and he found it in numbers, odds and percentages. One of the reasons he loved school was that it got him away from home and taught him more about mathematics.

After his first-grade classes let out, Warren and his friend Russ would sit on Russ’s front porch and note down the license plates of passing cars. Their parents thought this was so they could calculate the frequencies of each letter and number appearing on the plates, but in reality, the boys secretly believed their notes could help the police catch bank robbers, as the street was the only possible getaway route from the local bank. Sometimes he was able to get away from home by spending time at his dad’s office on the weekends, where he happily wrote the numbers of stock prices on the office’s big chalkboard.

The young Warren’s interest in numbers, probabilities and statistics was noticed and encouraged by other family members. At the age of eight, Warren received a book on baseball statistics from his grandfather, a gift that delighted Warren. He devoted hours on end to memorizing every page. He received another gift from his beloved aunt Alice: a book on the complex card game bridge, which sparked a lifelong obsession.

With these wonderful books, Warren could sit happily in his room, away from his erratic mother, and spend time in the company of more comforting and reliable companions: numbers.

Starting at a young age

If there is one thing that fascinated Warren more than numbers, it was money. When he was nine years old, Warren was already making money by selling packs of gum and bottles of Coke to his neighbours. A year later, he was selling peanuts at football games at the University of Omaha.

Warren's interest in money intensified in 1940, when he spotted a book at the library called *One Thousand Ways to Make \$1,000*. The ten-year-old Buffet was instantly inspired by it and confided in a friend that he planned to be a millionaire by age 35. He was certainly proving himself to be a determined kid. By age eleven he had saved up \$120, which was a whole lot of money in 1941. He used that money to make his first investment. He bought six shares of the company Cities Service Preferred – three for him and three for his sister Doris.

In high school, the odd jobs continued; he sold golf balls and bought pinball machines that he rented out to barber shops. But his wages really went up when he started delivering newspapers. In 1942, his family had moved to Washington, DC, after his dad was elected to serve in congress as the Republican representative for Nebraska's second district. It was here that Warren started delivering papers and selling subscriptions on three different routes, one of which contained three popular apartment buildings that were home to many US senators.

Since Warren earned a portion of the collected subscription fees, he was a highly motivated paperboy and a stickler for making sure his customers paid up. Remarkably, he was earning around \$175 per month at this time – more than most of the teachers at his school. Before long, his savings had grown to \$1,000. In 1944, at the ripe old age of fourteen, Warren filed his first tax return. He cited both his watch and his bicycle as deductions, and payed \$7.00 in total.

Buffet had good mentors

Considering Buffett's all-consuming interest in money and numbers, it is unsurprising that his classmates labelled him as a "Future Stockbroker" in the high school yearbook. It was also unsurprising that Buffett chose to study accounting and business at the University of Nebraska.

As he moved out of his family home and onto the college campus, it became apparent that he was a pretty messy guy. Indeed, his first roommate was so annoyed by Buffett's messiness that he decided to move out after the first year.

But his roommate was perhaps more frustrated by Buffett's ability to effortlessly memorize entire sections of textbooks, which he could then recite back to his teachers verbatim. This gave Buffett more time to listen to music and not pick up after himself, much to the annoyance of those who had to work harder to get passing grades. Since Buffett found college rather easy, he was quite surprised when, after applying for a graduate program at Harvard Business School, he received a letter of rejection.

But this proved to be a fortunate failure. Buffett was accepted by Columbia University, where he studied under Benjamin Graham, the author of the book *Intelligent Investor* and a man whose mentorship left quite an impression on Buffett.

Buffett loved Graham's book dearly, so when he found out he was teaching at Columbia, he forgot all about Harvard. He was also excited about another class that was being taught by David Dodd, the author of *Security Analysis*, yet another book that Buffett had memorized. Both of these teachers taught Buffett valuable lessons and fundamental investment strategies. For example, Buffett learned about the importance of investigating a company from top to bottom in order to determine its intrinsic value – the amount of money it's actually worth. This value is then compared to its perceived value, which is how much the stock is currently selling for on the market.

When a company's intrinsic value is far higher than its perceived value, it may be what Graham called

a “cigar butt” – an undervalued business worth investing in. Graham’s success rested in large part on the realization that there is a good chance that perceived value will eventually rise to meet intrinsic value.

