



THE  
**PEAK WORK  
PERFORMANCE**  
SUMMIT

HOSTED BY

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.**

AUTHOR OF

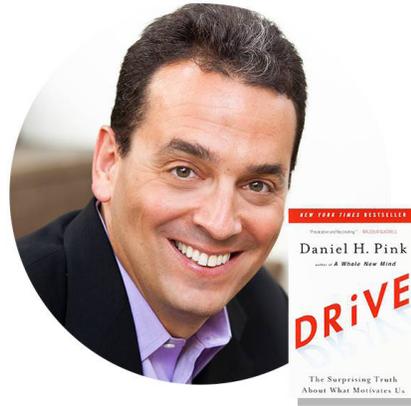
**The Best Place to Work:**  
The Art and Science of Creating an Extraordinary Workplace



# Table of Contents

- 3 – **Daniel Pink** on Motivating Top Performance
- 12 – **Adam Grant** on Why Helping Others Drives Our Success
- 23 – **Tom Rath** on Best Practices for Eating, Moving, and Sleeping
- 36 – **Greg McKeown** on Determining What is Essential and Eliminating Everything Else
- 49 – **Shawn Achor** on Staying Positive in a Stressful Workplace
- 59 – **Richard Wiseman** on How to Change Your Life in 59 Seconds
- 68 – **Susan Cain**: An Introvert’s Guide to Peak Performance
- 75 – **Christine Carter** on How to Be Happier at Work
- 86 – **Warren Berger** on Asking Smarter Questions
- 96 – **Gretchen Rubin** on Changing Your Habits
- 109 – **Michelle Segar** on How to Get More Exercise Without Going to the Gym
- 117 – **Laura Vanderkam** on What the World’s Most Successful People Do Differently
- 126 – **David Allen** on Getting the Right Things Done
- 136 – **David Burkus** on How to Elevate Your Creativity
- 145 – **Dorie Clark** on How to Network Like a Thought Leader
- 157 – **Marshall Goldsmith** on How to Lead Like a CEO
- 165 – **Susan Peirce Thompson** on Eating to Achieve Top Mental Performance
- 176 – **Tracy Brower** on How to Create Abundance in Your Work and Life
- 184 – **Todd Henry** on How to Be Brilliant at a Moment’s Notice
- 194 – **David Rock** on How to Listen Like a Leader
- 201 – **Scott Barry Kaufman** on What Creative Geniuses Do Differently
- 210 – **Brigid Schulte** on Balancing Work, Life and Play
- 221 – **Michelle Gielan** on Inspiring Positivity in Others
- 233 – **Peter Bregman** on Improving Your Performance in 18 Minutes a Day
- 244 – **Rory Vaden** on How to Multiply Your Time
- 255 – **Dan Ariely**: A Behavioral Economist’s Guide to Productivity
- 265 – **Michael Hyatt** on How to Have Your Best Year Ever
- 275 – **Hal Elrod** on How to Wake Up with More Energy on Less Sleep
- 284 – **Carrie Wilkerson** on How to Start a Business While Working for Someone Else
- 292 – **Chandler Bolt** on How Self-Publishing a Book Can Transform Your Career
- 304 – **John Lee Dumas** on How to Grow Your Network Through Podcasting
- 312 – **Laura Stack** on What To Do When There’s Too Much To Do
- 320 – About the Host: Ron Friedman, Ph.D.





## Daniel Pink Motivating Top Performance

Daniel H. Pink is the author of five provocative books, including three long-running New York Times bestsellers: *A Whole New Mind*, *Drive*, and *To Sell Is Human*. Dan's books have been translated into thirty-five languages and have sold more than two million copies worldwide. He lives in Washington, DC, with his wife and their three children.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Dan Pink, thank you so much for joining us at the Summit. It's a real pleasure to have you here.

**Dan Pink:** It's great to be here.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** As many of our viewers know, you wrote *Drive*, which has become *the* book on human motivation for a popular audience. In it, you identify three factors that motivate top performance. What are they?

**Dan Pink:** At work, the key is to move away from these controlling contingent motivators. I like to call them “if, then” rewards — as in, “If you do this, then you get that” — because science shows pretty clearly that they are good for simple and short-term tasks, but not so good for complex and long-term tasks. For complex and long-term tasks, you absolutely want to be able to pay people well, but once you do that, you want to offer them autonomy, mastery, and purpose. Autonomy is a sense of self-direction. Mastery is a chance to make progress, to get better at something that matters. Purpose is the knowledge of why you are doing something as well as how to do it.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Let's talk about ways that people watching this can apply these principles to the way they work. Let's focus on autonomy first. At many companies, workers have limited flexibility in how they do their job. That's especially true early in a career, when you're hired in a lower level position. What can you do to maximize your autonomy when you're working in a role that doesn't offer a lot of choice?

**Dan Pink:** This is from the perspective of the person working?

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Correct.



**Dan Pink:** There is some great guidance here from a researcher at Yale School of Management named Amy Wrzesniewski, who has written a lot about what she calls “job crafting.” She has found that high performers — from janitors in hospitals to people at higher levels of organizations — tend to reconfigure and re-craft their job in a small way that makes it more fully their own. Her lovely example with a janitor comes from janitors in a hospital who would talk to patients to check in on how they were doing and find ways to help the nurses. This shows that what you can take small steps to try to re-craft the job so that it’s more self-directed and meaningful.

Almost every job has that; it’s actually kind of a fascinating notion. We tend to think that there are these job descriptions and people only swim within the lanes of that job description; but if you actually look at what happens in organizations, people are crafting and re-crafting what they’re doing. If you go in as a young employee and say, “I need to do what I’m supposed to do, but part of my job is to re-craft what I do and how I do it in a way that’s meaningful to me,” you can get a lot of satisfaction from that.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Going beyond the job description that’s been handed to you and looking for proactive ways in which you can shape your role.

**Dan Pink:** Yes, and it doesn’t have to be big things. People have a lot more latitude than they think. The secret of job crafting, according to Wrzesniewski, is not saying, “Oh, even though I’m an account executive, I’m going to start writing lines of code for the software that we’re selling.” But it could be saying, “Even though I am an account executive, I might go talk to the coders and go out to lunch with them because that will give me a better understanding of the product that I’m marketing.” No one is telling you to do that. That’s not in your job description, but it’s meaningful. You self-direct and it makes you a better performer.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Now, what if your barrier to autonomy isn’t your role in the company? What if it’s the personality of the person to whom you report? Do you have any tips for increasing your autonomy when you work for a micromanager?

**Dan Pink:** That’s a very real challenge for a lot of people. There are a couple of things that you can do.

Number one is, if you want the autonomy and feel like you need permission from that person, ask for it; but ask for it only in terms of that person’s interests. Don’t say, “I really need to feel more autonomous.” That’s not going to work with a lot of those people. Instead say, “Hey boss, I have this great idea for how you can achieve more and accomplish your objectives,” and it just so happens that the pathway there is greater autonomy.

The other thing is to just do things. In most cases, job crafting is done without any formal permission. People just start doing it. There’s nothing to be said; you just start doing something that is meaningful to you. If you’re doing something that is meaningful to you, enhances your performance, and helps out the organization — but your boss tells you to stop, then you might be working in the wrong place. That can be a signal that it’s time to go somewhere else.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Let’s turn to mastery. One of the tips that you offer in your book for enhancing your level of competence is to periodically close the door and conduct a performance review on yourself. Do you conduct performance reviews on yourself and, if so, are



there some questions that you include that might be helpful for people watching this?

**Dan Pink:** That's a great question. I do a modified version that I stole from Peter Drucker. I don't do it monthly, though I probably should. I do it at around a six-month juncture, but not religiously at six months. It could be at some sort of meaningful break instead. For instance, I did one when the summer came to an end and there was a kind of turning of the page because my kids went back to school - one of them went back to college.

I write out just a few paragraphs saying how I want things to go for the next, say, four months and some pitfalls that I need to think about. It's a mix between Peter Drucker's advice and what is often called a pre-mortem, as opposed to a post-mortem. Then I file it away in Dropbox and go back to look at it however many months later to see if my expectations were right and what the pitfalls were and whether or not I avoided them.

If I were more diligent, I would probably do it monthly, but that process works reasonably well for me. The questions that I ask myself at the beginning are, "What do I want to accomplish?" and, "What do I want to learn?" Those are the two most important things. The other important one is, "What are the pitfalls?" If you start out at the outside of a time period and address those three questions, put it aside and come back and revisit that after one month, two months, three months, whatever, you'll learn something.

It's weird. I'm not sure I can draw any kind of great conclusions on that from my own experience. Sometimes I'm totally wrong about the pitfalls, sometimes I'm totally right and still don't avoid them. I've also found that my expectations often tend to be too extreme: I think, "It's going to go really well..." and it ends up being okay; it's just all right. It's an interesting exercise in that.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I have a friend who is an executive coach and recommends that her clients do something similar. The only difference is, rather than filing it away in Dropbox, she has them staple it to the front of their notebook so that they are forced to look at it every time they open their to-do list.

**Dan Pink:** That's interesting.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Let's turn to purpose, the third factor you've identified. Purpose, of course, is the experience of feeling like you are contributing to something bigger than yourself. What are some concrete things that I can do right now to achieve a sense of purpose in my work?

**Dan Pink:** In the time since I've written the book, I actually have a slightly different version of purpose and a way to describe it. I was slightly off in the book. I missed an important component.

You can think of one type of purpose as Purpose with a capital "P." That is exactly what you said, Ron — doing something in service of something larger than yourself: feeding the hungry, solving the climate crisis, whatever.

I also think there is another kind of purpose out there that you can think of as purpose with a small "p," which is just making a contribution, doing something that others care about, and asking, "If I didn't come into work today, would things be worse?"

People want to know at an existential level if anybody would notice and if something



would not get done as a consequence of their working or not working. Those are two aspects of purpose, capital “P” and small “p,” and to me they drill down to slightly different questions. Capital “P” purpose is, “Am I making a difference?” Small “p” purpose is, “Am I making a contribution? Am I doing something that contributes to someone else or helping my teammate get something done?”

One of the things that I find useful to do, maybe twice a week, is turn a “how” conversation into a “why” conversation. I like small, lightweight interventions and I try to do this myself. You can take it from the individual approach or you can take it from the leadership approach, from the angle of the individual contributor or from the boss. Let’s say you are a boss and do this twice a week. Bosses always tell you how to do stuff: here’s how you make a sales call, here’s how you do a presentation, etc. That is helpful for bosses in getting better work out of their people. But just twice a week, turn those conversations into a “why” conversation instead.

As a writer, I find this very useful. Instead of saying, “Okay, how can I finish this article; how can I write this essay?” It is important to ask myself why I am doing this. Why am I even writing this in the first place? Asking why can often give you a North Star, and — at the risk of being overly and poorly poetic — that North Star can light your way.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** You literally will stop in the middle and ask yourself...

**Dan Pink:** Not always; but sometimes, especially when I’m stymied. Say I’m writing an op-ed and wondering how I should start. If I’m stymied, I say, “Okay, wait, cut, fade out — why am I doing this? Why am I doing this in the first place? What am I trying to contribute here? What am I trying to do here?” That can help me to reboot and re-center, and give me a bigger picture.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Very interesting. In *To Sell is Human* — your follow up to *Drive* — you examine the research on persuasion and make a critical point that, to be effective in just about any role, it helps to be persuasive. What are some things that we can do in order to make ourselves more persuasive at work?

**Dan Pink:** You had it exactly right. If you look at what people do on the job, they are spending an enormous amount of time persuading, influencing, convincing, cajoling, and doing all those things that “smell” like sales. I don’t think there is a single bullet in how to do this effectively, but I do think it is important to understand how the landscape has changed. In any kind of persuasive effort — whether you are selling a labeler, a car, consulting services, or even an idea — you have to recognize that the seller and the buyer have generally the same access to information. That’s a big change.

In the old days, the seller always had more information than the buyer. This asymmetric information relationship is the reason for the idiom “buyer beware.” That asymmetry has sort of balanced out now. Not everywhere, not entirely, but the gap has closed incredibly. Sellers are on notice that the way to be an effective seller of anything in a world of information parity is to concentrate on understanding the other side’s point of view: What is the other side thinking, what is the other side’s perspective, what’s the other side’s interest? That’s, hard for us sometimes, but it’s a powerful skill.

The other thing that I would recommend is looking for ways to respond to the changed condition. Everybody has access to information, but a genuine expert can curate that



information and make sense of it more readily. You can separate out the signal from the noise in that information.

Another big aspect, especially in sales, is problem solving. Problem solving as a skill is less important. A lot of us don't realize that, if our customer or prospect can precisely identify their problem, they can find a solution without us. They don't need us, unless they are wrong about their problem or they don't even know what their problem is. Throughout white-collar work, including in selling and persuasion, the premium has shifted from the skill of problem solving to the skill of problem finding. Can you see problems before anyone else?

Those are some general tips on how to approach persuasion. Approach it with a sense of humility because you have information parity, and try to understand the other's point of view and go beyond the merely transactional things from accessing information to curating it and from solving existing problems to surfacing hidden problems.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** You mentioned seeing things from the perspective of the customer or the person with whom we are interacting...

**Dan Pink:** The other person's, yes.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Right. And there's an interesting barrier that you discuss in the book that comes about as our status at work rises. As we become more powerful, we have a harder time empathizing with others. Why does that happen?

**Dan Pink:** What the research shows is that — exactly as you said — as we feel more powerful, our ability to take other people's perspective degrades. There's actually some logic to that. If I'm in charge, I can't spend all of my time wondering, "What does Ron think about this? What does Susie think about this? What does Freda think about this? What does José think about this?" I'm never going to get anything done. You have to adopt that action orientation that limits your ability to spend time considering people's perspective.

Power can lead people to become too heavily anchored in their own vantage point. They say, "Hey, if you were as powerful as me, you would be the one in power. So I don't care what you think." That holds back an enormous amount of leaders because they have little coercive power. Without a cult of personality or incredibly ginormous thermonuclear carrots and sticks, you don't have a lot of power to coerce. You need the power of empathy, to ask, "Can I see your perspective, understand your point of view and find common ground?" There's this peculiar inverse relationship between feelings of power and perspective taking, and it's where a lot of bosses go awry.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** What do we do to remain empathetic even as we rise up the ladder at work?

**Dan Pink:** Part of it is being conscious of this phenomena. A lot of this stuff happens below our conscious awareness. We're not saying, "I'm so powerful, I'm not going to take your perspective." It's just the way it plays out. If you're conscious of these phenomena, that's one step.

The other thing that you can do, and it would be best to do this before an encounter, is dial down your feelings of power just a little bit. This doesn't mean you give back your salary or



resign your job or anything like that, but you say, “You know, I want Ron to do something. Ron’s a smart guy, and what’s in it for him to do it this way? If I sense that he is resisting, why is he resisting? Maybe there’s a barrier I can kick out of the way.”

That lowering of your feelings of power at that moment can actually make you a more effective leader. It’s a little counterintuitive for people because, when we face resistance, we always want to dial our feelings of power up — to force or coerce people a little bit more. There is an interesting set of data showing that notching it back the other way might be more effective.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** That’s a very interesting suggestion and I imagine it would be kind of hard for any of the managers watching this. As you pointed out, the impulse is to try and assert your position of leadership...

**Dan Pink:** Just to be clear, that’s often a good idea, but not always. I want to suggest thinking about power as a dial and recognize that dial goes up and it goes down. Adjusting your feelings of power — not your titular power, your feelings of power — can work in both directions and be enormously effective.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Very interesting. One group whose performance depends on being persuasive is salespeople, who also have to stomach a lot of rejection. One way the best salespeople overcome that rejection is by interpreting their failures in a way that benefits their future performance. How do successful sellers explain their setbacks and what can we all learn from their approach?

**Dan Pink:** This is the work of Martin Seligman at the University of Pennsylvania. Years ago, Martin did a well-known study about life insurance salespeople and found that the single biggest predictor of their success was what he called their “explanatory style.” They had a way of explaining failure that wasn’t delusional, wasn’t making it someone else’s fault, but actually focused on what Seligman calls the three P’s: personal, pervasive, and permanent.

Rejection is so toxic to us — we hate it so much — that a lot of us will go out of our way to avoid being in a position to even risk it. It feels terrible, and there’s probably some good evolutionary explanation for that. If you were constantly being rejected, your chances of survival were probably not great. If rejection felt bad, you would do anything you could to avoid that feeling. Seligman says that we tend to turn rejection into a catastrophe; we say, “It’s all my fault, it always happens, and it’s going to ruin everything.”

Seligman’s advice is to re-explain it to yourself, challenging your assumptions and say, like you would for a friend, “Okay, it wasn’t really all your fault or they were just not ready to buy. Is it really pervasive? No, it’s not pervasive, Ron, because you closed the deal last week. Is it going to ruin everything? Come on, there are very few things that ruin everything.” Recasting your explanatory style along the lines that Seligman is talking about can be really effective.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Another thing that persuasive salespeople do well is providing clarity. You provide an example in your book of two irrational questions that we can all ask when we’re trying to motivate others. What are those questions?

**Dan Pink:** This is interesting work from Mike Pantaloni at Yale University. It’s a technique



called motivational interviewing. It's been around for a while and is often used in therapeutic settings. The idea is that, if somebody is resistant to doing something, you ask him or her two questions.

First, on a scale of one to ten — one meaning not at all likely, ten meaning ready to do it right now — how likely are you to do your homework, clean your room, or look for a job - anything? Since these people are generally resistant to what they are doing, the answer is often very low; for example a three.

That might aggravate us as parents, bosses, or counselors; but instead of being aggravated by that low number, you ask the follow-up question: “Okay, Ron, you are a three...” — sorry to keep using you as the example for all these bad behavior — but, “Okay, Ron, you are a three, why didn't you pick a lower number?”

That's the key. The reason that is effective is because, at that point, that person has to see why he or she is not a two. If we're talking about looking for a job, they might say, “Well, I probably should look for a job because I am thirty-five years old and I don't want my wife to carry all the burden of my family and I do have some skills.” What happens then — and this is the key point — is people begin articulating their own reasons for doing something. When people have their own reasons for doing something, they believe those reasons more deeply and adhere to the behavior more strongly. That's the power of that kind of one-two punch of peculiar questions.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** That's interesting. What do you do if the person says to you, “You know what, Dan? On that ten-point scale, I am a one.”

**Dan Pink:** Okay, great. This is actually a really interesting question. You say, “What could we do to make it a two?” In those kinds of cases, there's usually some kind of barrier there. Continuing with the job example, it could be, “You know what? I don't have any suits.” Or, “I have no idea how to write a resume.” Then you can respond by saying, “Okay great, we will help you write a resume and that could get you to a two.” Usually you get twos and threes. When you get a one, it usually means that there is a barrier that is preventing them from making any motion at all.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I want to close with a broad question. You've spent the last decade thinking carefully about the psychology of work. Based on everything you've seen and read, how do you think work is going to change in the years to come, and what can we do to prepare ourselves for the workplace of the future?

**Dan Pink:** That's a really good question. Another good question. You know, it's weird — there's no single answer to that question. It's going in two very different directions.

Certain kinds of work are moving toward being much more humanistic, much more about having autonomy, much more about being — as Studs Terkel once famously said — a source of daily meaning along with daily bread. There's a much greater sense of purpose there, and many jobs are moving in that direction.

At the same time, other jobs are not. There are jobs where people feel that they are underpaid, they are not treated well, they are often monitored and there are a lot of things going on that are dehumanizing.



We're seeing, throughout the workplace, a kind of wide split, not only in wages and salaries and what people are earning, but simply in terms of how they are treated and how much we — as bosses, as customers, and others — respect their work. We need to get both of those groups going in the same direction. There are some good examples of that — Amy Wrzesniewski's, which we talked about before, and job crafting, which is very important for lower skilled and lower wage employees.

I'm a little concerned about the degree of monitoring that's going on in the workplace where companies are measuring keystrokes in the name of efficiency. That can end up being counterproductive because it's dehumanizing. There's this hospitality/restaurant view of work where you have people who are in front of the house and people who are at the back of the house. The people who are in front of the house get better pay, more freedom, and more money while the people at the back of the house are hidden. There are a lot of folks in this economy right now who occupy the back of the house and we're not treating them well enough in terms of recognition, in terms of the money, or in terms of challenge. If we make an effort to take those folks and steer them in the direction that work is going for people like you or me, then we have a more humane and productive workforce.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** If someone watching this is thinking about leaving their job and looking for a new position, are there some things that you recommend they look for?

**Dan Pink:** In terms of the components of the job or the quality of the job? I would talk to past and present employees and ask what it's like to work there. Think about your values. Do you value autonomy? If you do, ask about that. What kind of autonomy are you talking about? Are you talking about being able to come and go to the office as you want, or are you more interested in being able to pick your assignments? Or both?

Do your due diligence, get on the phone, get on email, find people who work there now, find people who used to work there, and try to get the ground truth of what it's really like to work there.



## Practical Tips From Dan Pink

- Avoid simply following a job description. Instead, look for ways of re-crafting your job in ways that make it more fully your own. This will make you feel more autonomous at work, which serves to energize you.
- Conduct your own performance reviews. Twice a year, write a few paragraphs indicating what you'd like to achieve over the next six months. Then, conduct a pre-mortem. Identify every barrier you may experience and describe what you'll do to overcome it.
- Next time you're feeling stuck at work, take a few moments to remind yourself why you're doing the activity. Directing your focus to purpose can give you renewed energy for powering through.
- If you're leading a team, make it a point to have more "Why" conversations that remind people of all the ways the work they're doing is important.
- Recovering from setbacks is all about the story you tell yourself. Avoid blowing your failure out of proportion. Focus on all the ways your failure is not about you personally and how you can change in the future. This will enable you to persevere.
- Next time you want to persuade someone to do an activity, ask them two irrational questions. Question one: On a scale of one to ten, how likely are you to do activity X right now? Question two: Why didn't you choose the number one? These two questions get people articulating their own reasons for doing the activity, which can be more motivating than any reasons you may give them.
- Before accepting your next job, spend a little time on LinkedIn finding people who used work for that employer and ask them about their experiences. You're more likely to get an honest take on what it's like working at a company from former employees than from people who work there now.



## Adam Grant Why Helping Others Drives Our Success

Adam Grant has been recognized as Wharton’s top-rated teacher for four straight years. He has been listed among HR’s most influential international thinkers, BusinessWeek’s favorite professors, the world’s top forty business professors under forty, and Malcolm Gladwell’s favorite social science writers. Adam is the author of the *New York Times* Bestseller *Give and Take*, which has been translated into twenty-seven languages and named one of the best books of 2013 by Amazon, the *Financial Times*, and the *Wall Street Journal* — as well as one Oprah’s riveting reads and *Harvard Business Review*’s ideas that shaped management.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Adam Grant, thanks so much for being part of this. A couple of years ago, the *New York Times* published an article about your research titled, “Is Giving the Secret to Getting Ahead?” What’s the answer to that question?

**Adam Grant:** It’s a very definitive maybe, Ron. That turned out to be a lot more complicated than I expected. To really understand the question, we have to divide people into groups with three different kinds of motivations. Most people approach their work either as givers, takers, or matchers, as you know. Givers are people who enjoy helping others and often do it with no strings attached. Takers are people who are always trying to get things from others and come out ahead in every interaction. The rest of us are matchers — people trying to keep an even balance of give and take, quid pro quo: I’ll do something for you if you do something for me.