Buffett finally became his own boss

Throughout college, Buffett was uncomfortable around girls. His shyness was so severe that he even enrolled in a public speaking class, hoping it would boost his confidence and make him feel less awkward. When he took this class, there was one young woman in particular that Buffett wanted to impress.

Her name was Susie Thompson, and though her father took an instant liking to Buffett, it took a good deal of persistence before Susie warmed up to his awkward charm. A nervous wreck, and too eager to impress, Buffett initially came across as arrogant and privileged. But once Susie gave Buffett a chance, she realized that his posturing was just a symptom of his awkward shyness and, eventually, she fell in love with his charming vulnerability. The two got married in 1952, and Buffett kept busy teaching classes and working at his dad’s old investment firm. Their first child, Susie Alice Buffett, was born in 1953, the same year Buffett got the job he had been dreaming about for years – working for Ben Graham’s investment firm, Graham-Newman.

Buffett quickly became the rising star of Graham-Newman, even though he soon realized that he actually hated being a stockbroker. He could not stand the thought of picking the wrong investment and losing someone’s hard-earned money. So, he soon began plotting his own partnership. After the birth of his second child, Howie Graham Buffett, Warren’s plans to become his own boss became a reality. In 1956, he launched Buffett Associates, Ltd.

The idea behind this partnership was that it would only include friends and relatives, and there would be simple rules behind every investment so that no one could be disappointed or have unrealistic expectations. At the same time, Buffett’s reputation was given a boost by his mentor and former boss, Ben Graham. Shortly after Buffett left his firm, Graham decided to retire and close up shop. But on the way out, he recommended Buffett as a reliable man for his clients to invest their money with.

Buffett had a strict investment philosophy and it proved successful

In his first year as his own boss, Buffett began a series of eight partnerships based on different sets of friends who gave him anywhere between \$50,000 to \$120,000 to invest. Each time Buffett started a new partnership, he made sure everyone understood his philosophy. He would tell his potential partners how he only invested in undervalued stocks, and that any earnings would then be reinvested in these same stocks. In a way it was like rolling a snowball down a hill: what starts as a small handful eventually grows bigger and bigger.

He also made sure they knew he was not the kind of investor who would cash out when a stock hit a certain number – he was patient. And this patient consistency paid off. At the end of 1956, his partnerships beat the market by 4 percent; at the end of 1957, it was 10 percent, and at the end of 1960, it was 29 percent. The snowball was rolling.

By the start of the 1960s, Buffett was already managing over a million dollars. At this time, the stock market was on an upward swing; unlike many other investors, however, this shift in the market did not change his way of doing business. He still searched for undervalued companies, and when he found something he wanted, he bought up as much stock as possible. This often meant earning a seat on the board to make sure that the executives did not do anything foolish with the investors’ money.

Remarkably, while managing millions of dollars, Buffett was still doing all of his own paperwork. But in 1962 he decided to make things less complicated and dissolved all of his individual partnerships

into a single entity: Buffett Partnership, Ltd. Around this time, Buffett's success was starting to expand beyond Omaha to Wall Street, where he was gaining recognition as one of the few major players who didn't work in New York City. However, some established money men remained sceptical and predicted that he would go broke any day now.

Buffett started thinking bigger

One person who recognized Warren Buffett's talents early on was Californian lawyer and part-time investor, Charlie Munger. The two like-minded individuals became fast friends after a long lunch in 1959 – a friendship that inevitably led to a fruitful business partnership. Munger's perspective opened Buffett's eyes to bigger possibilities and helped him realize that you could still play it safe while moving beyond those "cigar butt" stocks.

Indeed, the Buffett partnership would soon be taking a huge leap forward, thanks in large part to a certain stock that Buffett picked up at just the right time. When John F. Kennedy was assassinated in 1963, few people were paying attention to any other story. But, by then, Buffett was a creature of habit, and he continued digging through the back pages of the newspapers, where he came across a story about a soybean scandal involving American Express.

A subsidiary of American Express had certified that certain storage tanks contained soybean oil, but they were later revealed to be filled with seawater. As a result, American Express stocks took a severe hit. But this did not worry Buffett; he knew the company would bounce back. So, when prices hit rock bottom in January of 1964, he began gradually pouring money into American Express: \$3 million at first, and then, by 1966, \$13 million.

Naturally, American Express did bounce back, and it brought the partnership unprecedented rewards, enough for Buffett to start buying entire businesses. One of the first buyouts was a business that would come to define Buffett – the small Massachusetts textile manufacturer, Berkshire Hathaway. Buffett's research showed that its intrinsic value was \$22 million, which meant it should be selling at \$19.46 per share. Yet it was selling at only \$7.50 per share. In 1965, after some negotiation, Buffett got controlling interest in Berkshire Hathaway by purchasing 49 percent of the company at a little over \$11 per share. That same year, Warren and Susie earned an additional \$2.5 million, thanks largely to the American Express investment, which meant that Buffett had more than met his goal of becoming a millionaire by age 35.

With larger purchases came larger problems, and some new rules to follow

Even though Buffett is closely associated with Berkshire Hathaway now, the company was so problematic that Buffett would come to regret ever getting involved with it. But Buffett is not the kind of investor who likes to cut his losses, a philosophy that goes back to before his involvement with Berkshire Hathaway.

In 1958, Buffett made a similar purchase of a company in Nebraska called Dempster Mill Manufacturing, which made windmill and water irrigation systems. But things quickly fell apart: he put the wrong management in charge, the company went bankrupt and he decided to liquidate the company's assets. As a result, people lost jobs and the neighbouring community openly expressed their dislike of Buffett.

Determined to never let this happen again, Buffett wanted to be sure that the right person was in charge of Berkshire Hathaway and that the business stayed alive. This presented many challenges since the costs of textiles was on the rise during the 1960s and 1970s and the company's machinery was in desperate need of modernization. But Buffett never wasted money, so he was extremely hesitant about injecting additional capital into a company that held no real promise of turning a profit.

All this meant that Berkshire Hathaway would continue to be a burden as a textile manufacturer. Nonetheless, Buffett kept it alive by continuing to purchase winning stocks in its name every chance he got, eventually giving Berkshire Hathaway one of the world's best stock portfolios. Despite the problems presented by Berkshire Hathaway, Buffett was doing extremely well. His investment partnership was in such good shape that he decided to close its doors to new members and tighten his investment rules.

More and more technology companies were emerging in the late 1960s, which prompted Buffett to make a new rule: he would never buy stock in a company that offered a product or service he did not fully understand. Buffett liked things "easy, safe, profitable and pleasant," which led to another rule: no involvement with businesses that had potential or proven "human problems" such as impending layoffs, plant closings or a history of executives fighting with labour unions.

It was not all about money for Buffett

Even after Buffett became a millionaire, he remained a notoriously shabby dresser, a man utterly unconcerned with his outward appearance. Far more important to Buffett were the details and characteristics of the people who were in charge of his businesses. Reliable businesses have reliable management, so when Buffett made his acquisitions, he made sure they were being run by good people.

One of the main reasons Buffett decided to purchase the Baltimore department store Hochschild-Kohn, as well as Associated Cotton Shops, which ran a string of retail stores, was the people behind the scenes. Buffett got in the habit of sitting down with company managers and getting to know them well. He wanted to make sure they were enthusiastic people that he could trust. For a while, Buffett had his eyes on an Omaha insurance business called National Indemnity. But it was not until he met with Jack Ringwalt, whom he immediately recognized as a great manager, that he decided to buy.

These were smart moves, and by the end of 1966, the partnership was doing better than ever, outperforming the market by 36 percent. Buffett regarded the managers of these business – as well as his investment partners – as family. And as the 1960s ended, Buffett began offering to buy out his partners. It was a way to wind down the partnership so that he and Susie could focus more on personal endeavours.

Susie continued to hope that her husband might retire, or at least devote more time to his kids, who were quickly growing up without much involvement from their father. Susie was also busy: she pursued a singing career and got involved in the pressing social issues of 1960s America, attending civil-rights and anti-war protests.

Even Warren, who mostly steered clear of politics, could not help but get involved. In 1967, he became the treasurer for the Nebraskan office for Democratic presidential candidate Eugene McCarthy.

Warren's move into politics had a lot to do with the death of his father, who was a devout Republican. After his father died, Buffett could finally express his own political views without worrying about disappointing him.

Buffett always wanted to own a newspaper business

Back when Buffett was delivering newspapers in Washington, DC, he dreamed of one day owning his own paper. And when he made \$16 million in earnings in 1969, he was finally in a position to realize that dream. That year, Buffett purchased a controlling interest in the Omaha Sun. Not only did this fulfil one of Buffett's dreams; it would eventually lead to a cherished award.