The data across engineers’ productivity, medical student’s grades, and sales people’s revenues shows that the worst performers were consistently givers. They were so busy doing other people’s jobs that they literally ran out of time and energy to get their own work done. But the interesting thing was the best performers were also givers. The generous people were overrepresented on both extremes of success. Giving could be the secret to falling behind or to getting ahead, depending on how you make your everyday choices.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** How do you know if you’re doing it right or if you’re going too far?



**Adam Grant:** What we see is that failed givers are not very thoughtful about whom they help, when they help, or how they help. They tend to help anybody who asks. Successful givers are much more likely to be cautious with takers and reserve their generosity for givers and matchers. Failed givers tend to drop everything whenever a request comes in. Successful givers are much more likely to block out time in their calendar and chunk their times so that there might be one or two days a week with windows dedicated to helping others, but they have periods devoted to progressing on their own objectives.

The “how” is the most interesting. Failed givers tend to be jacks-of-all-trades. They help people in lots of different ways, which leads to them being perceived as nice people who can be bothered any time. Successful givers are much more likely to say, “I’m going to specialize in one or two forms of helping that I enjoy and excel at uniquely.” They end up giving in ways that actually involve some kind of comparative advantage so that their contribution is distinctively valuable. That leaves other people to respect them as a great knowledge sharer or as a gifted connector, which means those givers get to dictate the terms on which they help and what they actually contribute to others.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Fascinating. Are we born as Givers, Matchers, or Takers, or do those tendencies develop as a result of the way that we are raised?

**Adam Grant:** It’s completely hardwired; you have no control over it whatsoever.

No, just kidding.

What I like about these styles of interactions is that they are choices we make in every single relationship we have with other people. Yes, we do have a biological tendency. If you are born with the propensity to empathize with others, you’re much more likely to gravitate in a giving direction in lots of different roles in relationships. But we also learn these values over time through interactions with parents, teachers, peers, and lots of other groups.

There’s some pretty cool evidence showing that when we walk into the workplace, takers have the biggest effect on our styles. In some cases we emulate them because we think that it’s the necessary path to success. In other cases, we are so devastated and disgruntled by the fact that somebody would be horribly selfish that we end up deciding we are going to be the exact opposite.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So they could be really toxic as colleagues.

**Adam Grant:** Takers are probably the most toxic of colleagues, especially the disagreeable takers who are prickly on the surface and nasty underneath. Although you might call them by a slightly different name.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** In your experience, are people accurate at estimating which of the three camps they fall into or, like in every other domain that we have studied in social psychology, do people overestimate how good they really are?

**Adam Grant:** There are many takers out there wandering around thinking they are givers. It’s like a weird twist on the movie, *The Sixth Sense*. A lot of people would assume that we overestimate our generosity because of ego. We want to see ourselves as caring, kind, and helpful. That may be part of the story, but there’s actually more to it.

You will be familiar with the classic Ross and Sicoly research back in the seventies. Mar-



ried couples were put in separate rooms and asked to estimate the total work that goes into their marriage and what percent they were responsible for versus their spouse — which is a cruel thing to do to couples. On average, three out of four couples added up to over 100%, so somebody's lying; it's usually the men.

When you break down why people estimate they contribute more than their partner thinks, it's not so much they think they are a better spouse, but rather that they literally know more about their own contributions. You were there all the times that you walked the dog and you drove the kids to soccer. There's just no way that you could be present for all of your partner's contributions. You know more about your own giving than any other person's giving, so it's easy to walk away thinking you give more than most other people.

We see the same thing in teams at work. When you get teams of five together, on average they add up to over 143%. This is just an information discrepancy problem at the end of the day.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** If people are overestimating — well, I guess they're not overestimating, but they are more familiar with their own contributions — how do we help them figure out whether they in fact are givers, matchers, or takers?

**Adam Grant:** Whenever I'm in front of an audience, I like to ask for a show of hands and ask how many think they are givers. Maybe 10%-20% of the room will raise their hand. I follow up by asking how many of them believe they're givers but didn't raise their hand because they know that would violate the norm of modesty that givers are supposed to live by. There are always a few people who raise their hand under those conditions.

It's often a red flag when somebody says they are a giver. My immediate reaction is, "Nope, you are a taker." Real givers are too busy helping others to wave a hand and say, "Look how generous I am." People can judge their values and motivations, but whether they live by these giving principles is really in the eye of the beholder. If we want to assess someone accurately, the best thing we can do is get our friends, family members, and colleagues to give you feedback on where we stand.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Are there times where we should avoid being givers? If we are in an organization where we are surrounded by takers, have you noticed in the data specific situations where it's dangerous to be a giver?

**Adam Grant:** Being a giver can be risky when you are dealing with takers. It seems that the givers who are willing to flex their styles and shift into matching mode when dealing with takers are more likely to sustain their energy and avoid getting exploited; but you can also push that too far.

It's classic game theory. If you look at the early work by Axelrod, the idea was to be a perfect matcher. You start out giving; the moment somebody else defects, you go into a cautious and self-protective mode. That was very effective in early game theory tournaments where nobody had repeated interactions or any kind of visible reputation.

Robert Novak and his colleagues have done experiments where they say, "Look, let's have people play these games over and over again where you get to build a reputation and you get to know people over time." Then the winning strategy is often pure tit for tat, or matching, but rather generous tit for tat. Every two out of three times that you are exploited, you



hold back on giving; but the third time, you end up being generous anyway, which gives takers an opportunity to turn over a new leaf.

In everyday life, if we take this out of a game theory context, the most important thing we can do is say, “Look, there are lots of ways that I can give that are high value to others but low cost to me.” You don’t have to spend seventeen hours with every taker who asks you for help. I really like the example from the serial entrepreneur Adam Rifkin, who says you should do more five-minute favors. A five-minute favor is just a simple way of giving a lot to other people in ways that cost you little. It might be sharing a quick bit of knowledge, making a fast introduction, or going out of your way to recommend somebody. I would think about what kinds of five-minute contributions you could make to other people’s lives that are not going to jeopardize your energy or your trustworthiness, and then focus on those if you think somebody might be a taker.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** You’ve studied thousands of people’s interaction styles. I wonder, are there particular industries that appear to be saturated with takers?

**Adam Grant:** Let me give you a list of the top ten taker industries...

I’m actually not going to do that. But if you look at the data, what’s interesting is organization effects swamp industry effects. The founders and leaders of an organization, as well as the kinds of people that tend to be attracted there, usually shape that organization’s culture much more than the broad industry.

With that said, studies that measure the values of high school and college students before they select what industry they are going to work in show that takers gravitate, on average, slightly more to industries where they think they can maximize their wealth and power. You will find slightly more takers in financial services than in some other industries. On the flip side, givers tend to gravitate more toward healthcare and education — jobs where they feel like they can give back a lot. I’ve never met a taker who works in social work.

What’s fascinating, though, is that you can find variations within all these industries. There are hedge funds run by givers and nonprofits run by takers. It’s much more a question of the person’s skills and interests that ultimately influence what career they choose and then from there, they may apply lots of different values or styles.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Let’s make this actionable. Let’s say you are new to a team and you need to quickly assess who the givers are, who the matchers are, and who the takers are; what can you do to get an accurate read?

**Adam Grant:** First of all, you don’t want to do is ask their bosses; most takers specialize in kissing up and kicking down. They’re great fakers when dealing with powerful people because they know that’s how to get ahead. But, at some point, takers learn it is a lot of work to pretend to care about everybody and let their guard down a little bit with peers and subordinates. Those are the people who get to see their true colors. Try to get lateral and downward feedback. If somebody has a great reputation in both, but it’s more mixed across the board, that’s something you want to pay more attention to.

Another way is to look at how they talk about success and failure. Takers tend to use more “I’s” than “we’s” when talking about accomplishments, and the reverse when discussing failure. They will give you a long list of all the bad things that happened in their career and



then an even longer list of all the people who have thrown them under the bus and they blame for their failures.

A third thing is to ask them to predict the behavior of others. One of my favorite questions is, “What percent of people in your industry do you think steal at least ten dollars in a month from their employer?” We have a broad definition of theft that includes cash, intellectual property, and merchandise materials. In a typical group of twenty or more people, you will find a range of estimates from 5% to 90%. It’s always great when somebody guesses 100% because you realize that includes you, and you know that person is a taker. The higher somebody’s estimate that other people are thieves, the greater the chances are that person is a thief; because most people, when answering a question about others’ behavior, ask themselves what they would do or have done.

I’ll just caricature this. An extreme taker says, “Let’s see, what percent of people steal ten dollars a month?” Takers always talk that way, by the way. They’re like, “Last week I stole three hundred and forty six dollars, so ten dollars in a month has got to be pretty common — I’ll say 94%.” Whereas an extreme giver answering the same question says, “How do you even steal ten dollars from a company? Like, how many pens do you have to take home to add up to ten dollars?” It’s about seventy, I’m told. But they ask themselves “What kind of person would do such a thing? I don’t know, something like 9%.”

You should notice, by the way, that the giver sounds exactly like me. But in large samples, these differences play out. Takers anticipate more selfish behavior from others and that’s how they rationalize and justify being a taker: “It’s not me; all of you people are selfish jerks and I’m just being smart and protecting myself.”

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Is it the case that someone paranoid about the behavior of their colleagues is often guilty of those same behaviors?

**Adam Grant:** That’s one possibility. Any time you meet somebody who says, “You know, at the end of the day, everybody’s fundamentally selfish,” they are giving you much more of a look in the mirror than they realize. But there are other paths to developing a belief that there are a lot of takers out there.

One is being a narcissist with a lot of insecurity and thinking that it’s a zero-sum, win-lose world.

A second possibility is being a giver or matcher who got burned one too many times and overgeneralizes the belief that everyone is incredibly selfish rather than thinking that there are some selfish people out there that way and they’ve just been overly gullible.

Then there’s a third path — being a psychopath. That’s probably the most robust. °

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I really like your advice about talking to people who are in similar positions or people who work for individuals whom you are trying to assess. That’s a great tip. Do you then agree that you can tell a lot about a person by the way they treat waiters in restaurants?

**Adam Grant:** I do. Some of the worst takers that I’ve met are the people who fail to leave a tip. I actually have watched one person subtract money from the bill because he felt the service was not up to his standards, which is not a giving move. We see this behavior all



the time. I've often heard that in Hollywood, the way that you can tell whether an actor is a giver or taker is by how he or she treats the makeup artists.

Zappos has an interesting way of dealing with this. At one point in their hiring cycles, they decided to put some of their interviewers in limo driver positions. You get picked up at the airport and you think you are talking to a driver, but that person is actually vetting you for whether you are going to work there. It seems like the way that people treat someone who they think can do them no good is a decent barometer of their character.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Fascinating. Suppose you're watching this and you recognize, maybe uncomfortably, some of these taking behaviors in yourself. What can you do to change your behaviors in a lasting way?

**Adam Grant:** The first thing you should do is join Takers Anonymous. It's a twelve-step program you can... no, I'm just kidding. The first thing to do, most importantly, is identify the giving behaviors that you find to be fun or meaningful or have gotten feedback that you are uniquely good at. Very few people, except for sociopaths, are takers in every single interaction. Chances are you've had moments of giving. Look back at that history, learn from those moments, and say, for example, "You know, I got a lot of energy listening to other people's problems and giving them some advice, so I'm going to start trying to be a little bit more generous with my advice."

In other cases I've heard people say, "You know, I didn't realize this is a form of giving, but I've found that I like to make introductions. It's something that I love to do. I touch lots of different worlds. It's exciting for me to see different people connect and I can make a few more introductions every week."

Once you identify the forms of giving that you enjoy, pay more attention to other people's needs. The research on this goes back a couple decades, showing that one of the clearest differences between takers and givers is what they focus on in their interactions. Takers tend to approach other people by thinking about what they can get. Givers are much more likely to keep track of what they can give, which means trying to find out what other people are after, what they're trying to accomplish, what their goals are, or what challenges they're facing.

The third step is to find the points of intersection between what you like to give and what other people are trying to do.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Do you think there is a danger of people questioning your motives if you're too giving?

**Adam Grant:** Yes, there is. Benoit Monin and his colleagues have a study that they call the "Do Gooder Derogation." They look at this idea that people are sometimes resentful and threatened if you're too giving; sometimes high levels of generosity attract a lot of suspicion. This is one of the reasons that you find so many people deflecting when asked why they went above and beyond for this colleague, why they stayed late in the office when they didn't have to, etc. They'll say, "Oh well, you know, I like that task and I had nothing better to do." Really? I don't believe that for a second. You're trying to avoid any perception that you might be working too hard to help other people. If you can rationalize that it is in some way self-interested, then you are not vulnerable to that level of suspicion.



The other thing, as we talked about before, is that takers tend to be more suspicious than others. If somebody were constantly questioning the motives of others, I'd want to learn more about that person's values.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** That's a very interesting point. If you err on the side of being a little bit too giving and your target is questioning your motives, that might actually be some good information.

**Adam Grant:** It could be, especially if this is somebody who repeatedly questions motives and it's not unique to one situation or interaction.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Okay, let's say that you are successful at shifting your behaviors from mostly taking to mostly giving, but others continue to view you as a taker because of their previous experience working alongside you. What can you do to alter perceptions?

**Adam Grant:** If you've tried to shift from taking toward giving, but other people's perceptions haven't changed, you have a couple options. The first one is to actually think about the links in your relationships where you can start out with a clean slate and allow people to get a sense of the new you. The second thing is to focus on forms of giving that are valuable but invisible.

The mistake that a lot of people make when they shift into a giving direction is trying to make sure that it's noticed or they get credit for it, because they've realized that they were committing reputational suicide by excessive taking. But the more you go out of your way to get attention for your giving, the more people will actually question it. The forms of giving that are most useful for repairing your reputation are one on one and behind the scenes: helping, problem solving, mentoring, or giving advice. Focusing on those is a real, reasonable step.

The last thing is going to the people whose perception of you hasn't changed and asking them for feedback. A lot of people are uncomfortable being frank, but it can be a productive conversation to get people to update their preconceived notions. I might say, "Ron, I think in the past I've actually gotten a reputation for being a little bit too selfish. This is not the kind of person I want to be. Using the kind of changes that I've made so far, I would love to get your advice — are there other things I could do?" At that point, you may tell me actually, "I've noticed and I really appreciate that," or you may say, "You know, here's some things that I think would help with reputation repair around here." Then you can implement them.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I love your point about not going for the big, public ways of helping, which is the temptation when you recognize that you have a reputation. Doing so just gets you into more trouble because it's viewed as just another form of taking, masquerading as giving.

**Adam Grant:** It's so common that you have these takers trying to walk in givers' clothes. Ideally, you give in ways that focus on the contribution to other people as opposed to how this is going to look in the eyes of others.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** You make the case that it often pays to practice powerless communication. What is powerless communication and why is it so effective?



**Adam Grant:** This is a heavily debated issue. What I noticed, after collecting a bunch of data, was that a lot of takers speak in very dominant ways. They will self-promote. They highlight their strengths. They hide their weaknesses and they make sure that they have the most compelling pitch as possible so they can get what they want. The question is, “If that’s the mark or language of a taker, how do givers talk?”

There’s some wonderful research by Alison Fragale that looks at this idea of powerless speech — which is a bunch of stuff that we’re normally taught to avoid, especially women. It’s using lots of hesitations and hedges and disclaimers. It’s asking questions as opposed to giving answers. It’s admitting to your weaknesses and vulnerabilities as opposed to trumpeting your strengths.

An interesting thing that the data shows about being in a team or service setting is that it matters more if you are warm than if you are competent. If you talk like a taker, you send a signal that you are basically going to bowl everyone over and you’re going to try to take control and dominate everyone else.

People who use this powerless communication, instead of saying, “You know, Ron, that’s a stupid idea, I’ve got a better one,” say, “I wonder what everyone thinks about this.” It actually expresses a little bit of doubt or some degree of hesitation. They signal an interest in other people’s opinion; that allows them to appear much more like a giver. Which, in a team or service setting, is what people want to work with. Nobody wants to have a taker on his or her team or to have his or her surgery done by a taker. They want to trust a giver.

Of course, it’s possible to do too much of this and go too far. There’s a time and a place for this powerless communication, but you have to be careful to do it in ways that don’t jeopardize people’s perception of your competence.

My favorite example is Abraham Lincoln. He was in a debate once where he was accused of being two-faced. He said, “If I had another face, would I really choose to wear this one?” This is ingenious; self-deprecation is a great example of powerless communication. He was humanizing himself in a way that has no bearing on his leadership ability whatsoever. He knew that he was not the most conventionally attractive human on the planet and he was allowing you to laugh at him a little bit while still projecting an image that he is a competent leader. That’s a masterful use of powerless communication.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** If I wanted to go back to my office today and start practicing some powerless communication, what are two or three things that I should start doing?

**Adam Grant:** The first thing you do is start asking people more questions instead of trying to tell them what to do. It’s amazing how many leaders, in particular, fail to actually learn from the people around them. There’s a study that I love by Jamie Pennebaker showing that the more you talk in a conversation, the more you like the group and, more important to this conversation, the more you feel like you learned about them. You can reverse that dynamic — if you get good at asking other people questions, they will actually think that they’re coming to know you and you will learn a lot from what they have to say.

The second thing is learn to gauge whether this is an interdependent setting where people care more about your cues than you care about theirs. If so, you may want to soften your speech a little bit. You may want to use more signs of uncertainty.



The third thing is think about whether this is a safe place to expose some vulnerabilities and open up to the group a little bit about some mistakes that you've made and say, "Here's what I'm trying to do to learn from them so that people are a little bit less threatened by me."

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** In February, you release your second book, titled *Originals*. Can you give us a sneak preview of some of the things that we can expect to learn in that book?

**Adam Grant:** Yes. I started writing that book with a simple question that has been the most challenging thing I've seen people deal with in their everyday lives and their leadership roles, which is: "If I have an idea about how the world around me could be better, how do I champion it effectively and how do I speak up without getting silenced? How do I find allies who are going to support me? How do I speak up and how do I bring out non-conformity and originality of thought in the people around me, whether it's a team that I'm leading or children that I'm parenting?"

Those are the questions that animate originals, and I ended up finding some fascinating stories and studies. There's some data that suggests, for example, that what Internet browser you use will actually predict your level of originality. There's also some quite surprising evidence that sometimes the most original people, the ones we think about as championing major changes and innovations in the world, are actually the ones who most hate taking risks. This flies in the face of that image of the brash bull, the entrepreneur or inventor that I always carry with me. That's a little bit of what's to come.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Thanks. What's the Internet browser that predicts the most creativity?

**Adam Grant:** You'll have to wait till February to find that out.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Fair enough. Before we close, I'd like to point the spotlight in your direction for a moment. For those watching this who aren't familiar with your background, let me recount just a few of your achievements: You're the youngest tenured professor in Wharton history, you've published a groundbreaking, best-selling book and are about to release a second, and you're a *New York Times* columnist — all by the age of thirty-four.

Clearly you are doing something right. What practices help you maintain such a high level of productivity?

**Adam Grant:** Ron, that's very kind of you. I don't normally feel very productive at all, which may be one of the things that keep me motivated. I always expect to be able to do more than I ever finished.

One thing that I have found useful, and surprised me at first, is that I get a lot done by intentionally leaving tasks unfinished. I used to sit down to write and not want to get up until I was done with a chapter or an argument. Now I will deliberately leave sentences just hanging in the middle and get up and go do something else. What I find when I come back is that I don't have to do a lot of work to finish the sentence, and now I also have a bunch of new ideas for where the writing should go next. We've known this for almost a century now, that people have a better memory for incomplete tasks and there are lots of ways that we can leverage that in our daily lives.



Oftentimes, in the last three minutes of the meeting, we will be wrapping up and it doesn't seem like enough time to start something new but I'll say to a colleague, "Let's start it." I know we're not going to finish it; that is the point, because we will both then come back the next time we work on this with new ideas and perhaps a bunch of progress that was made while we weren't fully focused on the task. That's been mentally useful, for productivity and creativity.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** That's a very interesting tip. It sounds great from the perspective of having new ideas and being productive, but terrible for your emotional state and your ability to stay mindful during activities that follow. What's been your experience there?

**Adam Grant:** There's a little bit of a trade-off there. I'm not so sure that every moment of a creative pursuit is supposed to be fun. For me, it's exciting when I'm just jazzed about the new idea and then toward the end, when I have a sense that this is actually going to turn into something. There should be a lot of bumps in the middle. Creativity is hard, just like everything worth doing. Most of us should go in expecting that, if we're trying to generate ideas, we're going to struggle at some points along the way. If you're going to struggle anyway, you might as well struggle in ways that allow you to be more productive.



## Practical Tips From Adam Grant

- Being a Giver can help you get ahead if you're doing it right. The most successful Givers tend to specialize in one or two forms of helping that they enjoy and excel at uniquely.
- While giving can help you succeed, helping everyone with everything is a recipe for failure.
- Consider setting aside one or two days a week where you have dedicated window for helping others.
- The most effective workplace strategy is to start off as a Giver. But be prepared to shift from *giving* to *matching* (only do favors when those favors are returned) when dealing with Takers.
- Embrace “five minute favors.” Quick favors allow you to give a lot to other people in ways that cost you relatively little.
- To get a good read of whether someone is a Giver or a Taker, investigate their reputation with peers and subordinates, not bosses.
- If you'd like to become more of a Giver, identify giving behaviors that are fun for you and that you are uniquely good at. Next, listen closely for the points of intersection between what you like to give and what other people are trying to do.
- If you suspect you have a reputation as a Taker, try to focus on forms of giving that are valuable but invisible. Avoid trying to attract attention for your giving.
- Showing an interest in other people's opinions will make you more likable. To see if this works for you, experiment with asking more questions in your next few meetings or dinner parties.
- Instead of aiming to complete an important task in one sitting, try leaving it incomplete. Doing so will encourage you to continue thinking about it, and in the process, make you more likely to find creative solutions.





## Tom Rath on Best Practices for Eating, Moving, and Sleeping

Tom Rath is an author and researcher who studies the role of human behavior in business, health, and well-being. Business leaders and the media have described him as one of the greatest thinkers and nonfiction writers of his generation.

Tom has written six *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* bestsellers over the past decade, starting with the #1 *New York Times* bestseller *How Full Is Your Bucket?* His book *StrengthsFinder 2.0* was the top-selling book of 2013 and 2014 worldwide on Amazon.com. Tom's latest bestsellers are *Strengths Based Leadership*, *Well-being*, and *Eat Move Sleep: How Small Choices Lead to Big Changes*. In total, his books have sold more than six million copies and have made more than three hundred appearances on the Wall Street Journal bestseller list.

In addition to his work as a researcher, writer, and speaker, Tom serves as a senior scientist for and advisor to Gallup, where he previously spent thirteen years leading the organization's work on employee engagement, strengths, leadership, and well-being. He is also a scientific advisor to Welbe, a startup focused on wearable technology.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** In your new book you identify three keys to being energized. I wonder if you can tell us about them. What do we really need to perform our best at work?