In 1972, the Omaha Sun published an investigative article on Boys Town, a local shelter for homeless

boys that dated back to 1913. When the article was written, this shelter had become a huge 1,300-acre compound, with its own farm and stadium, being run by a priest named Father Edward Flanagan.

Curiously, though, it housed only 665 boys – and there were 600 employees. It seemed like something fishy was going on, so Buffett helped the Sun’s editor commission an investigation. And Buffett’s hunch led to a major scoop. Boys Town had in fact been stockpiling donations, grants and funds, amassing around \$18 million per year.

The article – “Boys Town: America’s Wealthiest City?” – ran on March 30, 1972, earning Buffett’s paper the Pulitzer Prize for outstanding regional journalism. The story immediately went national and led to reform regarding how non-profit organizations were run. After this success, Buffett then set his sights on a national newspaper: the prestigious Washington Post.

By the summer of 1973, Buffett owned over 5 percent of the Washington Post and was even developing an extremely close relationship with its publisher, Kay Graham. The following year, he joined the newspaper’s board and started attending Graham’s lavish dinner parties. He spent many nights awkwardly attempting to mingle with famous guests like the actor Paul Newman and trying not to embarrass himself in front of respected senators, diplomats and dignitaries from around the world.

When the going gets tough

When you are as active an investor as Warren Buffett and Charlie Munger, you are bound to pick up a couple of troublesome companies. When Munger noticed Blue Chip Stamps, it was 1968 and it was common for housewives to collect trading stamps – which functioned much like coupons – when they were at grocery stores and gas stations.

But with the rise of the women’s liberation movement in the 1970s, trading stamps became passé – unpleasant tokens of a less liberal time. Much like Berkshire Hathaway, Blue Chip was now on life support; it was only alive because Buffett and Munger were buying winning stocks under the company’s name.

So, to help Blue Chip, Munger bought 8 percent of Wesco, an undervalued savings and loan company. Buffett liked Wesco, too – but so did Santa Barbara Financial Company. In fact, SBFC wanted to merge with Wesco. But Buffett saw SBFC as an overvalued company that would only be bad news for Wesco. So, he flew to California to talk with Betty Caper Peters, the surviving member of Wesco’s founding family, and convinced her to call off the merger. She did, but the decision sent Wesco’s stock plummeting from \$18 to \$11 per share.

Buffett and Munger felt bad about this, so they offered to buy their majority stake at \$17 per share. But it did not end there: Santa Barbara Financial filed a complaint with the Security Exchange Committee (SEC) claiming Buffett and Munger purposely overpaid Wesco in order to ruin the planned merger.

The year of 1974 was a tense year. The SEC launched an investigation into Buffett and Munger’s tangled web of over 30 companies. This included five parent companies, such as Berkshire Hathaway and Blue Chip, that each owned five or more other companies, which in turn owned other companies and so on. They were not hiding anything, but the complicated structure made the SEC highly suspicious. Buffett was extremely anxious. He knew that even being named in a finding of wrongdoing could ruin a reputation forever. Thankfully, in the end, the SEC only issued one warning for a disclosure violation in Blue Chip’s past – and no individuals were named.

Buffett also faced challenges with his marriage and legal battle between two newspapers

The increasingly close relationship between Warren Buffett and the Washington Post’s publisher, Kay Graham, initially upset Susie. But she eventually began a romance with her tennis instructor, and wrote

a personal letter to Kay, telling her that she was free to have her own relationship with Buffett.

However, in 1977, with the children out of the house, Susie decided it was time for a radical change and made arrangements to move to San Francisco. In many ways, Buffett never grew up. Though nearing fifty, he was still a messy man who loved cheeseburgers and ice cream. He also remained far more devoted to his business life than to his family. Despite all this, Susie still loved him and wanted to make sure he was taken care of. So, when she left, she hired Astrid, a young woman Susie knew from a nightclub, to cook for and look after Buffett. Buffett was shocked by Susie's departure, but after many tearful phone conversations, he finally understood that she needed a life of her own.

Astrid eventually moved in with Buffett, a development that surprised both Susie and Kay, as well as Howie and Susie, Jr. Then, in the middle of all this, a nasty legal battle began that would take years for Buffett to resolve. In the late 1970s, Buffett and Munger had added another newspaper to their collection: the Buffalo Evening News. Part of their plan was to add a weekend edition to the paper which they would introduce by offering the first five issues for free, followed by a discount price.

But their competition in the area, Buffalo's Courier-Express, filed a lawsuit, claiming that this offer constituted unfair practice. The judge stunned Buffett by ruling in favour of Courier-Express. In his decision, the judge said it was unlawful to sell free newspapers, and if the public wanted to subscribe to the weekend edition, they would have to renew their order every week. Buffett naturally appealed this harsh decision, and, in 1981, he finally won – but by then the paper had lost millions of dollars.

Being a loyal friend brought Buffet to Salomon Brothers, where he faced one of his most trying tests

Another company that Buffett is now closely associated with is GEICO, an auto insurance company that Buffett first noticed back in college. It was actually one of the first stocks he recommended to clients during his brief time at his father's old firm, but it was not until the 1970s, when the company was in crisis, that he became closely involved.

In 1976, Buffett joined GEICO's board to help it out of bankruptcy by revitalizing its management. At that time, an executive named John Gutfreund, who worked at the Wall Street trading house Salomon Brothers, helped Buffett raise funds to get GEICO back on its feet. Buffett was grateful for Gutfreund's help and he tried to repay that favour when Salomon Brothers faced some problems of its own.

In the early 1980s, hostile takeovers become a standard way of doing business on Wall Street; junk bonds were used to make brokers rich and everyone was racking up debt by making deals based on credit.

Buffett, who always paid with cash, hated these practices, and he did not like the brokers or analysts indulging in them, either. But when Gutfreund asked for his help in 1986, Buffett agreed to join the board of Salomon Brothers. Buffett had such a reputation for being associated with stable and reliable companies that having him on your board was a clear sign to everyone that the company was in good hands and not vulnerable to a takeover. However, Buffett never suspected the trouble that lay ahead. In 1991, an employee named Paul Mozer was caught in a massive scandal. He had broken federal laws multiple times by illegally bidding in government auctions.

Making matters worse, management was made aware of this before the news spread but had not taken proper action. During the fallout, Buffett was made interim-CEO and he put together new leadership and reforms. Crucially, he used his contacts to plead his case and successfully prevented the Treasury Department from barring Salomon Brothers from future auctions.

Buffett's success has continued without technology investments, despite an eye-opening friendship with Bill Gates.

Warren Buffett's reputation took a downward turn in the 1990s. As technology stocks became all the rage, Buffett remained utterly uninterested in the NASDAQ. People began saying he was behind the times, an irrelevant old man. Remarkably, Buffett never concerned himself with these opinions, as he was doing just fine without technology stocks.

Actually, he was doing better than fine: between 1978 and 1991, his net worth jumped from \$89 million to \$3.8 billion and rising. And since becoming CEO of Berkshire Hathaway in 1986, that company's stock continued to soar, trading at \$8,000 per share in 1991 and soon topping \$10,000.

His career is proof that you can stay relevant and successful while steering clear of the NASDAQ. Buffett was one of the few people who recognized that the only thing tech stocks did reliably was make investors unhappy in the long run. Nonetheless, he did make a small investment in one company.

Warren Buffett and Bill Gates agreed to meet at a Fourth of July party in 1991, even though both of them went in thinking that they would have nothing to talk about. But that meeting led to a conversation that lasted the rest of the weekend, and they went on to remain close friends. Afterward, Gates began attending Buffett's annual shareholder meetings, which eventually became so popular that scalpers could sell a ticket for \$250, and, in the end, Buffett bought 100 shares of Microsoft.

Buffett and Gates also began meeting regularly for bridge games, along with Charlie Munger and Kay Graham. Throughout the 1990s and the 2000s, these two were neck-and-neck for the title of richest person in the world. But it was their friendship that opened Buffett's eyes to his real place in the larger world.

After taking a trip to China with Gates, Buffett realized how lucky he was to be born in Omaha. He clearly saw that he had had advantages that many people in the world did not, a realization that only reinforced his humble and thankful attitude toward life.

In the 2000s, Buffett faced personal losses that made him re-evaluate what is important.

Buffett's predictions about internet companies being a disappointment to investors were already coming true in the early 2000s, and the publications that called him irrelevant in 1994 were now rebranding him as a prophet. But this turnaround was not much comfort in 2001, when his dear friend and companion Kay Graham passed away.