**Tom Rath:** First, thanks for having me. I've been looking forward to the conversation. In my most recent book, *Are You Fully Charged?*, I wanted to answer the question: "What are the most practical things that we all need to keep top-of-mind on a day-to-day basis to create a high sense of well-being for ourselves and others?" In the past, I'd looked into the things we need to think about over a lifetime, a year, or the span of a career; this book looks at the keys to being energized within the day.

The first key is doing meaningful work each day and connecting that work to how it impacts another person's life. The second key is focusing on those thousands of interactions



that we have each day and making at least 80% of those interactions more positive than negative. That ratio is essential to staying positive and “above water” in terms of your daily well-being. The third key is to make sure that you have enough physical energy to be your best every day; that starts with a lot of small choices about the way you eat, the way you move throughout the day, and getting enough sleep to have a fresh start on the next day.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** You’ve done a great job in this book of taking what amounts to decades of research and distilling it down into three important insights. I wonder if you can tell us a little bit more about how we can make those insights actionable. For example, the first key was about meaning: How do we find more meaning in the work that we do?

**Tom Rath:** When we asked ten thousand people if they had done a lot of meaningful work yesterday, just 20% felt like they did a lot of meaningful work in the past day. My hunch is that the majority of people are doing meaningful work that makes a difference for another person, but we’re not connecting the dots in terms of being able to see that influence on a day-to-day basis. So, relative to meaning, not only do we need to do something that moves things forward for another person, we also need to notice when we do. It could be as simple as, if you’re working in a call center, turning a customer around from being frustrated or angry about your product or service. They may be back to neutral and that prevents them from having bad interactions with family members that evening. Something small makes a difference, but we’ve got to find little ways to acknowledge and to connect our efforts with how we’re making a difference each day.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** That’s a great observation. So many of us now work in jobs that require us to spend hours on end in front of a computer and that’s made it increasingly difficult to identify the value of our efforts. At many jobs, and I’ve had some of them, it feels like you’re essentially working in an e-mail factory, where on the commute home in the evening you look back and think, “Well, what did I accomplish today?” and your mind immediately goes to all the emails you sent, and that’s not very satisfying.

So one suggestion you’re making involves taking the time to actively think about some of the people we’ve helped over the course of the day --is that right?

**Tom Rath:** Yes, it can be as simple as that. There are great new studies emerging on these topics. For example, if your job requires you to prepare food in a kitchen, seeing the customers eating the food you prepared leads you to make higher quality food because you’re connecting the dots.

Adam Grant’s done amazing work over the years and talks about how people that raise funds for college scholarships over the phone have more fun and do a better job when they hear or read accounts from recipients of those scholarships.

My favorite example from the *Fully Charged* book is an experiment where radiologists reviewing scans for signs of cancer reported that they’re doing somewhat meaningful work; but when researchers appended a photo of the patient to the radiographic records, the radiologists’ diagnostic accuracy improved by 46%. Seeing the person who we’re serving at least once a day matters.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** It’s something we can do as individuals; but it’s also something that’s critical for managers and leaders to think about. If you’re looking to motivate your employees, finding ways of connecting them to their end customer and the people they’re



serving on a regular basis can help motivate them and keep them energized.

**Tom Rath:** That is such a great thought about managers and leaders. Employees need managers and leaders. Managers and leaders are the ones who need to be thinking about how they can make sure that any person who works for them can see how their talents are being productively applied for customers or communities each day. That might be one of the foundational principles of management or leadership, yet it probably doesn't get talked about enough nowadays.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So how do we keep 80% of our interactions positive?

**Tom Rath:** It starts with one of the things I've learned across all these different areas dealing with meaning and positive actions. None of us are going to have days where everything we do is perfect. There's going to be a net gains and, occasionally, net losses. I've yet to meet someone who's had a day with purely positive interactions. That would probably freak me out a little bit. If you do have a negative interaction with someone, just keep in mind that it's going to take three, four, or even five positives just to get back to a good operating baseline; you can use that heuristic throughout the day. This goes back to the first book I worked on, *How Full is Your Bucket*, about how each interaction either fills someone's bucket or takes from it. Those interactions usually carry a small positive or small negative charge; they're rarely neutral.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Let's say I've just had a negative interaction with my manager who called me into his office and chewed me out for not delivering a good presentation. What can I do with the next couple hours to get back on track?

**Tom Rath:** The one thing that we have control over is the way we respond or act in response to another person. I've tried to focus more on the outbound lens — I try to make sure I'm adding enough positive for the other person. In that example, if you have a manager with that style and that type of interaction is common — and it is typical in the workplace today that people have pretty poor interactions with their managers — the one thing that you can do is to control your response.

I've learned over the years that, no matter how difficult of an interaction you might have — whether it's with a stranger or your manager — you get to choose if you're going to let that have an effect your next interaction when you walk out of your manager's office. If you can at least try and turn that interaction positive for the other person, it takes the focus away from what your manager's done into something that's a little bit more positive for the people around you.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I really love that response. What you're saying here is that we're not just on the receiving end of our interactions. We also have the option of being instigators. If you've had a negative interaction, the best thing you can do is try to make someone else happy on some level. Stop focusing on yourself and start focusing on others. Having a positive interaction, especially one that you initiated, can be energizing because you'll feel more in control of your life.

**Tom Rath:** Yeah, you know, it's been interesting for me. I've been blind in my left eye since I was about sixteen. Whenever I'm in a crowded place or a coffee shop, I bump into people all the time — it's inevitable. Over the years, I've learned to use it as a way to get a unique psychological observation of what's going on in the other person's life each time it happens



because my condition stays constant. Most of the time, people are quick to be apologetic and diffuse the situation immediately; but there are rare cases where someone is real hostile and angry about my bumping into them. That quickly tells me that there must be something very difficult going on in that person's life. They're frustrated; and it's even more important for me to be apologetic and diffuse the situation as quickly as possible. When you look at things through that kind of a lens, especially in interactions with strangers, it helps to keep things from getting personal or getting you wound up on a given day.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** That's a very enlightened way of viewing that experience.

As I mentioned to you before we got on the call, I used to work in politics, where people have very short tempers. If you've ever watched *Veep*, that's a fairly accurate representation. When I was applying to graduate school one of the questions I got was, "How do you deal with people who have that sort of high level of ego; people who get upset quickly and yell a lot?" My response was that you could view anger as a signal of fear. They're getting angry because they're afraid that they're going to fail at something that's critical to them. When you do that, it gives you a completely different lens that prevents you from taking it personally.

**Tom Rath:** That's a great way to look at it as well.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** There are many profound lines in your book. Here's one that really stood out for me: "Being busy is often the antithesis of working on what matters most." Could you talk a little bit about why that's the case?

**Tom Rath:** That's one of the greatest challenges, and one that's emerged for all of us in the last decade. It's incredibly easy and, in some cases, enjoyable to just sit back and respond to everything that comes at you on a given day. If you told me that tomorrow I won't have any assignments other than just responding to all my incoming email, I'd say that sounds pretty easy and manageable. It may even sound fun in contrast to having to put something new together, initiate a new relationship, or initiate a new conversation — all of which require heavier lifting. The challenge that we face today is that it's easy to spend a day, a month, or even a year primarily responding to other people's needs. It's easy to not take enough time to step back and initiate something that creates a lot of meaning and well-being for other people in the future.

Another factor is that most people today unlock their smartphone about a hundred and fifteen times a day on average. Then there are the notifications you have coming on your desktop, your phone ringing, and everything else. These things contribute another big challenge we have today: paying attention to the people that matter most. We've got to challenge ourselves. When I have interactions with my kids, I have my smartphone completely out of reach so that I'm only spending time with them and truly paying attention.

I was really challenged by a study I read when I was working on this book. The study explained how, if I sit down at a table with colleagues and take my smartphone out of my pocket, just because they're too big to put in your pocket, and I set it on the table, even if that phone's powered off — that sends an implicit signal to the other people sitting around the room that I'm prioritizing that device ahead of them. It degrades the quality of the conversation. We've got to be very conscious about the messages we send when we tell each person that we need to pay attention to this little brick in our pockets over and above the conversation we're about to have.



What I recommend is to imagine that you're in a conversation with someone at work who you really care about to help them think about their career, or you're having a really meaningful conversation with a loved one. In either scenario, you should shut off all your notifications that pop up on a moment-by-moment basis. Then go back in and turn on the things that really deserve your attention and that you may need to get to in an emergency. You can set it up on any phone now: If someone in your favorites calls twice in a row, it's an emergency and the phone allows the call to break through. But 98% of the things that show up on your locked screen and cause you to open your phone and get distracted don't need your attention when you're with someone you care about.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Great tip. Make the phone work for you instead of letting the technology dictate where you direct your attention.

**Tom Rath:** Precisely.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** You mentioned getting into this reactive mindset, which we often do at work. For many of us, it's the first thing that we do and we've been trained to do it. We check our voicemail or email. We feel like if we're not immediately responsive to our colleagues, then we're not doing our job correctly. But when we put ourselves in that reactive mindset first thing in the morning, we make it more difficult to do some of those important things that are going to energize us and have meaning for our careers.

**Tom Rath:** I've heard you talk about this in some of your work, that it's a trap. In fact, I've been in this mode myself for many years. Whenever someone asked me how I was doing, my most common response was probably, "Oh, I'm crazy busy, busy but good." As I studied this more and read a lot on the topic, I've started forcing myself to stop and pause whenever I'm asked that question. I can either tell people that I'm doing a poor job of prioritizing my own time, which is what being busy is, or I can tell people that things are going well and I've mapped out my time in the right way.

It's an important reflection for people to step back and think about. I've created a lot of little rules and shortcuts for myself. I can't respond to an email until I get some activity or exercise in the morning. I read things and check in, but I won't respond to anything until I force myself to get some activity. I know a lot of other people who do this before they start responding. They get into that mode, to find little shortcuts or carve out time for the things that matter most, before they get pulled into that busyness trap.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** You mentioned changing the settings on your phone so that phone calls that aren't vital don't interrupt you, and you mentioned looking at your email or not responding until you've at least gotten some work done. Are there any other tips you can share about how to avoid the busyness trap?

**Tom Rath:** Always have one, two, maybe three projects on your radar that you're contributing to each day, where you feel like you're moving the ball forward for others. That allows you to chip away in the long-term. If you're in a business development role, reach out to one new person and build one new relationship for your organization so you can potentially have a new customer down the road. Even try to spend an hour a day contributing to something that will continue to grow instead of just deflecting everything coming at you — offense mode instead of defense mode. When I've interviewed leaders who have really done things that made a difference, they almost always point back to time spent initiating instead of just responding to employees' needs and demands on a given day like that.



**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** That's a really interesting analogy: offense versus defense. That's a fascinating way to think about it. So at the end of the day, you can think about what percentage of your time was spent on offense and what percentage of your time was spent on defense. You'd probably find a very strong correlation with amount spent on offense and feeling like you've had a good day.

**Tom Rath:** I hadn't really thought about that way before, but even 10% of your time in offensive mode could make quite a difference. I bet most people don't even get to spend 10% or 20% of their time on offense in terms of creating new things for the future.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Let's talk about your previous book, *Eat Move Sleep*. In that book, you spent a lot of time talking about how food affects our energy level and our well-being over the course of the day. Let's talk a little bit about food. How does food influence the way that we work?

**Tom Rath:** There's so much talk about food relative to obesity, diabetes, cancer, and other long-term consequences. Frankly, I don't think that those long-term motivators work very well. That's what got me to explore this topic in more depth. I'm amazed by the way food, in particular, has direct implications for our energy levels within a day. When you can make that connection, those choices become a lot easier.

My research on health started because I was diagnosed with a rare disorder that shuts off the body's most powerful tumor suppressors. I lost my eye to cancer when I was sixteen and have had several cases of cancer over the last few decades. Currently, I have cancer in my kidneys, my pancreas, and my spine, so I'm no stranger to extreme health challenges. I go in every year for all the scans and get a new lease on life. But frankly, over the years, it wasn't a great motivator to make better dietary choices.

A much better motivator was when I started to connect the foods I'd eat early in the morning or at noon with my energy levels later on in the day. I realized that if I have a breakfast filled with sugars and carbohydrates, I'm nowhere near as sharp in the middle of the day.

There's something that really drove it home for me while I was working on this book. My mom invited my kids, my wife, and I to go to brunch at a trendy new restaurant in downtown DC. I thought I was being good by getting the eggs benedict instead of the chocolate covered donuts. The eggs benedict came out covered in a hollandaise sauce, with fried potatoes on the side, and a biscuit covered in gravy. I ate it all; and then I had some of my wife's chocolate covered donuts. Later that afternoon, I was wiped out, lying down on the couch, and didn't have enough energy to be a good dad and take my kids to the park because of my dietary choices. I started reading some research about how scientists have found that people get "high fat hangovers" and feel poorly after eating bloating breakfasts and too much sugar earlier in the day.

What you eat during the day also dramatically influences your ability to get a good night's sleep. Eating well is a good start for making sure you have energy today and getting a good head start on the next day.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I have to tell you, I had a similar epiphany myself. For a long time I would eat a lot of fast food for lunch. I don't really have a preference McDonald's or fast food in general, but it seemed really efficient. I could just jump in my car, get some food, and be back to my desk fifteen minutes later.



I started exploring some of the research that you mentioned and looking at my own experiences. I like to play racquetball at about five-thirty every day. I noticed that, on days when I ate fast food, I would essentially concede four to five points in my singles matches. That's not something that I was necessarily looking for; it's just something I noticed. When I made that connection between the work that I do following a lunch of fast food versus a salad or something that's better for me, I would get a lot more done after eating the salad.

I wonder, though, how do you train yourself to eat healthier, particularly when you're at the office and it either requires more money or planning ahead from the night before? What are some recommendations you have on training yourself to eat better throughout your day?

**Tom Rath:** A lot of it starts with building healthier habits into your daily routine. Brian Wansick, one of the world's leading experts on behavioral health, has conducted some of the best research on this. To give an example: if you have the same default breakfast, it's easy to put together. By making a smoothie with lots of green vegetables and some berries and unsweetened coconut milk, I get a lot of nutrients really early in the day. On the road, I always have an egg white omelet filled with as many vegetables as I can find. I make that first meal pretty simple to get myself off to a good start.

Then I can build snacks into my day that are as easy and convenient as fast food. If I'm on the move and don't know what types of food will be available, or know for certain that healthy options will be lacking, I carry some mixed nuts with me. At home, I have pre-cut carrots and apples and other healthy options sitting around that are the first things I see in my refrigerator. I've either gotten rid of or hidden all of the unhealthy options so that I'm not tempted in a weak moment.

We've built so much convenience around unhealthy choices that we need to engineer healthy choices into our daily routine. We need to make them just as easy as the unhealthy choices, just like we need to go back and restore some of the activity into our routine that we often miss on a day-to-day basis.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** You mentioned starting your day with healthy meals; it sounds like you're getting some protein with every meal. One of the tips you mention in your book is that we should worry less about calories than the ratio of carbs to proteins. Tell us a little bit about that.

**Tom Rath:** This is something I'm very aware of because of my research background and from reading nutritional content labels extensively over the last decade for the sake of my own health. As someone who is battling cancer every day, I know that I need to minimize the amount of sugars that I'm putting my body. Since refined carbohydrates essentially get converted to sugar when they hit the bloodstream, those are two of the things that I've watched out for. What I have learned is that calories are fine when measuring quantity but they don't speak very well to the quality of what goes into our mouths.

I've found that the best available metric, at least on nutritional labels in developed countries, is the ratio of protein to carbohydrates. If you look at a bag of chips, for example, there might be twenty grams of carbs for every one gram of protein. Ideally, you want to find foods that have one gram of carbs for one gram of protein. At the minimum, that ration should be between 2:1 and 5:1, carbs to protein. Then you're getting enough of the protein that your mind and body needs while minimizing the carbohydrates and sugars.



There is no real dietary need for added sugars, but the sugars that you get from eating an apple aren't that bad for you. Anything with a lot of added sugar is a huge problem.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Why do I want to avoid sugars?

**Tom Rath:** The added sugars that we get in our diet are probably the leading cause of diabetes and obesity. Sugars give you a burst of energy, but we've got to think about what it does over the next three to five hours. It's important to connect how something makes us feel later on in the day. Sugar gives you that quick ninety second hit, but ninety minutes later it's not as helpful. We have to connect to the longer-term goals that we all want.

After writing *Eat Move Sleep*, I'm convinced that there are as many dietary opinions as there are citizens in the United States. Everyone has their own position on diets and there have been many big trends over the years, but almost every diet or expert recommendation that I've read has a few things in common.

One is that there are very few people that need more sugar in their diet. Another is that nobody is going to tell you to eat fewer leafy green vegetables. Finally, nobody will tell you to eat more fried foods. We can draw from these commonalities and ask, "How do we build more greens into our diet? How do we build in more of the healthier fruits?" You can add apples and blueberries and strawberries, the dark reds and blues and greens, into your diet and load up on those things before you eat the more tempting things that should be on the periphery of our diet.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** To bring this down to a practical level, if you and I are at a business lunch together and it's a set menu and the desert is a crème brulee, if I eat that crème brulee, am I going to be more tired ninety minutes from now?

**Tom Rath:** Yes. It doesn't matter as much if you're eating it late in the day and about to go to bed as it would if you had it for breakfast, but I've found that if you minimize the amount of sugars and fried foods, and you get more protein relative to carbohydrates early on in the day, you will feel better and be more resistant to temptation. This happens because you're essentially trying to store up willpower by making better automatic decisions early on in the day so that you have a little bit more willpower left and can just pass on the crème brulee all together.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Right. So not having a choice is better than making the right choice?

**Tom Rath:** Right, and it's interesting to me that it changes so much based on where you are geographically and by culture. I spent a week in California recently, and it's become the new marshmallow test to pass on the bread nowadays. People are starting to realize that there are things at meals you just don't need, and bread would be one. Especially at lunch and dinner, just realize that you're a lot better off passing on things, like dessert. While it's okay to splurge and have a dessert on your birthday or at a special holiday, it doesn't need to be every day. Every day is somebody's birthday and we have several events every week. If you have dessert at every one of those, that works against you from a short-term and long-term health standpoint.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Okay, let's talk a little bit about the move part of *Eat Move Sleep*. A lot of people assume that sitting down allows them to conserve energy. But you argue that



in some cases, it's just the opposite. Sitting is actually more exhausting to our bodies than moving around. How can that be?

**Tom Rath:** That's a really good point you bring up, about how we have built the expectation that you sit to conserve energy. I'm sure that was the reasoning for how we've become tethered to chairs in our culture. Now we have the argument over sitting versus standing. Standing all day would be about as exhausting as sitting all day. The problem is that we've reduced the variants out of our routine in terms of moving more, including sitting and standing and walking or pedaling or whatever you need to do.

It's fairly easy to see how variation benefits our physical health, but we also need breaks in mental activity — ideally at least once per hour. Even better is two every hour or one every twenty minutes to stretch and stand or walk to get a cup of coffee or have a quick conversation. There are real benefits for cognitive ability in our thinking throughout the day when we're able to do that. When I hear all the talk about the need to have thirty or sixty minutes of intense cardiovascular activity or real exercise five or six days a week, I'm concerned that 80% or 90% of us are so overwhelmed that we're kept from doing a lot of little things throughout the day. I would argue those little things might be even more important because that thirty minutes of exercise five days a week doesn't counteract eight or ten hours of sitting for a full day. Commuting, sitting in a desk chair, and watching television when you get home add up quickly; I would argue that is a bigger problem than lack of exercise in our culture today.

You've got to find little ways to break it up. You can start with setting a timer so you get up every twenty or thirty minutes. Or you can buy one of these fitness bands that vibrate every twenty or thirty minutes if you hadn't had any activity at all. With today's technology, it's not that difficult or cost prohibitive to make sure that we're moving around more. Ideally, you then find a way to get work done while you're sitting, standing, or — even better — walking throughout the day. I've been walking and working in my office for over two years now. It is remarkable how much more energy I have at 4:00 in the afternoon when I've spent a day on my walking desk instead of sitting on airplanes or in meetings all day.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So you have a walking desk, and it sounds like you have a standing desk as well?

**Tom Rath:** I originally had a treadmill in the basement that never got used, and I just put a two by four board from Home Depot and a keyboard over it. I thought I'd test it out and see if it was practical. It took a few weeks of getting used to, but after about a month I would just walk slowly: one and half to two miles per hour. I tracked how many pages I wrote per day along with how many steps I took that day in a spreadsheet and found that I was writing and editing about 30% more on days when I was walking at a slow pace throughout the day. Now, any time I'm in my office, I spend the vast majority of the day walking on a treadmill at a slow pace. When I first started, I had a sit and stand desk right next to it for when I needed a break; but I found that I still got pulled into the sitting way too much. I eventually just kicked the chair out of my room. When I'm doing things that require more dexterity or I'm on a call and don't want the treadmill in the background, I use a seated pedal desk so I don't have the alternative of a traditional chair.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Are you standing right now?

**Tom Rath:** Yes. I've been standing and I rotate with sitting on a desk that has pedals. It



doesn't have any electrical element to it so you can't hear it in the background.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** That's fascinating. So now what do you do if you work in an office where having a treadmill and having a bike aren't an option? Do you set an alarm to remind you to take a twenty-minute walk?

**Tom Rath:** You can default to that. There are a couple other things you can do. Any time you're on a conference call, you can use a wireless headset or one with a longer cord, stand up, and walk. I used to do this all the time when I worked in a more traditional office setting. I would walk in circles around my tiny workspace. At first people might have thought I was crazy, but eventually they figured out what I was doing. I admire Ron Lieber's approach. Every time he travels, he finds creative ways to make a standing desk in his hotel room and posts pictures on Twitter. I've been trying to do it myself when I go around a hotel to find the right surface or to stack things on an ironing board so it works right. Ron's got a great book called *The Opposite of Spoiled*, by the way.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Really interesting. The idea is to just break out of this old mentality of, if your office isn't providing you with the right desk, then you're screwed. Rather, try to be creative and look for new ways of incorporating activity into the way that you work.

**Tom Rath:** Yeah, it's important to know that it's not just about the workstation or space that you're at. We've all been guilty of finding miraculous ways to engineer activity out of our lives. We click a button and someone from Amazon shows up later the same day with whatever you want on your doorstep. We drive around parking lots for ten minutes to save ourselves fifty steps.

In the workplace, I've heard people say, "I need a printer in my office so I don't have to walk all the way down the hallway." We've got to find ways to flip that thinking around and find excuses to add fifty or one hundred steps. It's amazing how easy it is to get to ten thousand steps if you just build small things in throughout the day, even without a walking desk or a large space to walk around when you're getting your work done.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Let's turn to the topic of sleep. Over the last few years, science has uncovered some pretty compelling evidence about all the ways that sleep can actually benefit us over the course of the workday. Why do we need sleep and how can we get more of it?

**Tom Rath:** Yes, research emerging on sleep is just remarkable. We are now seeing that sleep has a profound influence on the incidence and growth of cancer, heart disease, obesity, and diabetes. What's most interesting to me is the more recent research showing how sleep affects our energy and productivity throughout the day.