Their 30-year relationship had been extremely close, and he was devastated for weeks after her death. Then, two months later, on September 11, 2001, things only became worse. Buffett took what he learned from both of these events – that we are living in uncertain times – and began investing in companies that offered some sense of certainty. This is what drew Buffett to businesses like Fruit of the Loom and companies that made farm equipment and children's clothes.

However, another period of re-evaluation was just around the corner. In 2003, Susie was diagnosed with stage 3 oral cancer. Even though they were no longer living together, Susie and Buffett remained close. And though he was often reduced to tears, he recognized how important it was to take this time to care for Susie.

Susie passed away in 2004. Buffett was heartbroken, and he spent days in bed, unable to talk to anyone. But when he finally emerged, he had gotten in better touch with his own feelings and had a desire to be closer to his children. He now believed he had figured out the secret to life: "...to be loved by as many people as possible among those you want to have love you."

He also knew what he wanted to do with all his money. He gave 85 percent of Berkshire Hathaway,

which was worth \$36 billion at the time, to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and he divided another six million dollars between Susie's charitable foundation and the other foundations set up for his kids.

What I took from it

For much of Warren Buffett's life, he had a one-track mind – rolling his snowball. This meant constantly investing and reinvesting the earnings. His relatively simple but thorough method for picking stocks to invest in had nothing to do with business trends or technology. Though he could calculate a company's monetary value quite quickly, he found success by paying attention to the human element of a business.

Use Buffett's "20 Punches" approach to investing. Imagine you have a card that gives you only 20 chances to invest in your lifetime. Each time you make an investment, someone punches a hole in your card, and you lose a future investment opportunity. If you use this philosophy, you will be much more diligent about the investments you do make.

What I Know For Sure

Oprah Winfrey

Who does not know Oprah Winfrey? Oprah was the one who planted the seed for my own curiosity in lessons on how to live an abundant life. Now for the first time Oprah highlights her snippets of wisdom in her new book, *What I Know For Sure*. As a creative force, student of the human heart and champion of adversity and living the life you want, Oprah Winfrey stands above many.

This collection of bits of wisdom begins with Oprah Winfrey recalling a 1998 interview during which the late, great film critic Gene Siskel asked her, "What do you know for sure?" "Now, this was not my first rodeo," Oprah writes. "I've asked and been asked an awful lot of questions over the years, but I have to say, the man managed to stop me in my tracks."

In the years following that interview, Oprah took up writing monthly columns called "What I Know for Sure" in her *O' Magazine*. "But just when I'm ready to raise the white flag and yell, 'That is it! I am tapped out! I have got nothing!'" Oprah confesses in the book's intro, "I'll find myself walking the dogs or brewing a cup of chai or soaking in the tub, when, out of nowhere, a little moment of crystal clarity will bring me back to something, I absolutely know beyond a shadow of a doubt."

The 14 years during which this book's contents were written were eventful ones for "The Queen of All Media." She closed "The Oprah Winfrey Show," which ran from 1986 to 2011 and remains the highest-rated talk show in history. She launched her own television network, became America's only black billionaire, and a major philanthropist. She received an honorary degree from Harvard University and the Presidential Medal of Freedom from Barack Obama.

The three most powerful points I took from the book were;

1. Continually ask yourself; am I really doing everything I really can to lead my life to the fullest
2. It is all about relishing each hour as though there is never another
3. It is important to value yourself and therefore creating five-star experiences or pleasures that define our life

Joy

Oprah says that it is critical to question ourselves whenever there is a nagging feeling of doubt and fear. Am I really doing everything I really can to lead my life to the fullest? Life throws a lot of opportunities at us, but it is up to us to either grab them with both hands and flourish or abandon them and sulk in a corner while leading a life filled with regret. We have the choice right this moment and that is the only moment we know for certain.

There are many people who get so caught up in their lives that they forget to smile. However, there are others who take it one step at a time and live the moment, even if it is just enjoying a walk with their dogs. Oprah says that it is all about relishing each hour as though there is never another. In simple words, it is about living every day as if it is our last day on earth and enjoying every moment of it.

Oprah talks about never ignoring your own needs. Sometimes, we tend to care more towards others but neglect ourselves in the process. Oprah reminds us that it is important to value yourself. In addition, she further talks about creating five-star experiences or pleasures that define our life. Whether it is enjoying a hot cup of coffee or a good meal or finding happiness by lending a helping hand to a random stranger, our lives are defined by these pleasures that offer satisfaction like none other.

Resilience

I read an article that 75 percent of super high achievers come from troubled families. Oprah falls into this group. She talks about her childhood that made her feel unworthy and alone. As a single, unwanted kid, Oprah was left to fend for herself. Later, upon the insistence of John Bradshaw; a counsellor and author, Oprah thought about her childhood and how she had gone through many awful experiences. Although she was abused as a child and became pregnant when she was only 14, Oprah realised as an adult that she could heal herself.

Similarly, each of us has our own journey no matter where we are from. Our memories could be filled with pain, shame and regret even if we are innocent and it is indeed very hard to cleanse our heart and mind and free ourselves from such memories. Oprah states that it is our responsibility to give ourselves the love we were deprived of. Each and every individual is responsible for his/her own life and that is an irrefutable fact.

If you are blaming someone else because of your unhappiness, you are simply wasting time. So, the only way to forget and heal is to pick your pieces up and move on because there is a silver lining to every difficulty you face today. Leave your worries behind and embrace the future that gives you more opportunities at every step.

However, there are times when you do everything, and it still seems like it is not enough. In such situations, Oprah says that it is best to stand and encounter problems head on. Your strength is about your ability to face adversities and keep walking through it. Successful people also feel fear and doubt, but what makes them stand apart is that they have faith. If you have the faith that you will go at least one step more than you think you can, you are already walking in the right direction.

Connection

Oprah talks a lot about connection – the connection we all want to feel and have. We want to be valued by somebody else and yearn to be loved. When an individual does not feel respected or loved, he/she will do anything to get that from someone else, even if it is immoral and unethical. This driving urge to feel loved makes you undervalue yourself and thereby settle for something that is not worthy for you.

If there is a lack of affection or intimacy in your life, it is not springing up because of distance or lack of social meetings, but it is because you are not giving yourself the respect you deserve. You can feel loved and expect love from others only if you first love yourself. Needless to say, if you have a low self-esteem, there is no boyfriend, lover, sister or mother in the world who can make you feel better. What you become in the future depends on what you are today, so do not be bogged down by the past. Never underestimate your strength no matter how beaten you feel.

Gratitude

When a person becomes too busy, he fails to notice the little things that contribute towards the joy he feels, and he ultimately stops being grateful for everything he has. Although he might earn more money in his career, he will eventually find something missing. Therefore, it is essential to dedicate a little bit of time to appreciate everything you have.

Oprah talks about her struggle to lose weight. Although she joined dieting programs and did lose weight, it was a never-ending vicious cycle of frustration because she only ended up gaining more weight. Thanks to the lessons she learned, she says that it's important to accept your body the way it is, even if you think that you're out of shape. It is about being grateful for the precious gift you have received; your body. Instead of fighting with it and becoming frustrated, the best option is to embrace it lovingly and make peace with it.

Possibility

Fear can immobilise a person and prevent him/her from exploring several possibilities that can contribute to his growth. If you stick to your job only because you do not want to get out of your comfort zone, you might let many possibilities slide by. One needs to have the courage to let go and move on and also make that bold move that invariably brings the best in an individual. No matter how fearful you feel, you need to keep your anxiety away and surge ahead.

Oprah also talks about the fear she had while growing up. She feared that people would reject her because they assumed that she was arrogant. Over the years, she says she has learned to not pay heed to such naysayers who can never be satisfied with anything. Since they are unhappy with themselves, they try their best to pull others down and will try everything to succeed in that. Therefore, the best thing to do is to ignore them. You are created to be extraordinary and nothing should stop you from achieving all your dreams.

Awe

We often confront situations we are not sure about. However, we all see miracles that seem unbelievable and surprise us to a great extent. Oprah says that a miracle is all about viewing the world with a light in our eyes. It is simply about acknowledging the fact that there's always possibilities and hope even if they seem to have vanished.

Of course, there are others who do not believe in miracles and will not acknowledge them even if it happens right in front of them. They are so closed to such miracles that they term them as mere coincidences and move on with their lives. However, Oprah says that miracles act as a confirmation that there is something larger than life at work. In fact, they occur every day and sometimes right in front of us, but we will see them only if we want to see them.