I grew up in this hardworking Midwestern culture. I would never admit that I needed a whole eight hours of sleep. We talked about only needing four or five hours as a badge of honor. It turns out that being reduced to four hours below your baseline of sleep has the equivalent cognitive impact of having a six-pack of beer in your system. We can't have three or four people in an afternoon meeting, each effectively drunk on a six-pack of beer. I certainly don't want the pilot on my plane tomorrow to be impaired in that way. We don't want teachers, doctors or surgeons, in particular, having that kind of impairment at any time of the day.



We need to go back and think about sleep as the fuel for performance. The documentary that we've been working on around these topics has an interview with the Army Surgeon General, and she talks about this incredible mission to build a sleep initiative into the Army because they've found that soldiers need sleep as ammunition for their brain when they're in the battlefield. We've got to think of it that way. When you need to be at your best, when you need to perform and be a good parent or a good doctor or teacher or whatever, you need to make sure you get a good seven or eight hours of sleep in order to be your best the next day.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** How do you get eight hours of sleep? Are there some tips you can share around how you wind down at the end of the day?

**Tom Rath:** There are a lot of little things, just little tips and tricks to make a difference from a sleep standpoint. Sleeping in a room a few degrees cooler in the evening than what you're used to. Avoiding all electronics and anything with an LED or bright backlight in the last hour before sleep makes a profound difference. The light suppresses the hormone melatonin that you want to kick in at bedtime, so keep the devices away for at least an hour before bedtime. People like me who move around on the road and live in a city can use a white noise app that you keep on throughout the night and creates constant noise; so little things don't wake you up or get you out of bed.

That's the tactical stuff at a more general level. Our family has been careful with the little kids to make sure that sleep is a family value. We talk all the time about the value of a good night's sleep. The first question I ask in them in the morning is, "Did you get a good night's sleep?" We don't treat going to sleep as a punishment. They don't have to lie down and go to sleep if they get in trouble. That sends a very different message about how we value sleep.

Workplaces need to have open conversations with managers and employees about how their schedules can work better to get a good night's sleep, because it really does matter for the sake of the organization's clients and the quality of their products. Those discussions cast sleep in a very different light. Something that I've learned from spending a lot of time on the road is that sometimes you need to budget. I know when I'm on the road I need to budget a ten hour window in order to get eight good hours of sleep and to be effective the next day. You have to think about it as the first priority.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** That's a great point. If you're working in the modern workplace, you need to view yourself as a mental athlete and really treat yourself as such. Preparation for a good day at work starts with good night of sleep.

One thing I've noticed that really helps is instead of assuming that eight hours in bed is going to be enough, give yourself a wider window, so that you get eight hours of actual sleep.

**Tom Rath:** That's something people take for granted. I have spent a lot of time in the last months with people I admire a lot. They've been real high achievers and they treat the hours in a day as if they're home by eleven p.m. and schedule their next meeting at seven a.m., they're good, because that's eight hours on a clock. What they're not considering is that window of time doesn't mean they'll actually get a full eight hours. We've got to help the people that we care about structure their schedules so that they really do have a little buffer and a chance to get sound sleep on most nights.



**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** And from a managerial standpoint, again, it involves highlighting that as a value, and it also can mean something as little as programming the emails that you write at 11:00pm to arrive in your employees' inbox the following morning so that they don't feel compelled to respond.

**Tom Rath:** Such a great point. This comes back to an important conversation leaders and managers can have with their employees about ensuring they have the energy needed for performance and well-being in their job. It is not just about the low hanging health costs and so forth. Take the conversation in a different direction. That is a much more proactive conversation that managers can have with employees and help them to understand that they want them to show up the next day and be their best.



## Practical Tips from Tom Rath

- Take some time to reflect on the ways your work benefits other people. Doing so will make your hours at the office feel more meaningful.
- If you've had a negative experience at work, here are two things you can do to return your mood to baseline: a) turn your attention toward making someone else happy, and b) schedule a few positive activities for later in the day.
- In situations when you need to be fully present, place your smartphone out of sight so that you're not tempted to split your attention.
- When possible, turn off notifications on your phone so that you're able to focus without constantly fending off distractions.
- If you have the flexibility, commit to not responding to email every day until you have gotten at least one important task done.
- Make sure you're spending at least some portion of your day playing offense (i.e., working proactively toward a long-term goal). Playing defense (i.e., responding to others' requests) all day long is a recipe for frustration.
- Avoid eating high-fat foods. They contribute to lower performance in the hours that follow and can disrupt the quality of your sleep.
- Make healthy eating the default by stocking your office, home, and briefcase with healthful foods (mixed nuts, precut carrots).
- When choosing snacks, look for foods that have a low carbohydrate to protein ratio (no more than five to one).
- Incorporate movement into your workday. Take walks, stand up during conference calls, and consider monitoring the number of steps you take with a pedometer so that you can track your performance.
- To get more sleep, lower the temperature in your home around bedtime and, starting thirty minutes before bedtime, avoid any devices with a backlight.
- Keep in mind that, to get eight hours of sleep, you need to allow for at least eight and a half hours in bed. To be fully rested, schedule buffer time into your bedtime schedule.



## Greg McKeown on Determining What is Essential and Eliminating Everything Else

Greg McKeown has dedicated his career to discovering why some people break through to the next level—and others don't.

The definitive treatment of this issue is addressed in McKeown's latest project: the instant *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* bestseller, *Essentialism: The Disciplined Pursuit of Less*. This book, frequently the #1 Time Management book on Amazon, challenges core assumptions about achievement to get to the essence of what really drives success.

McKeown is the CEO of THIS Inc., a company whose mission is to assist people and companies to spend 80% of their time on the vital few rather than the trivial many. Clients include Adobe, Apple, Google, Facebook, Pixar, Salesforce.com, Symantec, Twitter, VMware and Yahoo!. His writing has appeared or been covered by *Fast Company*, *Fortune*, *HuffPost*, *Politico*, and *Inc. Magazine*. He is among the most popular bloggers for the *Harvard Business Review* and LinkedIn's Influencers group, where he averages a million views a month.

McKeown has been interviewed on numerous television and radio shows including NPR's *All Things Considered* and NBC's *Press: Here*. *Entrepreneur Magazine* voted his interview at Stanford University the #1 Must-See Video on Business, Creativity and Success.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Greg, let's introduce your work to some of the folks who haven't had the pleasure of reading it. What is Essentialism, and how can I use it to be more effective at my job?

**Greg McKeown:** Well, we have a problem. We have fallen into the undisciplined pursuit of more, which leads us to feel overworked and underutilized. We are busy but not productive and feel that we're stretched too thin at work or at home. The antidote to that is the disciplined pursuit of less, but better. That is Essentialism.



**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So what does that mean on a practical level? How do we pursue less?

**Greg McKeown:** You have to begin with a non-practical point; but it's a philosophical point that helps us to put this into context. We have been sold the idea that if you can fit it all in, then you can have it all in your life. When people hear that, at first they think: "Well, that sounds right." It has a sort of sense of truthiness to it, but what does it really produce? The only problem with that idea is it turns out to be a lie.

What it produces in people is stress and exhaustion. It is important from a career point of view, making a millimeter of progress in a million directions. This isn't the way to become distinctive, to be able to identify and operate at your highest point of contribution. This is a way to become like everyone else and become the Yes person. If we want to become distinct, then we have to find a different and more deliberate strategy.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** One of the things I love about your book is your advice on how to say, "No" to projects and requests that are simply not essential to our success. Before we get into that advice, I wonder if you can tell us why you think we have such hard time saying no to others.

**Greg McKeown:** First of all, we're just complete novices at it. We have almost no experience. So I recommend starting with mini experiments.

I interviewed someone for the book, an award-winning employee in a company purchased by a larger, more bureaucratic firm. He went into the new company trying to be a good team player, which usually means saying yes to everyone and everything without really thinking about it.

His stress started to go up at exactly the same time as the quality of his work started to go down. That gap is what caused him the most concern. He almost left the company. Then somebody suggested that he "Retire In Role." He interpreted that as, "I ought to be asking is this the very best use of me? What if I was only being paid for the value I create, not for the number of meetings I attend, or the number of e-mails I respond to, but just on value creation?"

So he started experimenting with no. He rarely actually said no, but he did it in other ways. He stopped simply going to meetings because he was invited. He sometimes tried not to go to a meeting people usually expected him to go to, just to see what happened. At the end of a few months of this experiment, he had his life back. He was able to eat dinner with his wife every night. He was able to go to the gym and found creative freedom at work. He was able to focus on the things that made the biggest contribution. By the end of that year, his performance evaluation had gone up and he ended the year with one of the largest bonuses of his career. He learned that if you simply say, "Yes" to everyone and everything without thinking about it, then you couldn't be at your highest point of contribution.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So what should we do to avoid getting roped into doing things that are not priorities? How do we say, "No" gracefully?

**Greg McKeown:** The best Essentialists almost never use the word "no." Instead, when you're asked to do the next project, you can say, "Listen, I'm very happy to do that next project. That's the sixth project I've been asked to do and I can do a pretty good job on all



of these, but I'm wondering if it might be more useful for me to do a superb job on two or three of them? If we could identify what those two or three really valuable projects are... And here's my recommendation, which will really help you, my manager, or my manager's manager, achieve the agenda you've identified. Here is my case for why these are the things we should focus on now, and maybe lessen or just eliminate the other items on the list."

That means that the negotiation begins and the conversation can take place, instead of thinking that you have to say, "Yes" in the response to everything that you're asked to do.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So, getting out of a Yes/No paradigm and starting to think about having a more fruitful conversation around the things you're working on. Saying, "Here are the two or three that I view as some of the biggest priorities. How do you see it?" Having that conversation with your manager. Is that the general concept?

**Greg McKeown:** That's right. I came across an even more extreme example.

We see Steve Jobs as an Essentialist at work, looking for what was essential. But this example is often overdone. Most of us are not in the position as he was — C.E.O. of the company that he founded. So we can't relate in a practical way to how he was able to do it.

More fascinating is an example of somebody who said no to Steve Jobs and got paid one hundred thousand dollars for doing it. This is when Steve had left Apple and was trying to build Next. He was looking for an iconic logo and went to one of the best people in the business — Paul Rand. Jobs said, "I want you to design this logo for us. I want you to come up with a bunch of options and then show those options to me. I will tell you which ones I like the most. Then you can develop those." He starts explaining how this engagement is going to go, and Paul listens to all of it. Then Paul finally says, "No, this is this is how it's going to go." He says, "I will solve your problem for you. I will bring you one solution and it will really work. Then you will pay me and it is up to you if you use it, but that's how it works with me."

So Steve says yes to that and he got a jewel of a logo through that process.

But almost beyond that point Jobs said, "Paul is the ultimate professional." Now that's an interesting thing to praise, especially coming from Steve.

It is a great line: "the ultimate professional." Why? Because Rand had thought through the value relationship more deeply than Jobs had. That's what had given him the credibility to be able to push back, to be able to say, "Well, how about this?"

This is what I'm suggesting. I didn't write a book called *Noism*. It's not about saying no. It's about getting clarity around what is essential, so you can start to negotiate and have the conversation around which things should be deprioritized in order for the most important thing to get done.

That's always a legitimate and strong position to be in when you're negotiating with people who have more authority in the hierarchy of an organization. To use the insight that you gained — this is what's really important.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I really love that Steve Jobs example from the book. I also remember thinking when I read it is that it's something you can try when you are an established



professional. I wonder how much is relatable to folks who are the starting level, from an organizational standpoint or growing a new business and trying to attract clients.

For example, if you're a marketer — and I can tell you because I've worked in marketing — at the beginning, when you're trying to get a new client, there is that temptation to say, "Yes, I can do three or four or five versions." because you want that client. Maybe if you're at the point where you have more clients available, then you can take that attitude of saying, "No, Steve Jobs. I'm going to give you one version, if you don't like it you don't have to use it".

I wonder if this is a critique that you have encountered on Essentialism, where it's possible to try some of these techniques once you are at high level, but it's a bit more difficult starting out.

**Greg McKeown:** Well, there's certainly some truth to what you're saying. An example of someone who tried the opposite of Essentialism comes to mind. I was talking about Essentialism at LinkedIn recently and somebody told me that her New Year's Resolution that year had been to say, "Yes" to everyone and everything.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** That's often the advice you get in some self-help books. Try to say, "Yes" more often.

**Greg McKeown:** That's what she did. She says, "I'm completely exhausted. I'm out of my mind. I can't get anything done. I can't make the contribution I want to make." We thought it was fabulous that somebody had gone fully headlong in to the non-Essentialist approach.

We ought to begin by saying that the alternative path — the path of least resistance in today's world, of just doing everything — is not a strategy for success either. It might help in the very earliest stages of a career and earliest stages of an engagement with a potential client to be helpful in any way to what you can. I can see that. But it's a strategy that quickly gets diminishing returns.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I agree. One of the things that I've written about is the Marshall Goldsmith paradigm of "What Got You Here Won't Get You There." Some things that you do early in your career can be really beneficial towards getting you to that executive level. But once you get some level of success, continuing on with the same strategies can be counterproductive.

**Greg McKeown:** That's exactly right. It goes to the heart of the question that really frames Essentialism. Sixteen years ago, I quit law school and pursued a question that I was fascinated by: "Why don't successful people and companies break through to the next level?"

I found that the counterintuitive answer was hidden in plain sight and it was because of success. I noticed that having people focused on the right things at the right time produces success and the ability to break through to the next level. With that success come options and opportunities, which are good, as long they don't lead to what Jim Collins called the "undisciplined pursuit of more."

I've found that success can become a catalyst for failure. You have to become successful at success. And that's a different skill set. That's what Essentialism is really about.



**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So what you're saying here is that when you become successful, you have way too many options that become available that you never even considered when you first started out. And that plethora of options can actually derail you from what made you successful initially.

**Greg McKeown:** That's exactly right. It undermines focus. I have a perfect illustration.

The founder of Airbnb told me an interesting story. At first, they were into all sorts of different things. Eventually, they found an opportunity to find investors. The three co-founders got together and said, "Okay, what is the goal for this meeting and what is our strategy for getting there?" They came up with this target of becoming "Ramen Profitable." If they ate only ramen noodles for the ninety days until they met with investors, they would be able to demonstrate that they had become profitable.

The co-founders did everything together for those ninety days. They had a graph on their mirrors of exactly what they were trying to do. To this day, that was the most productive ninety days they have ever had. They knew exactly what they were focused on and got the investment. They wouldn't have done it if not for establishing that focus.

That's the first part of the story. It led to success.

Last year Airbnb had forty million people stay in houses that were registered within Airbnb's portfolio. This year, their goal is eighty million.

When I asked what his number one concern was for the company now, he said it's all the options and opportunities. Success makes it very hard to get that focus back and to know what they should and shouldn't pursue. Although that sounds like a nice problem to have, it takes a very particular kind of leadership to be able to figure out what's essential when you have these really good things coming your way.

You have to become more selective than you were in the past. You're faced with options and opportunities that you were once pursuing and are now pursuing you. You have to become more selective; otherwise there will be no space on your calendar. You'll be consumed with simply responding to all the things that are there now. The challenge and tragedy is that you'll then plateau in your progress.

There are many needs in the world. There are many issues that we should be trying to resolve. We have a responsibility to be able to determine which of these good things are really essential?

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Let's say I'm on board with that approach and feel empowered to only do the things that are essential to my success. How do I determine which options are best for me to invest in?

**Greg McKeown:** Let's use a metaphor for a moment. Most people don't take the time to organize their closet. They don't have a system or discipline of routinely going through and clearing out their closet. They end up with a closet packed full of stuff. They can't really discern between the things they love and the things they don't. Sometimes they think that a bigger closet would solve the problem. Until they have a bigger closet. Then they realize there's something else going on. What's going on it they're using an insufficiently selective criteria.



We have to become more selective in what we put in the closet of our lives. We shouldn't just ask, "is this a good opportunity," but also, "Is this absolutely a great opportunity for me? Am I really passionate about it? Does this really interest me? Does it fit into what I feel called to do?"

These questions help discern between good opportunities and the very few that we really ought to pursue.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I want to push you on this a little bit. I agree that that's a great criterion when it comes to being an entrepreneur. I have the flexibility to do that. You have the flexibility to do that. We can both say, "Look, do I really love this project?" And if the answer is no, they we can choose to wait or choose a different project.

But what if you work for someone else? What if you have a manager and your manager wants you to do X, Y, and Z, and you don't love X, Y, or Z? What do you do then?

**Greg McKeown:** We have to distinguish between a short term and longer-term strategy.

Let's first start with the long-term strategy. Not being able to answer those questions doesn't make for a great career. I went down this path at law school. I could have made a pretty good lawyer, but it wasn't the very best use of me from a talent point of view. It didn't meet the need in the world that I felt pulled to. What's the choice that I have in that condition? Do I say, "Well, I'm already committed? I'm in this path so therefore I have to keep going down this path?" Or do I say, "Look, I actually have to make a strategic change in my career so that I'm closer to my highest point of contribution?"

I know that that's a pretty extreme answer, but people can make that change in their long-term path.

I was running a program with somebody three years ago and we went through this process. He got caught up in a really good parallel path, but not the one he really felt he was supposed to pursue. The definition of parallel lines is two lines that never meet. Even though it was close, it was not the right path for him and he knew it. He was kidding himself, saying, "Well, it's pretty close. I can find ways to tap a little bit of my passion, a little bit of my talent."

Until recently, I thought that was the end of the story. I was speaking at a different organization and he was there. He told me that he had rewired his career and changed it completely to pursue what he had discovered in that conversation.

Managing our current job can be challenging, but in the long run we have an obligation to really try to navigate towards those things and that we're really built to do, so that we can make that contribution. That's not an easy path but it's the right one.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Right. I also think we shouldn't view it as either/or, in the terms of either I say, "Yes" to what my manager has asked, or I go through this exercise where I identify some of the things I'm passionate about doing and pursue only those. A third approach might be to find activities you love doing and identify ways for you to do more of them at work. Another way of looking at it is viewing yourself as an entrepreneur within your current workplace.

**Greg McKeown:** I just wrote a blog piece for *Harvard Business Review* called "Prioritize



Your Life Before Your Manager Does It For You,” about how to have that conversation. Once we come to clarity, we can frame what it is we’re trying to pursue in the terms of our manager’s agenda. So you can say the same thing, but in a slightly different way and really be heard differently.

Saying, “Look, I’m not passionate about that,” or “I don’t want to do that” is career-limiting at any point in a career. Saying, “I’m happy to do that, but here’s the thing that you’re working on and I think this project will push this forward the fastest,” sounds like a perfectly reasonable conversation to have. If we really think there’s a better way for us to contribute to our manager’s success, not having that conversation violates an important principle that our manager would hope we are living by.

It begins with getting clarity. Then we have to move past having that clarity to finding the right way to present and talk about that.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So not playing defense on the things you don’t want to do, but playing offense in terms of identifying the direction that you’d like to go, and then framing it in a way that benefits the people you’re working with, so that they see the value in it as well. Great tip.

About a year ago, you published a hugely popular article in the *Harvard Business Review* called “Why We Humblebrag About Being Busy,” in which you make the case that we’ve become trained to think of busyness as a good thing. Why is that? Why do we love telling others how busy we are?

**Greg McKeown:** I think that we’re in a business bubble now. Like the bubbles before, whether that’s the Silicon Valley bubble or the real estate bubble, they all have something in common: an overvalued asset that everybody suddenly gets excited about. It leads to irrational exuberance. It’s not a real estate phenomenon, not a Silicon Valley phenomenon – it’s a human phenomenon, where we get caught up in what everyone else is doing. We don’t want to be the one person not doing what everyone else is doing so we get pulled into this social phenomenon. That’s the phenomenon we’re in now.

There are two forces that can simplify our lives. One is some form of failure, like a bubble bursting. The other is leadership: a choice that we can make before we have to. That isn’t easy, but the advantage of operating as an Essentialist is that there’s tremendous opportunity in being ahead of the curve. We are increasingly seeing people, as *Time* magazine called it, participating in the “mindfulness revolution.”

I was at the World Economic Forum in Davos and this is the second year in a row where multiple sessions focused around this simplification theme have received huge interest. It’s becoming a part of the big global agenda because so many people are sensing the madness of this bubble and are trying to make adjustments. Eventually everyone will make these adjustments. I don’t know how long it takes, but how can we do it before we absolutely have to? That’s where the opportunity lies.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** These days, when someone asks how you’re doing, the temptation is to say, “Super busy” and to start naming some of the commitments that you’re working on. You suggest that’s a mistake. What should we say when someone asks you how we’re doing?



**Greg McKeown:** A friend of mine always says, “Fine, unless you want the details.” You can use many positive things when somebody asks such as, “I am doing fantastic, I’m doing great”. “There are lots of good things going on,” and then change the conversation back to them.

In England, when people ask you how you are, they really are asking you and so you owe an answer. I learned the hard way that, in the US, people are not really asking you. You give an answer and people think, “Where in Christ did this person came from?” I mean this is just a thing you say in the US, so the faster you turn it back to them, the better, without using busyness as a badge of honor.

If somebody really does want more information, you can point to something you’ve done that’s rejuvenating. Something that you feel is essential. What you did with your kids last night. Now they get something out of this conversation rather than adding anxiety.

We’ve been adding to this bubble. We make the other person sense that, if they are not this busy doing this many projects, they’re doing something wrong. Instead, they’re doing something right by creating space to think and do those things that are really important.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I also think we have his view that if we say to people that we’re busy that they’re going to view us as being important, or as someone who is contributing value. In fact, it can create the opposite impression, where it seems like we’re not in control of our time. In contrast, if you say to someone “things are going well and here’s what I’m focused on now,” it can actually make you seem more impressive.

**Greg McKeown:** I also think the fact that we view saying how busy we are as evidence of importance or success is itself evidence of the bubble we’re in.

Does busyness equal success? When you hear it that way, it’s obvious that it doesn’t. But in today’s vernacular that is what seems to be assumed.

As soon as you have busyness equaling success, busyness has become its own value. You’ll keep producing more and more of that behavior that is not an asset. Busyness is not an asset. Eventually it will be seen for the fraud that it is.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Ok, let’s say I’m sold. I’m ready to become an Essentialist. What practices should I immediately put to use, to start getting my life under control?

**Greg McKeown:** There are three principles of how you become an Essentialist. The first is to create space so that you can explore what is essential. The practical suggestion I have is to hold a personal quarterly offsite. Every ninety days, get out of your work environment, out of your normal every day work, and go off somewhere. Go out into nature. Go stay at a hotel. Just get out of your normal environment and ask yourself these questions: Where have I been over the last ninety days? What are some of my achievements? Where do I want to be ninety days from now? What are the two or three things that are really important to me, personally and/or professionally? Finally, what’s trade-offs do I need to make in order to be able to achieve my goals?

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** It feels so natural for us to take an offsite with our company or department, yet we never think to do the same in our personal life.

**Greg McKeown:** That is an oddity, that we understand the value proposition in a corpo-



rate environment, but don't understand it in our life environment. I do think that we need to become the C.E.O. of our own lives. If we don't, many other people will happily step in and take that executive function.

That leads to the second suggestion: Eliminate the non-essentials. Instead of allowing email to dictate how we spend our time, make a list every day of the top six things that you want to get. Put it in priority order and cross out the bottom five. You can still keep those items, but now you've identified the priority task you have for the next day. Write it on a Post It note and put it on your computer.