While many people believe in miracles, it is quite possible that you stop believing in them because you have too many problems in your life. Granted, when you have way too many problems, you tend to stop believing. However, Oprah urges you to think about the bigger picture. Each and every one of us has our own problems and agonies we go through every day, but the point is to learn from them. Once you treat the world as a huge classroom, you will learn to appreciate more and learn where you went wrong.

Clarity

Over the years, Oprah has been bombarded by requests from people who have always asked for help in some form or the other. Although she helped many people by donating a lot of money, it quickly wore her down because she was no longer doing it for herself but was only doing it to please others. She found that it was difficult to say "No" to people. However, once she realised that she would help only if she really felt like helping from the bottom of her heart, things changed for her. Similarly, one should only do something if there is a clear intention that is pure. It should not be done to please others.

Oprah talks about how essential it is to take care of yourself. Although it might seem selfish to put your needs ahead of the others you love, it is also necessary to understand that you need to be fit in order to take care of others. This does not make you selfish at all, but instead it gives you more strength to care for the others you really need in your life.

Oprah also talks about instincts and how critical they are. She describes a near-death experience she had when flying over the ocean. Although she had initially wanted to postpone the trip, she had ignored her instincts. Stuck in the plane at 40,000 feet with a windshield cracked, she learned to tune everything out and focus on being calm. Likewise, you need to trust your instincts when you feel that something is amiss. Never underestimate what your inner voice is trying to tell you because it is your own radar or compass that is trying to direct you in the right direction.

Power

Oprah talks about her strong feelings when it comes to people spreading negativity. Gossip; the coward's way, according to Oprah, is something an individual adopts only when he is feeling insecure about someone else. Since he/she is envious or jealous about another individual's success, he will try to malign him in the worst way possible. As a celebrity, Oprah has heard gossip about her and also confesses that she did feel a strong urge to defend herself in such situations, but after she learned that it was not worth it, her life has become far more stress free.

Most of us live in a society where we spend huge amounts of time on gossiping about somebody who is better than us. What would happen if we stopped ridiculing others and focused on our lives and career? Wouldn't our lives be far more peaceful? Oprah urges us to not get bogged down whenever they hear negative rumours. At the same time, she says that there is a lot of power in the words we utter. Instead of using powerful words to hurt someone, we can use the same to heal someone.

What I took from it

The inspirational wisdom of Oprah Winfrey is collected for the first time in this amazing book. For me, the most important message from the book is that your circumstances do not have to dictate your future. As a privileged white male; it is both sad and heart-warming to read about Oprah's difficult upbringing in the apartheid south of the US, as it was back then, and the successes she achieved in her later life. Oprah proves that hard work and grit pays off. She is not just successful financially but rich spiritually as well. An inspiration to all.

I am a big believer that books come across your path at the right time, and this was one of them. I just love this book and have now read it few times. I feel like I have learnt so much from her and about her. It is easy to read and if you listen to the audiobook read by Oprah herself while following in your book, I feel the message sinks in even deeper as Oprah's passion comes across from her reading. I highly recommend this book

The End

“End? No, while alive the journey never ends...” — J.R.R. Tolkien

OUR DEEPEST FEAR IS NOT THAT WE ARE INADEQUATE. OUR DEEPEST FEAR IS THAT WE ARE POWERFUL BEYOND MEASURE. IT IS OUR LIGHT, ^{NOT OUR DARKNESS} THAT MOST FRIGHTENS US. WE ASK OURSELVES, WHO AM I TO BE BRILLIANT, GORGEOUS, TALENTED, FABULOUS? | ACTUALLY, WHO ARE YOU NOT TO BE? YOU ARE A CHILD OF GOD. YOUR PLAYING SMALL DOES NOT SERVE THE WORLD. THERE IS NOTHING ENLIGHTENED ABOUT SHRINKING SO THAT OTHER PEOPLE WON'T FEEL INSECURE AROUND YOU. WE ARE ALL MEANT TO SHINE, AS CHILDREN DO. WE WERE BORN TO MAKE MANIFEST THE GLORY OF GOD THAT IS WITHIN US. IT'S NOT JUST IN SOME OF US; IT'S IN EVERYONE. AND AS WE LET OUR OWN LIGHT SHINE, WE UNCONSCIOUSLY GIVE OTHER PEOPLE PERMISSION TO DO THE SAME. AS WE ARE ^{LIBERATED FROM OUR OWN FEAR, OUR PRESENCE AUTOMATICALLY} LIBERATES OTHERS.

———— MARIANNE WILLIAMSON ————