There's a service that allows you to do this on your computer. It asks, "What is the priority right now?" and you can type that in so that you're reminded about it every time you open a page on your web browser. [Note: The program is called [Momentum](#).]

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Brilliant.

**Greg McKeown:** So, you can use that or you use the Post It note. You then are scheduling time the next day uninterrupted to focus on that priority.

I want to emphasize the word "priority" for a moment. We've talked about this idea that we've been slowly conned over time to that, if we just shove it all in, we can have it all. The word priority itself illustrates this con. The word came into the English language in the 1400s. It meant "the very first thing." Very sensibly, it stayed singular for the next five hundred years. It was only in the 1900s that we pluralized the term. This illustrates a certain kind of madness because you know you cannot have, by definition, many priorities. You cannot have ten things that must be done before everything else can possibly be done.

Who has not been to a meeting where somebody said, with no sense of irony at all, "These are our ten priorities." The idea is to get back to the original meaning, asking each day "What's important now? What is the priority?" When you're done with that, you move on to the next item on your list and you focus on that.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So to sum up, the first step was taking an offsite every ninety days to figure out what are your priorities. The second is to think of a priority in the singular sense and home in on the one thing you're trying to do with your day. What's the third tip?

**Greg McKeown:** The third thing is to re-allocate resources that you have eliminated and to work on the things that you identified as most important. The idea is to make execution as effortless as possible. That's a different way of approaching execution and non-essentialist things: you've got to force execution, shove it in, and make it work. I recommend designing a routine. Our mornings could be organized to not reach thoughtlessly for the phone and get sucked into requests from people as soon as we wake up. Every time we're checking e-mail we're checking somebody else's agenda. Instead I suggest that we build thoughtfully. Here are a few things I'm going to do for the first hour: wake up, read this particular book, this wisdom literature for ten minutes, then maybe meditate for ten minutes, and then spend ten minutes envisioning the kind of day that I want to have, figuring out what is important for myself.

If you do it right, you can build a routine so that the first hour is an incredibly valuable re-charging experience instead of something you sort of fall into and react to as you get on the phone and grab your coffee. That sort of reactive start to the day would fall into non-Essen-



tialism. You build a routine so that the execution is as effortless as it can possibly be.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So how did you spend the first hour of your morning today?

**Greg McKeown:** The very first thing that I do every single day is read scriptures. I read a chapter every single morning—it's the very first thing. After that I spend some time with my wife and our children reading and talking about the day. We had a mini family counsel this morning, talking about the routine that we have for the summer.

The children also have a routine. That has saved us so much stress as parents. We don't have to think every morning, "What are all the things we want them to do before they get pulled into their own non-essential activities?" By non-essential, I don't mean play. Play is essential; screen time is not. One of the routines we've established is they have to do forty-five minutes of creative play before they can have screen time. They have to be creative — draw something, play something, or come up with a song.

After I did those things, it was time to identify the project I have to get done today. I worked on that for about the first half an hour of my workday before we got into this. So there we go. I don't want to pretend that it was a perfect routine this morning, but everything I did in that first hour I would not have done if I hadn't given deliberate thought to what that first hour should look like.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Before we got on our call today, I asked you about the image behind you and I wonder if you can explain for our audience what's going on in that picture.

**Greg McKeown:** The picture is called *The Listener*, by Jack Christiansen. It's one of my favorite paintings, if not my absolute favorite. The person at the center is listening to the voices around him. There are a bunch of famous characters and a loud constant stream of opinions. It's illustrating not just information overload, which we've heard so much about, but the real problem of our times — opinion overload. That's what social media has brought to us: that feeling of "everybody has a point of view and everybody gets a vote in my life." This picture is illustrated in somebody who—instead of reacting responding to all of that, instead of trying to get to their intuition—is trying to listen to what his own conscience is speaking to him. I love that as a constant reminder that the different voices and opinions don't matter; what I really need to do is get centered enough to hear that voice. That is an incredibly calming experience for me, centering myself. Lastly, out of it comes the priority that I value so much.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I love the image and as you were speaking it sparked a question for me: Is it easier to be an Essentialist earlier in the day? That's when you're focused, but then around three or four, it becomes really easy to check Facebook or look at that cat video that your aunt sent you on Twitter. How do you maintain your energy throughout the day to stay focused on the things that matter?

**Greg McKeown:** First of all, let's just talk about the correct problem you just identified—it's decision fatigue. What we know now scientifically about our discipline levels is that we have a pretty fixed amount of discipline on any given day. Despite the sense that we can will ourselves to have more discipline, we only have a certain available amount each morning. Over time, you can do things to increase that daily amount, but when you wake up, you just have "x" amount of discipline for that day. This is why routine is such an important part of living an essentialist life. You need to save as much of that decision capac-



ity as possible by not having to decide the first thing you should do, who should you then respond to, etc. Having a routine means not using up all of your discipline and have more decision-making capability and discipline available in the afternoon.

When I travel, I notice that I am more exhausted halfway through the day than I normally would be because I have to make more decisions all along the way. That's why, when I travel, when I'm going to do a keynote at an organization, I have a routine for everything from the moment I pack all the way to the moment I return. I have packing down to a routine. I don't have to use up energy rethinking and re-deciding and trying to work out what to do next. I can use it to be thinking, learning, and discovering in the place that I happen to be. This has given me an 80% reduction in decision fatigue when I travel.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** How do you routinize a new environment? It sounds great, but how do you routinize when you're going into St. Louis at 8:00pm on a Tuesday versus getting into Milwaukee at 8:00am on a Wednesday?

**Greg McKeown:** You can't routinize everything. You routinize what you can so your decision capabilities are available for the things that can't be routinized. When I pack, I have one suitcase and it's in exactly the same place in my closet. When I unpack it, there's already a certain set of things that I keep there permanently so I don't have to think about them on a checklist. I wear a certain suit and only a couple of different shirts so everything is the same. I can pack in less than two minutes. It is a very quick and simple process. I don't have to use any thinking on it and, as a result, I do all those things and I don't ever forget my phone when I'm leaving. If you forget your phone, it affects you; now you've got to buy one or find another hotel or something. It creates all of this extra work. If it's all just routinized into a checklist system, it works like a charm.

I have a step-by-step plan now that I'm given each time I go out and do a keynote. The plan has what time I'm being picked up so a driver picks me up and takes me to the airport. When I get to the airport, a driver takes me to my hotel so I don't have to ever think about that. I have an exact routine for what I do when I get into the hotel room. I don't go and find a restaurant; I have room service. This allows me to use the time that I travel to be thinking about the next big thing to launch, the next thing that is going to make a contribution in the world.

I traveled yesterday so it's very fresh in my mind. I spent my time and energies while traveling launching a program called "Essential," which is the very best way to become an essentialist. We're putting together a community of people who want to become essentialists. They spend a year meeting every ninety days and help each other decide the most essential path in life professionally and personally. It takes an enormous amount of energy to figure out who should come and so forth. If I were constantly reacting to the travel elements and having to make those decisions every time, there'd just be no energy left. I'd be exhausted by the time I got to the hotel. Everything would just be survival.

When I do the keynote — because there's a routine to the actual keynote itself — I know exactly what's happening. I'm not changing the slides every time because I'm not changing everything, so I can put any additional energy to listening properly. In the moment, by listening to the people that are in the room, we can have a very real conversation. That is a benefit that comes from not trying to rethink the keynote every single time; you do it and try to adjust everything to it. You keep that stuff as routine as possible so that you can use



your energy to adjust in the right way.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So the key takeaway here is to try to routinize as much as possible so that you're not re-creating the wheel every time. You have your set decisions.

If you're going on business trips, you may think about the things that you do every business trip so that you don't have to make those decisions. This might involve: Where am I staying? What are the restaurants I'm going to be visiting? What's my checklist for things I need to pack?

For presentations, you could create a checklist so that you do not have to rethink everything before you go into that presentation. It is the same few things—get the water bottle set an hour before your meeting—that type of thinking. Maybe it's wearing the same few suits every time you present, so you don't have to choose what to wear on the day of your meeting. The fewer decisions you make, the more resources you have available for actually performing at your best.

**Greg McKeown:** That's exactly the point. This is how you can make execution frictionless. The point isn't so much to have an effortless life. The point is to make things as effortless and routinized as possible so that you can use your precious time, energy, and thought cycles on the next level. This has been critically important for me.

I continue to work on how to take the full end-to-end process of keynotes so that the whole process from someone's interest in me giving a keynote to completion is simple the whole way through. Everybody benefits from that. It's easier for me, it's easier for a potential client, and it's easier for the team that's involved. In making that happen, you can get to the point where you can almost guarantee this will be a home run. This system works.

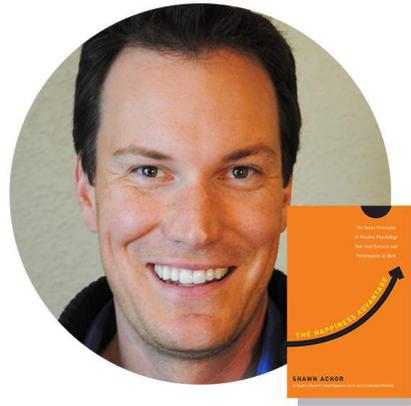
If anything goes awry at any point of the plan, there's enough energy and awareness to be able to deal with it. I'll give you a concrete example. One of my keynotes took me through Boston in middle of the snow during this past winter. I was grounded in the airport. I was giving the last keynote of the conference. I called the client and said, "Listen, I'm just grounded here in Boston and there's not a single plane going out, there's nothing." If I had been too exhausted to think about everything, I'd have given up at that point. Because everything was effortless, I had enough energy to be able to meet this challenge. We ended up calling every private jet possible and we found somebody. I was there an hour before the keynote and actually had plenty of buffer time before going into it and it just worked perfectly.

The point is that unexpected things come up, things that we know we're not great at predicting. You know that something's going to come, you just don't know exactly what and when. If you're already in a reactive state, getting pulled all over the place in a non-essentialist way, there is no buffer when those moments hit you. There is no decision capability left; you're just absolutely going to be wiped out by those waves of life. In this case, because there was enough routine and things that were taken care of, we had the energy when the big surprise hit. I had the energy to be able to figure out what we really needed to focus on and what it would take to get it done, and we did it. I don't want to sound holier than thou in any way about this. There are lots of examples where I don't feel like I get this right, but I do see this as an illustration of Essentialism in practice.



## Practical Tips from Greg McKeown

- Instead of focusing on being more efficient, invest some time reflecting on tasks and activities that can be eliminated from your life.
- Recognize that every activity you engage in comes with opportunity cost. The most effective path to increasing your productivity is saying “No” to non-essential pursuits.
- Once you start having some success at work, you begin to get flooded with new opportunities. It is at this point that being intentional about how you spend your time becomes especially important. Unless you become selective, your career will plateau.
- Instead of saying “No” directly to a higher up’s request, say you are happy to help and then engage your manager in a conversation on all the projects you are working on. Make a recommendation on how your time would be best spent.
- Identify the tasks you are passionate about doing at work. Once you have clarity around your interests, you can pursue those preferences more successfully by framing them in the terms of your manager’s agenda, so that he or she also sees the value.
- Avoid seeing busyness as a virtue. What it reflects is a lack of focus.
- Every ninety days, consider taking a “personal quarterly offsite,” where you reflect on what you’ve achieved and determine what is essential in this coming quarter.
- Each day, determine the one thing you want to focus on. Write it on a Post It note or use a computer program (like Momentum) that reminds you of that priority throughout the day.
- To avoid wasting energy on simple decisions, routinize as much of your day as possible. Create checklists that make each routine less effortful.



## Shawn Achor on Staying Positive in a Stressful Workplace

After spending twelve years at Harvard University, Shawn Achor has become one of the world's leading experts on the connection between happiness and success. His research on happiness made the cover of Harvard Business Review, his TED talk is one of the most popular of all time with over nine million views, and his lecture airing on PBS has been seen by millions.

Shawn has worked with over a third of the Fortune 100 companies, and lectured in more than fifty countries speaking to CEOs in China, senior leaders at the Pentagon, schoolchildren in South Africa, and farmers in Zimbabwe. Shawn is the author of New York Times best-selling books *The Happiness Advantage* (2010) and *Before Happiness* (2013), as well as *Ripple's Effect* and *The Orange Frog*. He recently did a two-hour interview with Oprah at her house discussing happiness research and perception of success.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** In your first book, *The Happiness Advantage*, you make a compelling case that happiness improves our performance at work. How exactly does feeling happy make us better at our jobs?

**Shawn Achor:** Most people think that once you're successful, *then* you're going to be happier. As it turns out, a positive human brain does remarkable things. It actually transitions. It releases dopamine, a pleasure seeking neurochemical in the brain that facilitates learning. When your brain is positive, it becomes like a sponge. Its creativity triples, its intelligence rises, and it starts scanning for new possibilities.

We've found that, when the human brain is positive, every single business outcome we know how to test for rises dramatically. Productivity rises by 31% across industry and function. On average, sales rise by 37%.

I'm working right now with Nationwide Insurance. We just did a study with Gary Baker who is the president of nationwide brokerage services and we introduced this research to get their teams to become more positive. The revenues went from three hundred and fifty million to nine hundred and fifty million dollars in a single year. We're finding that when the human brain is positive, it actually works better than when it's negative, neutral or



stressed.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** A critique I often hear from business leaders is that the idea of happiness at work sounds great, but it also feels a little frivolous as a business objective. What's your reaction?

**Shawn Achor:** We see that mentality a lot. There's this notion that happiness is an individual choice, so leaders think that's on the employee to figure out. But if you're actually interested in raising profit for a company, if your job is to raise the levels of engagement on a team so they get a job done — one of your top responsibilities is to make sure that our brains are turned on to their highest possible level at work. If you're ignoring levels of happiness, you're ignoring some of the greatest predictors of long-term success.

Only 25% of job success is predicated on a combination of intelligence and technical skill. Based on positive psychology neuroscience, we've found that 75% of your long term job success revolves around three other factors: the belief that your behavior matters, the social connection you feel at work and at home, and the ways that you view stress—whether our leaders help us view stress as a threat or as a challenge.

I would say, to those who think that happiness might be frivolous or not part of their job description, look at the numbers. We've got over a decade of research. I've worked with nearly half of the Fortune 100 companies. The revenues of companies that decide to invest in the happiness of their employees rise dramatically. The ones who ignore it will go the way of dinosaurs.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** You've written a lot about what distinguishes happy people from their unhappy peers. Can you share some of the highlights? What do happy people do differently?

**Shawn Achor:** The first thing they're doing is realizing that happiness is not something that happens *to* them. So often we think that, "if I just work really hard, if I put my nose to the grindstone, if I'm more successful then I'm going to feel those greater levels of happiness." Positive people realize that happiness is a choice.

Whatever your brain attends to becomes your reality. If you focus solely on the negatives or the hassles or complaints, or keep putting happiness off, your brain actually never cultivates the happiness it was supposed to.

Our brain is like a muscle. If I work out my bicep, it's going to get stronger. If I stop, it literally atrophies. The same thing is true with the parts of our brain that look for the negative. You practice those and they get really strong. If you don't use the muscle in your brain to look for the things to be grateful for or the meaning embedded in your life, then that part of the brain stops working.

The second thing happy people realize is that happiness is not simply a shift in mindset. A lot of people think, "Well, if I just change my mindset, if I just decide to be happy then that's the end of the game." By lunchtime or when they get home they've gone right back to their default position.

What I find so powerful and exciting about this research is that we see dramatic differences from building small habits into a person's routine.. Even if someone has been pessimistic their entire life, we can actually teach them optimism. We can teach them joy and happiness and we can sustain it.



Happy people adopt positive habits into their life. They intentionally scan the world for three things that they're grateful for to raise their levels of happiness. They exercise, which is the equivalent of taking an antidepressant. They meditate or do attention training, where they focus their brain on one activity at a time instead of multitasking, which not only raises their accuracy rate by 10%, it actually raises their happiness and lowers their stress levels. They write positive emails to their family, friends or co-workers praising them or thanking them for something. Write a two-minute positive email praising or thanking somebody each day for twenty-one days in a row and your social connection score goes off the charts. Social connection is not just a good predictor of long-term happiness, it's the best we have. Social connections are as good of a predictor of life expectancy as obesity, high blood pressure or smoking.

We fight so hard against the negative that we forget to tell people how powerful the positive can be. Happy people realize that power. They realize that it's a choice but it requires effort.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Those are all useful habits but it seems like many of them require time outside the workplace, right? Like exercise or writing in a gratitude journal. What are some things that I can do between the hours of nine and five to stay positive at work?

**Shawn Achor:** We should try to eat and sleep before going into work. We know that's going to improve our performance. The other thing is charging your happiness battery. That can be done within forty-five seconds. We did this at American Express for forty-five seconds each day, we had people think of three new things that they're grateful for that have occurred over the past twenty-four hours. If I'm sitting at work, I sit down at my desk and the very first thing I do is I try to think of three things I'm already grateful for. That teaches your brain not only to scan the world for threats, but also scans for the things that provide meaning in your life.

Other things you can do over the course of the day: you can go for a coffee break. Every ninety minutes you should be taking a cognitive break anyway. We find that, if you want to stay in the performance zone for longer, you need to actually take recovery periods within that working day. While you're waiting for a coffee, take a napkin and bullet point every detail you can remember about one positive experience you've already had during the day. Maybe it was having breakfast with your kids, maybe it was a good phone call, maybe it was the sunrise you saw driving to work way too early in the morning. Whatever it is, that's causing you to feel positive and meaningful as your brain tries to remember those details.

It's the fastest intervention we found for raising people's levels of engagement at organizations. And it's free.

Another thing you can do is give praise or recognition to somebody. If you provide praise or recognition or smile at somebody strategically — like somebody you wouldn't normally smile at — that simple activity turns out not only do you feel better about yourself, you get a positive feedback loop with that person as they smile back to you. This makes it easier to return to your work with greater levels of energy.

We did this with a group of hospitals. We had eleven thousand doctors, nurses, and staff practice making eye contact and smiling with one another. Not only did engagement levels rise dramatically, the hospital earned tens of millions of dollars more as the number of unique patient visits rose. Also, the likelihood of patients to refer the care based upon the quality of care that they received skyrocketed. They even felt better about their quality of care. Small changes, massive impacts.



**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Studies that have come out over the last few years suggesting that the more we focus on whether or not we're happy, the less happy we tend to be. That presents an interesting paradox. Being happy can make us more successful, but *trying* to be happy tends to make us unhappy. How do you square those two ideas?

**Shawn Achor:** The key is not evaluating how happy you are compared to other previous moments in your life. As people start to think about happiness, they can't be thinking, "Oh, I wish I was happier." That absolutely causes people to feel less negative or less positive. It sometimes causes them to spiral into depression, which is exactly why you get that research you're describing.

If you ask somebody, "What could you be doing to create greater levels of happiness in your life," they start cultivating positive habits like doing kind things for other people. They start handling stress in a different way, they start investing in the people around them, and they start actually doing some of these positive activities like meditating or exercise.

The problem with that research that you described is that it doesn't give us an out. If happiness is not something we should be thinking about, then why pursue any of the things that we're pursuing? Why pursue being more successful at work? Why pursue trying to deepen our connection with other people? Why get married or have kids? All of those are choices to create greater levels of happiness.

We need to cultivate a belief that happiness is not based upon those external standards. It's based upon our choices to do the things that cause us to be positive and then to create habits that help us to sustain it.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** What I'm taking away here is that we get locked into these false expectations about how happy we should be, when really, the question we should be asking ourselves is "what can I do to be happier in this moment."

**Shawn Achor:** That's exactly it. It's not a "should." It's not a comparison to other moments.

If I compare my current happiness to the happiest day of my life, well of course I'm less happy now and now I feel worse about my current situation.

We have access to negative things all the time. I can turn on the news right now and quickly find four or five things to make me feel terrible about what's going on in the world. But we also have access to joy all the time. The fact that we're having that opportunity to talk right now through technology is phenomenal. The fact that we're both healthy in this moment, the fact that we're taking time out of our day to look at how we can use levels of happiness to improve our business performance, all of that is an incredible privilege and opportunity.

We can choose to focus on that. As soon as you do, your brain stops focusing on stress as a threat. You start realizing it's a challenge and as a result of that your entire brain turns on.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** In your new book, *Before Happiness*, you outline five key strategies that make a major difference in how we feel both at home and at work. One of those strategies really resonated with me: Eliminating negative noise. Can you tell us about that?

**Shawn Achor:** It started with some research I was doing because I have a fifteen month old. When you don't sleep, your brain actually thinks you're under threat. The same thing is true when your brain is bombarded by a lot of noise and too much information. If you



have people that aren't sleeping very much, that are getting bombarded by information on their smart phone and on their smart watches, that barrage of news triggers your sleep-deprived brain to focus on the negative. It thinks you're in a threatened position. It thinks you're in the middle of combat, so it focuses on the negatives you need to deal with.

If you sleep eight hours, you can remember 70% to 80% of positive and negative words the next day if you memorize the same set. But sleep five hours and you still remember about 70% of the negative words, but only about 20% to 30% of the positive words. Your entire world changes because your brain decides to focus those finite resources in another way.

In the midst of the lack of sleep and the increased flow of information, we have to create some noise cancelling. I have noise cancelling headphones that I use on planes. They help me quiet the noise so I can focus on my work and don't hear the children crying or the plane's engine. We can turn our brains into noise cancelling machines; and it doesn't take much time. We don't have to shut down the noise in our life all that much. We found that a 5% change in the amount of information flow that comes into our brain could make us happier and more successful.

In experiments we ran, we asked people to avoid turning on the radio when they first get in their car and just have that silence for a second. Allow your brain to assimilate all the information that it was just feeling before moving forward and listening to some talk radio or to some music. Or we have people mute just one or two of the commercial breaks in the television they watch over the course the day. We have them meditate two to eight minutes a day. Those simple moments of noise cancelling have a major impact.

When I first started meditating I thought, "Well, I just wasted two minutes." Then, over the course of the day I started having all these epiphanies, or "Eureka" experiences. That's exactly what happens when people get better and better at meditating. When they take that time, the gamma waves within their brain actually change and they start to look like patterns of the Eureka experience where you're like, Aha! These two ideas. I suddenly get it.

When people take that noise cancelling moment, their brain starts seeing patterns in the world. If you study the history of science, you can look at Einstein and a guy named Henri Poincaré. Both came up with the theory of relativity at the same time and neither was in a laboratory. Neither was even working. One was coming home from a party and was looking up at a clock tower; the other was on vacation taking a walk on the cliff side. For both, the idea just came to mind. What I love about that is that it's exactly what we see in the business world. Take a 5% decrease in the amount of noise in your life and your ability to see patterns rises dramatically.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I love that tip about leaving the radio off when you first get in your car. I've started using it and it makes a big difference. Not just in terms of reducing the amount of information you're consuming, but also in terms of encouraging you to reflect on the ideas that are already in your head.

Are there some other actionable, easy-to-apply tips you can share for reducing the amount of information that we consume on a daily basis?

**Shawn Achor:** I don't watch the news anymore. I read the news online, which allows me to pick and choose the stories that I'm going to decide to bring into my brain. I'll still let a couple of those negative stories in when I feel like they'd be important for me to know to connect to other people, but rarely and without the emotional tone than I was getting by watching them on the television. I've dramatically decreased the amount of news that I've



consumed. I do it strategically now. I'm still informed about the world, but all the things I can't control do not absorb me.

I know people that go all the way to shutting off the news. The happiness of many of them rises dramatically.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** A related strategy for those who need to be on top of news stories is to read the paper at a time when it's not going to derail the rest of your day. For example, avoid the news at 11:00pm right before going to sleep.

**Shawn Achor:** That's exactly it. That's one of the other noise cancelling strategies I try and have been helpful for me. I used to check email right before going to sleep. I'd get an email and suddenly feel activated by it. I needed to solve a problem right away, or I'd get very excited and stay up for the next two hours. So my wife and I just made it simple. We don't provide that type of information flow. After 9:00pm, or when we enter our bedroom, there's no checking email.

There are lots of things you can do to decrease the amount of noise that you're feeling.

We're also exposed to *internal* noise. We have constant thoughts saying, "You're not good enough," or "You're a fraud," or "You're never going to solve this problem." That causes worry. What we have people do is create opposite thought patterns that cancel out that noise.

I try to tell myself that I'm going to worry in proportion to the likelihood of this event. So if the chance of a negative event happening to me is .0001%, that's how much brainpower I choose to devote to it. I'm going to spend the 99% of my resources focused on what could possibly happen.

People spend so much time plotting escape routes in cases of danger in their brains that they actually rarely take time to plan for success. So we have people use those brain resources to think, "What if this meeting goes really well? What if I get that interview? What if the book does better than I was hoping it to? What if I get that promotion? What am I planning to do as soon as I get that?"

In each of those moments we stop doing what Brene Brown calls dress rehearsing tragedy. When I find myself thinking about how bad a situation could be, I use that shift in thinking to move forward.

As a parent, when I start worrying about things with my fifteen month old son, I think to myself that worrying is not love. It's easy to think that by worrying I'm being a much better dad, but I'm not. I can still be conscientious about the things that need to get done without the worrying about what happens if something goes wrong in this moment. I can prepare for the bad without feeling the anxiety for it.

What makes me better as dad or a business leader or a speaker is actually thinking about the positives that I can create in other people's lives, instead of worrying about how I'm being perceived.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Another strategy you recommend is "choosing a more valuable reality." What do you mean by that?

**Shawn Achor:** People spend a lot of time wondering whether they're an optimist or pessimist. Is the glass half full or half empty? I think that exercise is a waste of time when there



might be a full pitcher of water right next to the glass. That's what I've been encouraging people to do. In the midst of those moments that could have a positive spin or negative spin, scan the environment for more resources to change the current environment you find yourself in. Ask yourself, "How can I actually make this a better situation by expanding the ways that I'm looking at this?"

There are "multiple realities" in each moment. I learned this from Dr. Tal Ben Shahar, my mentor at Harvard. In one of his lectures, he went through his entire life story and talked about all the failures he had and why he should feel pretty bad about himself. Then he told the exact same story, mentioning those exact same life events, but suddenly they didn't seem like failures anymore. They were events that caused him to change the trajectory of his life or because he failed at a psychology or statistics class, he had to study it better than anyone. By the end, he knew it so well that now that led him to become a professor at Harvard. So in each one of those moments we have access to different types of realities, and what we need to do is choose the most valuable reality. We want a reality that's valid, that's actually true, that's accurate and takes in the correct information within that space, but that is also helpful.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So let's make this concrete. Let's say, for example, that I hear rumors that my department is about to undergo layoffs. What can I do to choose a better reality within that pretty stressful context?

**Shawn Achor:** One of the first things I would do is try to stop my brain from just rehearsing the tragedy of what might happen. Stop going through all this negative cycle of what's going to happen with my life, which devolves into, you don't have a house anymore, you're living on the street, in a van down by the river. What we want people to do is to immediately assess: is this information valid and accurate? I might go to senior leadership to find out if this information is true.

The second thing I would do is to look for the best alternative. If the worst happens in this moment, how can I make the best of that? What are some of the strategies and activities I can do in this present moment to make sure I'm in the best position if that actually occurs? The reason that's valuable is that when people start feeling anxious, they split their brain resources. They're processing the anxiety that they feel. Then, less of their brain can figure out how to solve that problem.

The other thing I would do is link with the other people around me. I would create a social connection to talk with others about what they're experiencing, so you're not going through it as an individual, but with other people. This is significant because social connection is the greatest predictor of long-term happiness. It also allows us to stop questioning, "Am I going to be okay or not in this situation?" When you start focusing on whether other people are going to be okay in that same situation, your brain moves away from the experience of fear to an experience of empowerment. Now you're wondering, "How can I help other people feel better in the midst of this anxiety and stress?"

The last thing I would say is to think about things empirically. I have worked with so many people who thought losing their job it was the worst thing that ever happened to them. While they went through losing that job they thought their world was ending. How were they going to pay their mortgage? They've got a family. What are they going to do with their life?

Once they've had some time, where they have that new job that they love or they became an entrepreneur and they've cultivated this lifestyle that they love or they found a new



group of friends, they realize: “I thought it was going to be the worst thing and it turned out to transform my life in incredible ways.”

If you ask people, “What are the moments in your life that have been the most positively transforming for you,” you find that 80% to 90% are responses to high stress situations. We are so worried about stress in our life that it gets in the way of experiencing the type of life that we deserve or the type success we need. If we fight or flee from stress, we’re fighting the very things that cause us to achieve our potential at the highest level. Some of the things we fear the most, like changes at work that we don’t know about from senior leadership, might actually be the very thing that causes us to propel our career forward.

That’s only if our brain is focused on looking for those possibilities in that moment. The faster you get positive, the better.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I love a couple of things that you said. One is that, when we feel helpless, looking for ways that we can help others can empower us to feel like we have more control in life. And the other is your point on looking at stressful moments as opportunities for growth. Both of those strategies can go a long way toward making a difficult situation better.

**Shawn Achor:** Yes, that’s absolutely true. I just did this study with Alia Crum, who is a professor at Stanford, and Peter Salovey, who’s now President at Yale. We went into UBS in the middle of the banking crisis to look at how people dealt with stress. We found that even our stress management programs were making people sicker. We often tell people that stress is related to the ten leading causes of death and disease in the United States. The World Health Organization found stress to be the number one killer: It tears down every organ in your body, so whatever you do at work — don’t stress!

When you hear that information, you feel much more stressed. But there’s equally true research that high level stress turns on the immune system to its highest possible level, speeds up our cognitive processing, improves our memory, and deepens our social bonds.

So we did an experiment. We split up the managers: Half of the managers at UBS received the training that says stress is bad for you, here’s how you fight or flee from it. The other groups had a training that says stress is enhancing if you choose to view, observe, and acknowledge the meaning embedded within the stress.

There were extremely high levels of stress for both of the groups. But the group that looked at stress not as a threat, but as a challenge had a 23% drop in the negative effects of stress, including headaches, backaches, fatigue, and burnout. The things we fear about stress were eliminated when people had a positive mindset.

This means that, as people go through those situations like you’re describing, stress is inevitable. But its effects upon us are not.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Over the past few months you’ve published a number of fascinating articles on the psychology of vacations, and what we can do to make them more enjoyable. Can you share a few tips?

**Shawn Achor:** People don’t take time off because they think it’s going to stall their career, or they say, “I’ll take tons of vacations once I’m really successful.” That formula is completely wrong. We know that happiness fuels success. We know that the greatest competitive advantage in the modern economy is the positive engaged brain. So if you can give



yourself a positive engaged brain in the midst of your work, your likelihood of a promotion and your success rates rise dramatically.

We just did a study with US Travel Association on a project called Project Time Off. What we found is that people don't take vacations because they think it will impress their boss. It turns out that the likelihood of promotion rises by 6.5% for people who take their vacation days. It's the polar opposite of what we expected.

What's also amazing is that the average vacation *doesn't* create greater levels of happiness, because people stress about it. They don't plan. They just go. When they come back there's a lot of stress. It helps if you plan a month beforehand by letting your team know you're going to be gone and you plan the details in advance. If you meet somebody on vacation and make a social connection, if you go far from home and you are not trying to plan the details during the vacation, you return with higher levels of happiness and higher levels of energy 97% of the time.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** To make this actionable, let's review. What are the elements we should focus on if we want to have a good vacation?

**Shawn Achor:** You want to make sure that you plan more than a month ahead, letting your team know. You want to plan the details before the trip so you're not planning them on the trip. You want to meet somebody at the location and make some type of social connection. The creation of a social connection is the greatest predictor of happiness. That can be the local guide host, a friend that you meet at the location, or a friend that you meet at one of the bars.

The final thing we found is that going far actually helps. Using Twitter you can actually look to see the geo-tag of tweets and the further people are away from home, the greater the levels of happiness from vacations.

Now we're trying to convince companies that they should actually pay their employees to go on vacation. Not only does it decrease the liability that they have in terms of insurance, but their health care costs drop. Productivity levels rise, happiness rises, and employees are less likely to leave the company because they're enjoying their work and not feeling burned out.



## Practical Tips from Shawn Achor

- To elevate your mood, start your day by identifying three things for which you are grateful.
- Write at least one email thanking or praising someone each day.
- Avoid comparing your current happiness level with how happy you've been in the past. Instead, focus on the actions you can take to elevate your happiness in the present.
- Find yourself waiting in line? Instead of reflexively reaching for your smartphone and checking your email, jot down a few recent positive events.
- To foster more creative insights, carve out time in your day for meditation — even if it's for just two minutes a day.
- Experiment with ways of reducing your information consumption by 5%.
- Avoid turning on the radio in your car for the first few minutes of your ride, and skip checking the news before going to bed.
- Never bring a smartphone into the bedroom so that you're not tempted to check email.
- The next time you're feeling stressed, try shifting your focus to what you can do for others. Doing so will help your situation feel more controllable.
- Paradoxically, one of the best things you can do to improve your performance at work is take more frequent vacations.
- To get the most out of your next trip, make as many decisions as you can in advance, so that you're not overwhelmed with choices when you arrive at your destination.





## Richard Wiseman on How to Change Your Life in 59 Seconds

Richard Wiseman began his working life as a professional magician and currently holds Britain's only Professorship in the Public Understanding of Psychology at the University of Hertfordshire. He researches the psychology of luck, change, perception and deception; and his work has been published in leading academic journals.

Richard has written several bestselling books (including *The Luck Factor*, *Quirkology*, and *59 Seconds*) and has delivered keynote addresses to organizations across the world (including The Swiss Economic Forum, Google and Amazon).

He was listed in the *Independent On Sunday's* Top 100 People Who Make Britain a Better Place to Live, and has acted as a creative consultant to Derren Brown, The MythBusters, and Heston Blumenthal. Richard is the most followed British psychologist on Twitter, his YouTube channel has received over three hundred million views, and one *Scientific American* columnist described him as "The most interesting and innovative experimental psychologist in the world today".

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Richard, thank you very much for joining us at the summit. Your book, *59 Seconds*, aims to improve people's lives in under a minute. Your book includes some really interesting tips, but you start with something you don't believe in: positive thinking as a technique for elevating our performance. Not only do say positive thinking doesn't work — you think it can actually backfire Tell us how.

**Richard Wiseman:** My disdain for positive thinking at all was actually one of the main motivations for the book.

I would go to the self-development section of bookstores and look through book after book. I'd see books saying to visualize your perfect self, to imagine how I want life to be. As an academic psychologist, I knew the research and that this was a dreadful thing to be doing. So my heartbreak and frustration as an academic was one of the motivations for *59 Seconds*.



There are several studies that ask people to visualize their perfect self and imagine themselves in the relationship they want or the career in which they want to succeed. These studies show that visualization actually discourages people and makes them less likely to achieve their goals. After engaging in that kind of fantasy world and not seeing those goals come to fruition quickly, people start to think, “Well, that’s it. I’ve given it my best shot and it didn’t work and there’s nothing else I can do.” They become discouraged and fatalistic.

Yes, visualizing your perfect self can make you feel good. It promotes happiness for a short period of time. But it completely disrupts motivation.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Fascinating. So if I’m about to go out and deliver a major speech, picturing myself succeeding at that speech can actually get in the way.

Which raises an important question: If positive thinking doesn’t work, what does?

**Richard Wiseman:** Visualization is a very powerful idea. It has an impact on our behavior and our success. The important thing, though, is to visualize process. Visualize yourself doing whatever you need to do to achieve that goal. If you’re a student and you want to do well in exams, don’t visualize yourself opening an envelope and taking out an A grade certificate. Visualize yourself revising, asking questions in class, working quietly on the things you need to do to be successful.

If you’re going to walk out and give that speech, visualize those first few steps on to the stage. Visualize your opening line. Don’t visualize a standing ovation at the end of that talk; that’s going to disrupt your performance.

It’s a very simple, but very powerful idea. Visualize process, not end point.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Great tip. There’s a fascinating section in your book on the psychology of persuasion. No matter what you do these days, you’re in the business of persuasion on some level. You’re either trying to convince people to purchase your product, or buy your service, or simply trying to get hired. One way or the other, we’re all selling something. What can we do to be more persuasive?

**Richard Wiseman:** One technique is to get people saying “Yes.” As humans, once we get into the habit of saying, “Yes,” we are very likely to agree to an end request. Start by building small, or just by asking people questions where you know the answer is going to be yes. The more they say, “Yes”, then the more likely they are to agree with you at the end of that process.

Another is to sit them in a comfortable seat. We’ve seen from a lot of research that if you’re sitting in a hard seat, you become a hard negotiator. You push for a better price or a better deal. In a soft seat, you physically become softer and you’re more likely to agree to a less ideal price.

A third technique is get people nodding their heads. We often look at the behavior of others to decide how we think and feel. If you nod at them and they start to mimic you, then they’re more likely to say, “Yes”.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I’ve noticed that some sales people, at the end of whatever it is that they’re saying, will nod to signal that they’re done talking. This often gets people to do the same because we can’t help but mimic the behavior of others.

**Richard Wiseman:** There’s an important point there: Once you know about these tech-



niques, then you yourself become a more aware, and hopefully immune. When you find yourself in a comfy seat, saying, “Yes,” and nodding your head, hopefully you’ll realize what’s happening and make informed decisions.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** You discuss something that Benjamin Franklin once recommended: if you want someone to like you — instead of doing them a favor — ask them to do a favor for you. Does that really work?

**Richard Wiseman:** It’s related to a fascinating idea called the “As If Principle.” It’s the notion that we often decide how we think and feel based on our behavior. For example, you smile when you feel happy. Well, it turns out that you also feel happy when you smile. If you force a smile, your mood will brighten.

The Benjamin Franklin idea is taking that into the social domain. Whom do we help? For whom do we carry out favors? People we like. If you ask somebody for a favor for you and they go through with it, they end up liking you more because they’re behaving as if that is the case.

There are limits, though. You can’t say to somebody, “Hey, would you mind giving me your entire bank account because then that’ll be a really great sort of favor for me?” They’re pretty certain to say, “No” to that. But if you find somebody that says yes, let me know.

Come up with favors that get the reaction, “Oh yeah, I would do that that’s a small thing. I’m prepared to do that.” In doing so, they’re acting as if they like you and that promotes interpersonal attraction.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** There was a related study some years back on the Foot in the Door Technique, where if you ask people to sign a petition — an easy thing for them to do. Most people say, “Yes”. Then you go back and ask them to put up a lawn sign, and they’ll do it. But if you just cut right to the lawn sign without first asking for the petition signature, that doesn’t quite work as well.

**Richard Wiseman:** Right, that’s a foot in the door technique. In the original study, they told people there was bad driving in the area and asked them to put a sign in their garden that said “Cut down on bad driving.” The sign was huge, so everyone said, “No, of course I’m not doing that.” Then they went to another residence with a much smaller sign. Most said, “I’ll give that a go.” Then they went back to those people who said yes to the smaller sign and asked about the huge sign. *Those* people agreed. They got something like a 50% increase simply by starting small and then ending up with a much larger sign.

You could call that the “As If Principle,” or Franklin Principle, at work.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** One of the things we often focus on at work is trying to appear competent. We feel really uncomfortable if we have to admit that we don’t know something. If we make a mistake, we often go home ruminating over it.

You point out that making mistakes and appearing fallible actually makes us more likable. How does that work?

**Richard Wiseman:** This is the so-called “Pratfall Effect.”

Like all social psychology, there are limits. You can’t go out into the workplace, trip over, bang your head on the desk, knock everything over, ruin the photocopy and break the computer, and say, “Haha! There we are. I now expect to get a raise because I’m the most



popular employee.” That’s not going to work.

But the study shows that if you come off as too perfect, like a superhero that can do everything, people don’t like you much. It’s a question of balancing competency and knowing your job, with occasionally being a bit goofy and human.

If you’re on a date, you don’t want to come across as perfect. People find that intimidating. I’ve found they actually leave quite early. Instead, you should come across as a bit vulnerable, the sort of person that makes the occasional error. You become more likable and pleasant to be around. You’re more likely to get promoted, dates don’t leave early, and so on. The effect is very interesting. It’s one you have to use very carefully, but it really does work.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** That can be really liberating for people. Often you go into a client meeting or you’re meeting with your manager, your boss, your CEO, and you feel like you need to be perfect. This research tells us you really don’t. In fact, appearing perfect may be hurting your career.

**Richard Wiseman:** It’s also related to what’s called the “Spotlight Effect,” where your mistakes seem much bigger to you than anyone else. You may say something not overly sensible in a meeting that and be absolutely mortified. Other people probably weren’t listening or think, “Oh, it’s just a small error.”

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** There’s a study on the Spotlight Effect where they invited people into the lab and had them put on T-shirts that were ridiculous in some way. Either they said something funny or they were dirty, but they looked terrible. They asked the T-shirt wearers to guess how likely the people in the room were to have noticed their shirt and people vastly overrated the attention of their peers.

**Richard Wiseman:** That’s exactly it. It’s a great study. They get these fashion conscious students and brought them into the lab and made them change into a shirt that says, “I love Barry Manilow,” which, apparently is the worst thing for a fashion-conscious student to wear. I don’t know why. I like Barry Manilow.

Eventually, they persuaded some of them to put on the Barry Manilow T-shirts, go into a meeting, sit around, and talk. They’re thinking, “Goodness, all my friends are going to think I like Barry Manilow and I can’t explain to them I’m part of an experiment!” They became very self-conscious. It turns out their friends hardly noticed the T-shirts. That’s a very good example of the Spotlight Effect.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Another insight from your book is, if you want a client to like you, you should consider either serving them coffee or taking them out for a meal. How does that work?

**Richard Wiseman:** In terms of likability, a lot of it is driven by mood. If you give somebody a cup of coffee or if you take them out for a meal, you just put them into a good mood.

That’s the key to a lot of these persuasion techniques, and it’s also key to creativity. A lot of these techniques for making people more creative involve putting them into a less stressed and more positive mood.

Giving somebody a cup of coffee is seen as a positive thing to do, but the coffee is also probably warm. There’s some great work that explains how our physical environment affects how we think. In these studies, people were asked to interview a candidate for a job and



given either a cold or warm cup of coffee. We associate positivity with warmth in terms of personality, so when they had the warm cup of coffee, they thought the candidate for the job was a much warmer person.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** You also talk about research on how we can elevate our performance very quickly. One of the tips you offer is utilizing something called the “Zeigarnik Effect” to overcome procrastination. What is the Zeigarnik Effect and how do we put it to use?

**Richard Wiseman:** It’s this notion that, when we have something unfinished in our minds, it really sticks with us. If you hear just the first part of a joke — for example, “a horse and a bear walk into a bar together, the barman turns and says to them...” — and I didn’t tell you the punch line, you’d have this nagging urge to find out what it is.

The effect is the same when it comes to problem solving. When you give people some sort of task and then, halfway through that task, you stop them, that task sticks in their mind. They want to get back to that task and finish it. As soon as they finish, their mind is clear and they move on.

If you say to yourself, “Look, it’s a massive task. I really don’t want to do it. It’s unpleasant and I’m not going to start,” you start to procrastinate. If you say to yourself, “I’m just going to work at that task for a minute. I’ll just give myself five minutes to work away the beginning of that task,” it sticks in your mind. It’s unfinished and you’re about 30% more likely to finish, if you just tell yourself I’ll work at it for five minutes. This is a lovely application of the Zeigarnik Effect.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So if you’re struggling with how to start a report, or perhaps outline a client presentation — take two or three minutes to get started and promise yourself that you’re going to stop after three minutes. You’re going to find it a lot harder to stop than you think, is that right?

**Richard Wiseman:** Absolutely. Just say to yourself, “Look, I know I don’t want to do it. I’ll just work on it for five minutes,” and you increase your chances of actually working away far more on that task.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I’ve actually put this to use with my kids. If you want your kids to clean their rooms, don’t tell them to clean the rooms. Just tell them to take one minute to get started. It takes on a life of its own. They just end up wanting to clean the room because they’ve already started and they don’t want to set it aside.

**Richard Wiseman:** It’s exactly the same with my kids. Except I tell them just spend a minute cleaning *my* room. It’s more likely they’ll finish. I don’t care about their room. I’ve never been in there in ten years. My room — that’s where I spend all my time.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Another fascinating recommendation from your book: You suggest that every once in a while we should picture our own funeral. This can sound really morose to someone who hasn’t read this book, but there are some real motivational benefits that come from picturing your legacy and thinking about the eulogy that people will deliver about you. Tell us about that.

**Richard Wiseman:** This is one of my favorite techniques even though it is one of the most negative things you can do. Spending time thinking about your own funeral and what you’ve achieved in life has two impacts.



First of all, it makes you realize that time is short. It's the one resource that we can never get more of. We're all going to die at some point and our time is limited, so you're motivated you to get on with whatever you want to do.

When you think about your eulogy, you ask, "What do I want people to say about me?" Do you want them to say, "He was cranky old guy who never really helped anyone. He was ruthless and to be honest, none of us really liked him." Or would you like them to say something a more positive? Given your behavior, what do you think folks are going to say if they were honest about you? Done properly, this is a very demanding, but beneficial, exercise. It focuses our attention on what's important and forces us to ask whether we're heading in the direction that we want.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Writing about death can certainly seem awkward and uncomfortable. I've noticed that writing in a journal can help you achieve similar results. Simply writing about the things you've achieved from the perspective of looking back at them in your sixties, or from the perspective of your kids reading your journal after you've passed. It can be a simple practice that you incorporate into your daily life that can be quite effective.

**Richard Wiseman:** There are lots of these techniques. I also feel slightly uncomfortable writing about death. When I was writing the book, my rule was that, if I would not do a technique, I wouldn't advise anyone else to do it. I never deviated from that rule. I'm not saying I have done every technique in the book, but I'm prepared to do them.

I tweaked a few exercises, because I didn't want to go and track down someone who has influenced my life and tell them what they mean to me. That would feel very uncomfortable for me.

But as you say, writing those letters and putting them away and thinking after your death they will be sent out, that's something I will do.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Another one of your books is *The Luck Factor*. In that book, you offer scientific evidence that believing you have good luck is more than just a way of viewing the world — it can actually influence your level of success. How so?

**Richard Wiseman:** This was research I carried out prior to the Positive Psychology movement. I was interviewing people about key career moments in their life. People would often say that something was very lucky or unlucky. In all those years, no one had carried out any research into the concept of luck. So I gathered about a thousand of the luckiest and unluckiest people in the U.K. together and started to analyze their lives.

We could see that many of the events that they were ascribing to chance really weren't chance at all. Lucky people expect the future to be bright, so they persevere in the face of failure. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Unlucky people were pessimists and fatalistic. They were certain that it wasn't going to work out for them no matter how hard they tried, so they didn't bother trying in the first place.

You have unlucky people who would say, "I haven't got a job. I haven't had a job for ten years, I don't bother preparing for job interviews because they never go my way." That is a self-fulfilling prophecy. It's a very simple example of how our beliefs that we're lucky or unlucky influence our behavior and our lives.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Have you created any interventions that take people who think



they're unlucky and train them to be luckier in life?

**Richard Wiseman:** The first decade of the research was about identifying the principles behind the lucky life, the last maybe four or five years was a series of experiments called Luck School, where we took people who weren't particularly lucky and got them to think and behave like a "lucky person." We saw big differences in terms of happiness and financial success and longevity of relationships and so on.

It really is possible to harness the power of luck, and part of it is being more optimistic, but that's really the thin end of the wedge. It's also about being action-based, taking risks, putting yourself out there, and being a flexible thinker. All these things are key to a lucky life.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Can you give us some concrete examples of things that people who are in Luck School were asked to do?

**Richard Wiseman:** One of the simplest things was to keep a luck diary. Each night they would write one of the most positive things that happened to them during the day. It may have been emotional; it may have been an experience. What's the best thing that happened even if it was a terrible day? That focuses our attention on the good things in our lives.

We are creatures that habituate very quickly to our surroundings. If you buy a new car, it's great for a couple of weeks. Then you get used to that car and want one that's even bigger and fancier. The luck diary was about having a sense of gratitude of what's in your life and that really helps people rather than focusing on the negative. It gets them into a more positive mindset.

We also asked them to be flexible. To do things they haven't done before. To go to work using a different route, go to a class they've never attended, or even just to watch different types of television programs. That gets them thinking that they are not somebody who is a creature of habit. They're somebody who's prepared to act and think differently when opportunities come their way.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** When bad things happen, it's easy to view those developments as evidence that you've got bad luck. Your research suggests that believing you had bad luck can lead to even more misfortune. How do we stop the downward spiral when things aren't going our way?

**Richard Wiseman:** This is based on the topic of resilience, which is a very popular topic at the moment. It's often the lucky people would take the long-term view. They would say that this looks like a terrible event on the face of it, but you do not know the impact of that event. It may be one of the best things that ever happened to you.

I remember one of our lucky people coming in for an interview. He'd fallen down the stairs and broken his leg and came in with a cast. I said, "Would you consider yourself lucky?" and he said absolutely. He said, "I could do with some time off work and also, the last time I went to hospital, I met a nurse there. Twenty-five years later, we're happily married. It was the best thing that ever happened to me, although I didn't know it at the time." He's got that long-term, resilient view. You have to take a relative approach to these things. Realize that the outcome of any event, although it may look bad to you, could have been far worse.

Unlucky people are doing is the exact opposite. They're always saying that whatever happens to them, it could have been better. There was one guy in the unlucky group who is a multi-millionaire because he'd hit the jackpot in the U.K. lottery. He'd won four thousand



pounds and he's in the unlucky group. I said, "How do you feel about your win?" and he said, "I was so unlucky because I have to share the jackpot with someone else who chose the same numbers. Otherwise, I'd have got twice that amount of money. How unbelievably unlucky."

So you can see the impact of resilience, or in that instance, non-resilient thinking. It's really important to say, "You know, although it looks bad, it could have been a lot worse." That's we're lucky people naturally fall.



## Practical Tips from Richard Wiseman

- Use visualization to improve your performance. But instead of imagining yourself succeeding, picture yourself doing the actual behaviors necessary for you to succeed.
- You can make yourself more persuasive by:
  - Putting people in the habit of saying “Yes” before getting to the real ask,
  - Making sure your audience is physically comfortable and in a good mood, and
  - Occasionally nodding at the end of your statements.
  - Getting someone to do you a small favor can convince that person that they like you.
- Avoid looking perfect. It makes you less likable. Instead, every once in a while, demonstrate your fallibility.
- To minimize procrastination, don’t try to do a difficult task all at once. Instead, start working on it only briefly and promise yourself you’ll stop in a few minutes. Simply getting started will build more momentum than you realize.
- From time to time, picture your own funeral. It will help clarify your goals and motivate you to get started.
- When bad things happen, focus on all the ways it could have been worse. This will help you recover more quickly.
- At the end of each day, write down a few positive things that happened to you. This keeps you adapting to your circumstances and contributes to a positive outlook in life.





## Susan Cain: An Introvert's Guide to Peak Performance

Susan is the co-founder of Quiet Revolution and the author of the award-winning New York Times bestseller *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in A World That Can't Stop Talking*, which has been translated into thirty-six languages. Susan's book was the subject of a *TIME* cover story, and her writing has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Atlantic*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and many other publications.

Susan recently launched the Quiet Leadership Institute (QLI), whose mission is to help companies harness the talents of the introverted half of the workforce, and to improve communication between introverts and extroverts. Its clients include Proctor & Gamble, GE, NASA and others. Her record-smashing TED talk has been viewed over ten million times, and was named by Bill Gates one of his all-time favorite talks.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Susan, you've written a lot about personality and how it affects the way we live and work. One dimension of personality that you've paid especially close attention to is introversion. What does it mean to be an introvert?

**Susan Cain:** A lot of people have heard of introversion and extroversion as defining how you get your energy and how you recharge your batteries, with the idea that introverts recharge their batteries by being more on their own and extroverts recharge them by being with other people.

All of that is a metaphor for what is happening neurobiologically. Introverts and extroverts have different nervous systems. Introverts have nervous systems that make us more reactive to stimulation. What that means is that we're at our most alive and most switched on and happy when we're in quieter, less stimulating settings. Extroverts have nervous systems that crave stimulation. It takes more for you to be in your optimal zone of stimulation, so if you don't have enough going on, your body is telling you to stir things up. Get some action over here. And if you don't get it, you start to feel kind of bored and listless and sluggish. That plays out in all kinds of ways. It's not just about social life. It's also about how do we react to stimulation like lights and noise and crowds, and really everything.



**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** You argue that most workplaces are not especially well designed for introverts. Why not?

**Susan Cain:** They're not and it's a funny thing because introverts make up one third to one half of the population. We're talking about one out of every two or three workers. We're not talking about a tiny population that companies can afford to ignore.

Yet most companies are designed to have everybody working together. There used to be open door policies — now there are open offices. The psychologist Russell Dean did a study where he gave introverts and extroverts math problems to solve with varying levels of background noise. He found the extroverts did fine when the background noise was loud but the introverts did much better when the background noise was softer.

That is a profound bit of research for companies who care about the way people work and communicate and innovate and thrive. It's telling us there's no such thing as one size fits all environments. Yet we set our workplaces up to be one size fits all.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I think that's exactly right. And in many cases it's left up to individual employees to adapt. Let's say you're an introvert working in an organization that's just bursting with stimulation. What are some things that you can do to position yourself to succeed?

**Susan Cain:** A lot of it comes down to feeling deep down that you have the right to be yourself. You have the right to be who you are. I say this because the more you feel really comfortable in your own skin and entitled to be you, the more you can make tweaks throughout the day that honor your own needs.

It might be that you will benefit by, every hour or so, getting up and taking a solitary walk by yourself. Many people tell me, "Well, I feel guilty when I do that," or "It feels like I'm not a team player," or "It feels like I'm going off by myself and that's somehow suspect."

If you know that's what you need and it's going to enable you to be more present and to be more focused when you return then you should do that. Similarly, if you know you have a morning of meetings, or you know you're going to be giving a presentation that afternoon, you might want to schedule a lunch date that's just with yourself and honor that solitary lunch date just as carefully as you would a meeting with an important client.

These tweaks are not that radical. The radical shift comes more in self-awareness and awareness of each other, not in having to transform everything.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Self-awareness is key. I also think we need to re-examine the value of incorporating solitude into our workday. If you are taking time for yourself, it's not because you're being selfish. In fact, it's one of the most generous things you can do for your company. If you don't have that energy to focus, you're just not going to do well. That doesn't help anyone.

**Susan Cain:** Exactly. Why would we not do it? Why would we not make changes that honor everyone's temperament?

The same thing is true of extroverts. There are some offices where the vibe is really quiet and not that social, and extroverts have a really hard time with it. The introverts in those offices need to take the extra steps to make sure the extroverts are getting the social time that they need. If you're an introvert in a leadership position, it might be that your impulse



is to come to work and go right to your desk and put your head down and get into that state of flow that introverts love. But maybe instead you schedule fifteen minutes to go and chat with your colleagues and see how people are doing before you go into your flow state.

It's about acts of generosity to each other.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** One experience you might have, especially if you're an introvert, is finding yourself exhausted after a major presentation or a big meeting. What can you do in those moments after a huge outpouring of energy to regain your focus?

**Susan Cain:** In my book I talk about the delightful personality psychologist Brian Little. Brian has talked deeply about this because he's a real introvert that is also a phenomenal public speaker. He taught at Harvard for a while and was always rated everybody's favorite professor. When he goes out on the lecture circuit there are standing ovations everywhere he goes. But as soon as he is done on stage he races for the nearest restroom and shuts himself up in a stall where he cannot be bothered by anyone.

This is what people have actually done since time immemorial but it's never been socially acceptable to talk about it. He does. He calls it his "restorative niche." It's really important to schedule that restorative niche.

I was once chatting with a former aide to President Obama, whom I believe is an introvert, and she told me that the standard practice in the Oval Office would be to book the President for back-to-back meetings. You've got your 9:00 to 10:00, your 10:00 to 11:00, 11:00 to 12:00, and he said, "I need to have ten minutes between each meeting to think about what I've just heard and, I suppose, to recharge." Everybody was absolutely stunned by this because it had never happened before.

But many of us benefit from taking time in between — if not to recharge, then to think and digest what you just heard and come up with a plan of action based on that. This culture that we live in is telling us we should be on the go all the time. Just do it, twenty four seven. That's not benefiting anybody.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I love that story and I think there's a lot we can learn from it. Whether you're in a high position or not, you can benefit from ten to fifteen minutes after a meeting.

We tend to race from meeting to meeting and that can interfere with memory because there's no moment of allowing yourself to process the information. Even if you do allow yourself some time between appointments, if the first thing you do after a meeting ends is check your phone to look to see what messages you've received, then you're still interrupting that process for memory to consolidate.

**Susan Cain:** That's absolutely right. The other problem is just having back-to-back meetings in the first place. At the Quiet Leadership Institute we have a rule of no meetings before 12:30, so all our meetings are scheduled in the afternoon. Of course, sometimes we have to break that rule — we might have an important client meeting that has to happen in the morning — but in general, for internal team meetings, that is what we do.

The idea behind it is that people's best work usually comes when they can dive deep in their minds and into a state of flow. It's really hard to get into that state if you are continually being interrupted, or if you think, "I'm grooving right now on this creative project, but in fifteen minutes I'm going to have to come back up for a meeting." That gets in the way



for everybody. So it's really important for companies and for organizations to be thinking: How can I give my people lots of uninterrupted time?

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** We've talked about practices that can help introverts during the workday. I wonder if we can shift to the hours before and after work. Are there some habits or routines that introverts can incorporate into the beginning or the end of their day to sustain their energy?

**Susan Cain:** A lot of this is about mindset. People tend to feel on some very deep level that work should be done in conditions of displeasure. We don't think about, "How can I reward myself at every step of the day? How can I associate what I'm doing with pleasure?"

When I do my writing deep dive work, I always do it with a latte on hand and maybe a slice of banana bread, because it's really important for me to associate writing with conditions of pleasure. By now it's a Pavlovian reaction so that I associate writing with something happy-making even if I don't have those elements on hand.

We should do that all the time. We should be thinking, "Ok, how can I start my day with something I love?" For one person it's a run; for somebody else it might be ten minutes curled up with a book. We should be building in these positive experiences throughout the day.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Do you think that these pleasurable experiences are restorative on some level? If you've had a really stressful day, should you then go out of your way to set aside a period of time for reading a novel, because that's going to be critically important on those particular days?

**Susan Cain:** It's important in general but it is especially important on the difficult days.

There's one thing about just being tired and then giving yourself a rest, but then there's another duality there which is on the days that you're doing something that is making you anxious, it's really important to understand your physiology.

Biologists talk about how we have our Behavior Inhibition System, which is kind of the system that makes us stop when we're anxious. Then you've got your Go system, the Behavioral Activation System. When you're having those anxious moments and your body is telling you "Stop, Stop, Stop," like when you have to give a speech or something like that, the best thing to do is something that's super activating and pleasurable to you because your Go System can override your Stop System.

Let's say you love to run. The running itself gets your Go System going and that makes you happy. It gives you a kind of forward momentum that literally trumps and overrides your Stop System. So that's really the thing to think about when you're feeling a kind of negative, worrying type of energy. You want to think, "Okay, what's the thing I could do that makes me really happy and pumped up?" It might be dancing in your office if you can close the door. It doesn't really matter what the activity is. You want to get into that energized happy state.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** That's fascinating. What are some other examples? Let's say I don't like to dance. What are some other things I could do before that nerve-racking meeting?

**Susan Cain:** It's different for everybody. Physical activity is great if that works for you, whether it's dancing or running. It may be talking to a friend who makes you laugh, some-



body with whom you reliably have fun, uplifting conversations. Schedule a call with the friend on your way to the presentation. It will relax you to no end.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** One audience that's been especially receptive to the ideas in *Quiet* is the business community. In fact, you recently founded a company called the Quiet Leadership Institute to teach leaders how to empower the introverts in their organization. What recommendations do you have for people who manage introverts and want to see them succeed?

**Susan Cain:** A lot of companies come to us and say, "We have a very extroverted culture, but we've seen that the heart of our company are the creative people or the R&D people, who tend to be very introverted. We've got this group of people who are contributing so much but they feel that their work isn't being recognized because they're not big self-promoters, or they feel uncomfortable because they prefer to work in quieter conditions and we don't have that for them." That's often the genesis of why they bring us in.

As I said at the beginning, there are smaller tweaks that companies and organizations can make without having to overhaul everything. A lot of it is looking at the culture of meetings and figuring out strategies for blocking meetings so they do not overtake that people's day. A lot of it is about strategies for how you run those meetings so that you're actually getting the most out of everyone's brain.

A recent study out of the Kellogg School showed that in your typical meeting three people do 70% of the talking. That's crazy if you want to get people's ideas and solve problems and come up with new solutions. How are you going to do that if you're only hearing from three people?

We work with people to give them techniques for how to run their meetings differently. A lot of that is how to open lines of communication between introverts and extroverts so that it becomes socially acceptable to talk about what each person's needs are, and how each can accommodate the other. That's an important function that we play: simply coming in and making these discussions socially acceptable so that people can actually open up and talk about this stuff. Making adjustments like, "OK, this person really wants to put their head down for a few hours a day," or, "That person is an extrovert and really appreciates it when you check in daily to find out how they're doing."

Those simple acts of recognition go a long way to improve morale and people getting along with each other. It's crucial because we know from research that the most effective teams are a mix of introverts and extroverts. It's imperative for managers to figure out, "OK, how can I actually get my team functioning effectively?"

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** On the point of morale, a common approach to teambuilding at many workplaces involves taking everyone on an offsite retreat or inviting your team to happy hour. But those experiences are not likely to resonate with the introverts on a team. What do you think managers should do instead?

**Susan Cain:** That's a good question. I remember talking with a manager in Silicon Valley who told me that he had this great creative team of coders and they have done a great job and so the manager then rewarded them by saying, "You get to have a big night out on the town with lots of drinks!" And the coders were just like, "Ugh, we don't want to do this." So you have to really think about who your people are and make sure you're structuring off-sites and such in ways that work for people.



We've been looking at this at Quiet Leadership Institute and we're starting to structure off-sites where everybody goes on a hike together. Doing something around a shared activity that's quieter and doesn't depend on small talk and socializing, where everybody's got an activity that they're doing together actually helps a lot. And making sure that you're giving people breaks and that there isn't an expectation that people are supposed to be together twenty four seven. The simple act of stating that and of making it acceptable goes a really long way.





## Practical Tips from Susan Cain

- To perform at your best, you first need to take your personality into account.
- Introverts benefit from quieter, less stimulating environments, and occasional solitude. If you are introverted, be sure to schedule downtime over the course of the day.
- Extroverts prefer frequent social interactions. If you are extroverted, avoid working alone for extended periods and make meeting and talking with others a priority.
- Find your restorative niche: a physical space or an activity that allows you to restock your energy after a draining task.
- When possible, schedule a few minutes of downtime between meetings to allow yourself time to digest what you've learned.
- To sustain your energy throughout the day, look for ways of *pairing* work activities with pleasurable experiences, like drinking a warm cup of tea or listening to music.
- Block out a few hours of uninterrupted time on your calendar so that you can bring your full attention to your work.
- The next time you feel anxious before a major presentation, instead of trying to relax, try doing something you find exciting and enjoyable.





## Christine Carter, Ph.D. on How to Be Happier at Work

A sociologist and happiness expert at UC Berkeley's Greater Good Science Center, Christine Carter, Ph.D., is the author of *The Sweet Spot: How to Find Your Groove at Work and Home and Raising Happiness*.

A sought-after keynote speaker, Dr. Carter also writes an award-winning blog, which is frequently syndicated on the Huffington Post, PsychologyToday.com, PositivelyPositive.com, Medium.com, and several other websites.

Dr. Carter has been quoted or featured in *The New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *USA Today*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *The Washington Post*, the *Boston Globe*, as well as *Good Housekeeping*, *Parenting*, *Martha Stewart's Whole Living*, *Fitness*, *Redbook*, and dozens of other publications.

She has appeared on the *Oprah Winfrey Show*, the *Dr. Oz Show*, the *TODAY* show, the *Rachael Ray Show*, *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, *CBS Sunday Morning*, *ABC World News with Diane Sawyer*, PBS, as well as NPR and BBC Radio.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Christine, I love the advice in your new book, *The Sweet Spot*. Before we dive in and discuss your many valuable tips, let's take a second to examine some of the big themes you present. You write that there's a tipping point between a stressful life and a flourishing one. What do you mean by that?

**Christine Carter, Ph.D.:** That's based on Barbara Fredrickson's research on positive emotions. It's where we sort of tip over between what she calls flourishing and languishing. Flourishing would be defined as having a ratio of three or more positive emotions to every one negative emotion. Languishing would be the opposite, where we are extremely stressed out. It is a psychological fact that something happens in our brain when we gather a critical mass of positive emotions or experiences. We become more creative, more verbally fluent, and our best selves emerge.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So, we really need to take responsibility and ownership about cre-



ating that ratio?

**Christine Carter, Ph.D.:** It's something that we definitely have control over and it's not as hard as it might sound.

It's fairly typical to say, "Well, I definitely don't have a ratio of positive emotions of three to one or more." For most people, it's one positive for one negative. Only about 17% of the population is said to be flourishing past that tipping point. But it is something that is easier to access than most people realize.

You can create a collection of things that you know are going to foster a positive emotion or experience as something to draw on when you're going through a tough time. I have poems all over my house that I love. They provide a sense of inspiration for me. Inspiration is a positive emotion. I also know that throwing the ball for my dog is going to provide some joy. I have funny animal videos bookmarked on my computer. We all have things that fill us with positive emotions like gratitude, confidence, hope, even a sense of contentedness or awe. We need to know what those things are and how to foster them for ourselves.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I love that idea of having a positive emotion playlist. It's easy to fall into the trap of thinking that I'll feel good when my circumstances change. If you proactively choose to do things that have made you happy in the past, you'll tend to be happy in the present. If I've had a bad day, and then I force myself to go swimming, that tends to lift my mood. There are other ways we can do that, right?

**Christine Carter, Ph.D.:** Absolutely! You've hit on something really important. Research shows that human beings are actually quite terrible at predicting what will make us happy in the future, but we can be great at recognizing what has fostered a positive emotion for us in the past. It's really important to think beyond just happiness.

In our culture we really tend to confuse happiness with pleasure or gratification. When I'm talking about happiness, I'm not actually talking about gratification. I'm talking about a positive emotion. We have a wide range of positive emotions available to us. I've mentioned a bunch of them already.

Thinking of them in categories can them more accessible. When we're thinking about positive emotions about the past, what makes us feel thankful is a sense of gratitude or appreciation. Happiness is in the present; so are engagement, passion, contentedness, and calm. For the future, there's confidence, hope, optimism, and faith. These are powerful, positive emotions.

Then there are the global emotions that we study at the Greater Good Science Center, at U.C. Berkeley —awe, inspiration, and elevation. These are very accessible emotions for some people. Our most powerful positive emotions are about other people, like love and compassion. We don't often think of compassion as being a really powerful positive emotion, but it is; it's stunningly powerful even though it involves thinking about the suffering of another person.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** In the early part of your book, you talk about the Chinese symbol for busy and why we should pay attention to its literal translation. What do the Chinese know about busyness that many of us overlook?

**Christine Carter, Ph.D.:** In ancient Chinese, the symbol for busyness is comprised of two



components: one that means heart or soul, and the other that means killing. So it's something that deadens.

This runs counter to the way our culture sees busyness. We see it as a sign of importance, a sign of significance, and we live in this culture where the most important people seem to be the most pressed for time. Multitasking is valued above everything. What is multitasking? It's extreme busyness, having many things going on all at once.

It's a huge myth that busyness is a sign of significance, importance, or even productivity. We know intuitively that this is true. We all know people who are not productive, not doing meaningful work, but claim to be extremely busy and important. They're overwhelmed.

It's probably even more important to think about how the reverse is true. I had this very profound experience of speaking at Wisdom 2.0 this year. I was surrounded by these incredible wisdom teachers, people who are doing incredibly meaningful, significant, and fulfilling work — making the world a much better place — and none of them were busy. They all had very predictable, concrete habits of stillness, the opposite of busyness.

We know that this is true intuitively. We can look around us and see that busyness cannot be equated with productivity, importance, or meaning in life. We also know that this is true scientifically. We see that the busier a person is, the more likely they are to be approaching what researchers call “cognitive overload.” When we are experiencing cognitive overload, everything we need to do and all our internal resources are hindered. It becomes difficult to make decisions, resist temptation, or remember social information that could make it easier for us to collaborate with a team. We have a hard time organizing our thoughts, thinking clearly, or coming up with innovative solutions. We have a very hard time adapting to change. Not only are we more stressed out and less happy, but we're also worse at our jobs.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** A lot of people would be surprised to hear that you occasionally start your day by watching television. How does watching TV help you get off to a good start?

**Christine Carter, Ph.D.:** I do that in winter when I exercise. I'll watch *Downton Abbey* or *Friday Night Lights* in the morning; it motivates me to get on the treadmill. Here's the key to that: I don't let myself watch my “exercise show” at any other time of the day. I've paired something that I am naturally motivated to do, which tells you something about my motivation. I'm easy to motivate, if I pair something I like to do with something that I'm just not that motivated to do. Walking or running on the treadmill is not that fun for me. There's no intrinsic joy in that, so I watch TV while doing it.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** There are broader applications for that strategy, right? One that involves finding things that are good for us but that we might not enjoy, and pairing them with something that is enjoyable.

**Christine Carter, Ph.D.:** Exactly. It's especially interesting coming off the busyness question. I'm a huge advocate of not multitasking and doing just one thing at a time to avoid cognitive overload. This is a rare case where I think multitasking is a great idea.

When I talk about avoiding multitasking, it's about cognitive effects. We can't run parallel apps in our brain at the same time. We can't think about two problems at once; our brain just switches back and forth rapidly between them. But we *can* do one cognitive thing and



one physical thing. I don't really care how well I exercise or how well I fold laundry while watching television. Cognitive overload is not an issue in these examples. But I get called out on the multitasking thing all the time.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** You're hitting a really important point, which is that we perhaps have gone a little bit too far by saying multitasking is always bad. The key is to do something physical and something mental together, as long as the two don't require your full attention.

**Christine Carter, Ph.D.:** Exactly, and to just be aware of when multitasking is actually going to make you less productive. It's very draining and energy inefficient for your brain to be working on a problem and be constantly interrupted by emails. If you're doing something that requires brilliance, focus, concentration, or creativity, just do that one thing.

I could even go deeper on that because I also work at a treadmill desk. I'm on it right now. It's not exercise, and I'm not actually accomplishing more than one thing. The movement helps my creative process. It generates human growth hormones and brings more blood flow to my brain. When I start to feel the creative insight hit, I will stop the treadmill and be as still as I possibly can. I stop because using my motor cortex—the part of my brain responsible for keeping me standing up and walking—takes energy; I want to dedicate all resources to the creative part of my brain and not divert my energy.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So let me get this straight: You are on the treadmill desk, you're walking, you get an idea, you stop, and then you write it down and then go back on the treadmill. Is that right?

**Christine Carter, Ph.D.:** I don't usually turn the treadmill back on, honestly. I'll be writing and get on a roll. I have this whole method for getting into that zone. I'll often just stay there and keep walking, but occasionally a bunch of insights will start coming to me from that subconscious part of my brain and it goes into high gear; especially if I'm trying to come up with an innovative solution to something that I've been working on, and then I will press stop. I'm already writing, so I stop the treadmill and try and quiet my body as much as possible so I don't do anything that taxes any other part of my brain.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Very interesting.

**Christine Carter, Ph.D.:** I also work with noise canceling headphones and music. That can really do wonders for your energy. There's a reason why elite athletes always have playlists. There's a lot of evidence that music can increase your energy level and your concentration. I turn the music off when those insights hit, though; that's another part of my brain that I don't want taxed when everything is coming together.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So the music can help you find the insights, but then you'll turn that off and then focus on getting the insights down on paper?

**Christine Carter, Ph.D.:** Exactly. The music helps me get into the zone; that is where the insights really start to occur

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Is there a particular style of music or song?

**Christine Carter, Ph.D.:** Yes, I play around with this a lot. I use Pandora and I've created my own station. I sort of honed it to where it starts off just as instrumental classical pia-



no and then adds in movie soundtracks or anything that is upbeat and high energy, but without lyrics. It has maybe twenty-five songs, so I've been listening to the same stuff for a really long time. I keep doing it because it's become a trigger for my unconscious brain. I'm able to get into a state of very deep concentration very quickly.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** You recommend delegating as much of our day as possible to autopilot, so that we can conserve our limited mental energy for decisions that truly matter. How do we do that?

**Christine Carter, Ph.D.:** I was just talking about one. A good routine or an actual habit is dependent on having a trigger, how you tell your brain to go into it, and then the actual routine occurs and then the reward. To get into a flow state, my trigger is having a ritual before I start the treadmill. I boil water for coffee or tea, even in the summer when it's really hot ; it's part of the ritual. I don't drink that much hot tea, but I boil the water and I go to the bathroom. I'm like a toddler going on a road trip, right? I get a snack, bring a glass of water to my desk, and clear off my desk so that I don't have to look at dishes or open books or pens or anything. Then I open the document that I'm going to need, quit email completely, and close any open windows. I've basically insulated myself against distractions. Finally, I put headphones on and start the playlist. I then press go on the treadmill and essentially chain myself to my desk.

So, the trigger is that little ritual that starts with boiling the water for the tea. That's why, even when it's hot and I don't want tea, I still have to do it because that is the first cue to my brain. The last cue to my brain is the music and being in front of the clear space. The habit could be much simpler. The trigger could be a time of day or it could be something happening, like somebody cutting you off in traffic. Your trigger could be anything. It just needs to be the same every time.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So it's a recurring event that you then anchor a set of behaviors around?

**Christine Carter, Ph.D.:** Exactly. It's a cue for the set of behaviors. And then the last piece of it is that it is a reward.

We are really good at rewarding ourselves in our culture; we're not as good at rewarding ourselves in a way that helps for habit formation. If they want to get into an exercise habit, most Americans or most Westerners will think, "Okay, I need a reward." If they exercise every day for a month they're going to take themselves out to a big meal or buy themselves a cute new pair of shoes or whatever they find rewarding. This does not work. The reward has to be a paired activity, like we were discussing earlier. It has to cue the reward center in your brain while you are finishing that activity.

Getting into the zone when I'm writing is a reward in itself. The sense of accomplishment that comes from just being able to write quickly and with ease, that sweet spot, is rewarding enough. For exercising, I pretty much need and want *Modern Family* or *Downtown Abbey*. For little habits, it could just be a little "yay me!" to ourselves. I got that from B.J. Fog at Stanford, who has a really great website to help people get into habits. That tiny "I did it!" is enough to tell your brain to make a little note to self, "Ooh, that's a good behavior to repeat." That little hit of dopamine that activates that reward center in your brain is all you need.



**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** What if you don't like the work that you're doing? You like to write, so having a chapter that's ready to be published is a reward for you, but what if you have to do some tasks that are just not all that enjoyable? Is there some kind of reward that you can link to achieving that behavior that maybe isn't quite as intrinsic?

**Christine Carter, Ph.D.:** There are lots of things that I have to do that I don't like. They aren't as intrinsically rewarding to me as my craft, so I group the tasks together. I break them down into things that I can do in less than ten minutes. Any more than ten minutes and I can't create that sense of momentum that is gratifying to me.

We're not necessarily going for a positive emotion; we're going for gratification. The sense of accomplishment is just checking things off the list. I can get into a flow state afterwards, but just powering through the list gives me the rewarding feeling.

A lot of people are like this. People tell me they just love making lists so they can cross items off the list. You need a very satisfying mechanism for crossing something off the list. I used to do this and it's very satisfying to break those things up and do one thing at a time so that I can get to the completion part of it. I'm not trying to check my email while I make an appointment for my daughter's vaccination. I'm just checking these boring things off my list one thing at a time. That's good for action items that you have to get through and don't necessarily enjoy. If your job is inherently not fun for you, I hope you find a different job, but sometimes you can't.

The second trick is to look for your social value. To figure out where you bring meaning to other people. Not how you're benefiting from the job — you might not be benefiting at all — but it's imperative in any job to find your meaning for other people. What value, what impact do you have on other people?

I'm not saying that a lawyer that hates their job should move to a non-profit. I'm saying to understand how you're helping people in the job that you are already doing. Talking to other people about the impact that you could potentially have on them can be beneficial.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** This is one of the things making a real difference for organizations: putting employees in touch with the end user. It allows employees to discover for themselves how a product or service has benefited others, often in ways that they haven't realized.

Simply having that knowledge around work helps. And even if you do know, it's nice to be reminded. In many jobs, it feels like you're just working in an email factory. It's rewarding to know that you really do help people.

**Christine Carter, Ph.D.:** Right. And this is the difference between working in an email factory and having an effect on other people: simply knowing the effect that you're having on those other people.

This all came from Adam Grant's research on people doing really boring or very hard jobs. Lifeguarding is actually very boring. It seems glamorous if you're a teenager, but it's hard to keep people in those jobs. Having lifeguards read a paragraph about the lives that people before them saved helps them to stay in their job.

Another example includes people working in call centers making cold calls for fundrais-



ers. They were motivated by reading a paragraph about somebody that benefited from fundraisers, even if it was totally removed, completely indirect, and wasn't even the same fundraiser.

Strangely, reading a paragraph about how the job you're doing has benefited the person actually doing the job does nothing. That's really interesting to me because we're in a sort of "me, me, me" culture. Like, what am I going to get out of this? What goes on my resume? That doesn't lead to the emergence of our most intelligent, productive, and joyful selves, though.

So thinking about how you will benefit will not increase your productivity or brilliance. However, thinking about how *other* people benefit *will* increase those things. Arianna Huffington would call this the eulogy strategy. Instead of thinking about what you're going to put on your resume, think about how a particular behavior will affect what people say about you when you're gone.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** You also recommend eliminating the junk stimuli in our lives. What are junk stimuli and how do I get rid of them?

**Christine Carter, Ph.D.:** Junk stimuli can be any input causing you to have to take in your environment through a filter. Often those filters are filled with junk stimuli.

Think about junk mail. We get junk emails and we get junk snail mail, and we get sales calls in the middle of dinner. Anything that is going to make the brain filter can be junk, so filtering out that junk ahead of time is something worth doing! You only have so many resources to process what you can take in, so take in only the things that are really relevant to you.

The number one thing is turning off message alerts. I don't need to know right now when I'm getting an email; that's just going to distract me. I don't need to know if I've gotten a text. I don't need to hear my phone ring. I don't even need to hear it vibrate somewhere else. That all just pulls resources. It can be anything auditory or visual, any kind of clutter in your environment that distracts your limited resources. There are entire industries, very powerful industries, built around your attention. People and companies used to just want our time and money; now they want our attention, too. Building a fortress around your attention can be very helpful.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I did an interview today where they asked me: "What are people supposed to do at work when they genuinely need to be on-call to respond to a client requests?" I'm interested in your perspective. What do you recommend in those instances where we just can't afford to turn off our phone or email?

**Christine Carter, Ph.D.:** No job can expect you to have your email or your phone on twenty-four hours a day. I guess some of them do, but that's really unhealthy. You're responding to email and calls and trying to do your best, but you can't do your best work on any project that requires concentration. You may get through tasks that you can do in three minutes between emails or between calls.

When you turn off your phone and email, you are able to sleep or connect with your family and do tasks that fulfill your potential in the world. It's another psychological fact, however much we might not like it. We might want to be like computers that can just run 24/7,



but we aren't. We're animals. We're more like an oak tree than an iPhone. We need to obey those laws of nature.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** One of those laws of nature is the need for social connections. There's been a lot of research over the last few decades showing that, when feel connected to the people around us, we are a lot healthier, happier, and productive. This can be difficult outside of work. Maintaining your connection with friends beyond just baseball is hard, especially if you have kids or work for long periods of time.

You have this great idea in your book that you call finding friendship efficiencies; how do we do that?

**Christine Carter, Ph.D.:** I can't remember where I learned that term. I didn't create it.

I like to hike for exercise several afternoons a week. Since I moved to Marin, one of my friends has a flexible enough schedule that she can go for a hike with me. I'm getting my exercise and I'm also seeing my friend, which makes that activity much more joyful for me.

Another example is that I have to eat lunch, and I really work hard to take a break at lunchtime. I concentrate on just eating, so that's a perfect time to meet with a friend. I have a friend who lives far away but in the same time zone, so I call her and we eat lunch together.

That's what I mean by friendship efficiency. Another real efficiency—I would call this connection efficiency—is looking for people in your environment that you can connect with.

Parents do this really innately when they become friends with the parents of their children's friends, especially when their kids are really little. They become friends with the people that are dropping off or picking up their kids at the same time as them.

We can all learn the name of the person who checks out our groceries, or the name of the barista at the coffee shop, and chat with them a little bit. Or just simply make eye contact and smile at the people in your environment; that will create a real sense of connection for your nervous system. We are clannish and tribal people and feel much more relaxed and happy when we sense the people around us. When we don't feel threatened, it changes our entire outlook on life. Taking time to see the people who are already around us can be a particular help.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** A lot of people feel awkward talking to the guy at the gas station or the grocery checkout person, but research shows that, although you think that's going to be an awkward interaction, you're probably going to be in a better mood after having done it. Getting into that habit can really help.

**Christine Carter, Ph.D.:** Remember that it also has value for the other person. In a research study I read, they found that it puts you in a better mood and puts them in a better mood. It's a very unambiguous finding. It's not that the majority of people feel better; everybody feels better.

There are small studies that have been done about people thinking that they won't like to be talked to on the train? People assume that others won't want to make polite small talk on the train. But then somebody does it and afterwards, they report being in a better mood and having liked it. This is a way to make yourself happier, but you're also bringing value to your community.



**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Another recommendation you have for maintaining a positive outlook involves finding activities you don't enjoy and then looking for the minimum effective dose. I really like this idea. How do you find the minimum effective dose?

**Christine Carter, Ph.D.:** This is sort of combating the “more is better” myth that we have in our culture. We live in a “more is more” kind of a world where we assume that more connections on social media and “more work to earn more money” so that we can “buy more stuff” is going to be better. Of course, when we take a step back and think about this, we realize that it is not true. More is not necessarily better and we often already have enough.

The minimum effective dose is my mantra for when I feel like I am approaching toxicity in any of my activities and more is definitely not better. I look for how I could do less and still be effective. Of course I got this term from doctors. Doctors always try to give the minimum effective dose of any drug to a patient that will create healing. We talked about reducing the time spent on email, but I do this with everything. The amount of time I spend exercising, helping my kids with their homework, attending meetings, and even going into the office at UC Berkeley. I did this with absolutely everything and it took some testing. I had to find that place where I was still very effective, but doing less.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** How do you fight the urge to do it perfectly? I mean, it's one thing to know that it's theoretically better to use the minimum effective dose, but when you're actually doing the activity, a lot of people—and I can tell you I'm one of them—really want to get it as perfect as possible and you need to fight it. So what tips do you have around eliminating the need for perfection?

**Christine Carter, Ph.D.:** I am a recovering perfectionist myself, a former overachiever. I see perfectionism as a particular form of unhappiness and it's just the sense that nothing is ever good enough. You get over it by accepting that nothing will ever be perfect and that the beauty in life comes from our imperfections.

I have lots and lots of mantras around “good enough is actually good enough.” This is making space. I know I can continue to toil away at something, but it's not going to get that much better and the costs are so high — to my stress levels, to my happiness, and to my productivity in other arenas. I just constantly remind myself that perfectionism is not an effective strategy.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I heard at an interview with you where you talked about exercising in the morning and there was a term that you used. I think it was something like “better than nothing,” but catchier; what was it?

**Christine Carter, Ph.D.:** No, that was it. That's my Better Than Nothing workout. It's a part of the minimal effective dose. This came from joining a lot of gyms and employing personal trainers, trying to do some strength training and all that. I always had the sense that I needed to do more strength training and threw a lot of money down the tubes for elaborate workouts that I could do to become stronger. Then the next day I'm sore or I'm traveling, so it never really worked. So I thought, “I'm going to find a minimum effective dose of strength training.”

Here's what it is: twenty pushups in the morning, twenty-five squats — kettlebell squats if I'm not traveling — and a one-minute plank. That is the only strength training that I'm doing. I don't do anything else. I'm definitely much stronger than I've ever been. Small things



done consistently are much more powerful than big things done sporadically.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I want to read this quote that appears in your book and I thought was really powerful. “Busyness is not a marker of intelligence, importance, or success. Taken to an extreme, it is much more likely a marker of conformity or powerlessness or fear.” I raise this because in your book you talk about how you’ve managed to break the cycle of busyness in your own life and I wonder if you can share how you’ve done it.

**Christine Carter, Ph.D.:** One of the most powerful things that I did was I changed my herd. As I said earlier, people are really clannish and tribal; we tend to follow a herd even if it’s a very unconventional herd. Most people are looking to other people for their standards, and that’s why our behaviors are so contagious.

When I started my career working in marketing at a consumer products company twenty-five years ago, I was following a very corporate herd. I didn’t need to be, so I changed. That corporate herd works a certain amount of set hours and is all about working harder, not smarter. I realized that great writers, great engineers, and creators tend to do things very differently. I did a bunch of research on the different work rituals and routines of very creative people who are very productive — people who write a lot of books or who are able to write a lot of code. By doing that, I started to think of myself as one of those people instead, and that shifted everything for me.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Would you then recommend that other people who are finding themselves in a world where they’re not getting enough done, and working in a way that isn’t ideal, find better role models?

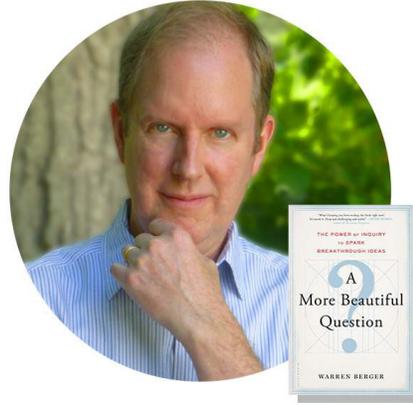
**Christine Carter, Ph.D.:** Yes, absolutely. Surround yourself with people who are doing it the way that you want to do it. Find out what they are doing right. Who are the people who are both productive and joyful? You have lots of role models, people who are working incredibly hard and doing very good work. I would suggest that if they don’t have time to enjoy the life that they’ve worked so hard to create, they are not doing their best work.

Surround yourself with people who are fulfilling their potential. People who are working in such a way that they are allowing their most productive, most creative, most intelligent, and most joyful self to emerge, and do what they’re doing.



## Practical Tips from Christine Carter, Ph.D.

- To stay consistently positive, you need to have three positive experiences for every one negative experience. To achieve this ratio, consider creating a “playlist” of activities that will put you in a good mood (for example, taking your dog for a run, or listening to classical music). Refer to it when you are having a difficult day.
- Multitasking isn’t always bad. Combining a physical activity (like doing the dishes) with a mental activity (like idea-generation) can be a very effective use of your time. It’s blending two physical tasks or two mental tasks that you should avoid.
- Movement helps the creative process. The next time you’re stuck at work, try taking a fifteen-minute walk.
- For a more meaningful life, pursue a eulogy (rather than a resume) strategy. Instead of always thinking about what you’re going to put on your resume, think about how your actions will influence what people say about you when you’re gone.
- Look for junk stimuli in your workspace and do your best to get rid of it. Turn off alerts, vibrations, and use noise-cancelling headphones when possible.
- Seek out friendship efficiencies: common interests with friends or colleagues that allow you to engage in activities you enjoy while also building your social network.
- Try pairing tasks you’re avoiding (e.g. exercise) with activities you enjoy (e.g. watching a show you really enjoy). This will motivate you to get started.
- Resist perfectionism. Accept that nothing will ever be perfect and that the beauty in life comes from our imperfections.
- Find the social value of the work that you’re doing. Seeing the bigger picture will make your hours at the office feel more meaningful.
- Try to increase the amount of time you spend with people who are fulfilling their potential. Just being around them will make you more likely to fulfill yours.



## Warren Berger on Asking Smarter Questions

Warren Berger is an expert on design thinking and innovation. He has studied hundreds of the world's leading innovators, designers, red-hot start-ups, and creative thinkers to analyze how they ask game-changing questions, solve problems, and create new possibilities. Warren believes that questioning leads to innovation, can help you be more successful in your career, and can spark change in our businesses and lives.

Warren currently writes for *Fast Company* and *Harvard Business Review*, and was a longtime contributor at *Wired* magazine and *The New York Times*.

He has appeared on NBC's *Today Show*, *ABC World News*, CNN, and as an expert on NPR's *All Things Considered*. As a speaker, Warren has keynoted at the CUSP Conference, the Fuse Conference, the Design Thinkers Conference, the International Women's Forum in Rome, and TEDx Portland. He has also spoken at in-house conferences hosted by General Electric, MassMutual, Citrix, and Microsoft, among others.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.** You make the case that one of the most underutilized and powerful tools that knowledge workers have is the ability to ask better questions. How can asking questions make me better at my job?

**Warren Berger:** Questioning gets us into the habit of challenging assumptions. We operate on assumptions, habit, and automatic pilot. Whatever our job or career may be, we're used to doing things the same way. It is the habitual way of behaving. When someone is in the habit of questioning, they step back and ask questions like, "Why am I doing things this way? What's really going on with our customers right now? What's happening in our marketplace?" Stepping back and asking fundamental questions about your work or your life, that ability to question and to be curious about things, is a natural skill that we all have. Unfortunately, we tend to shut it down over time. My argument is that we need to rekindle that questioning mind and bring it to the forefront of our daily life.

The thing to keep in mind is that you obviously can't be questioning all the time. We have



to live our lives, get things done, do our job, and meet deadlines. It's often necessary to operate on automatic pilot. Good questioners force themselves to periodically step back from routine and ask those questions.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** It's an interesting shift in mindset. We often expect our leaders to have that confidence and conviction that everything they're doing is correct. You're saying you don't want that.

**Warren Berger:** There's a big shift going on right now in the leadership space. A lot of the creative leaders are recognizing this. Steve Jobs was at the forefront of this style of leadership. A lot of tech companies have this progressive mindset. They're realizing that the business environment has gotten so complex, and things are changing so quickly, that they have to be in this questioning, exploring, and discovering mode.

Leaders don't really have all the answers. I'm not sure they ever did, but they used to think they did. It was common for leaders to present themselves as the answer people, someone who knew best. Now, leaders are seeing the power in admitting that they don't have the answers, but they are searching for the answers. They're constantly learning, exploring, and discovering. It's a new style of leadership. It's an interesting combination of humility and confidence. You have to be humble enough to admit that you don't have the answers, but confident enough to say it to the people following and counting on you.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** That's a great point. I have found that, when you're asked a question in a meeting, rather than pretending that you have an answer when you don't, it can be more impressive if you simply say, "Let me find out." That attitude of curiosity garners respect. In some ways, people relate better to leaders who admit that they don't know, rather than ones who are in a position of knowing all the time, because in some way that's intimidating and it's the opposite of what contributes to close, healthy relationships.

**Warren Berger:** There's a few things that happen when a leader shows that attitude of questioning. One of the really important things is that it models that behavior for the rest of the company. It says to everyone that, if I'm the leader and I can admit that I don't have all the answers and I can admit that I'm in learning mode, then surely the rest of you can too. It has a ripple effect on an organization. People who were afraid to ask questions now have this model of the leader saying: It doesn't make you look bad. It's actually showing your confidence and your strength when you are able to ask questions in front of other people.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Great point. One of the things you note in your book is that we ask hundreds of questions a day as children, but then we enter school and the questioning suddenly stops. What happens?

**Warren Berger:** This is an interesting phenomenon. I was really surprised when I discovered this. Teachers are aware that it's an issue in education, that questioning seems to decline as kids go through school. I've seen research that shows student engagement levels declining right along with the questioning. It's a chicken and egg situation. Are engagement levels going down because they're not asking questions, or are they not asking questions because they're less engaged?

There's a strong correlation between questioning and being engaged and involved. When kids are in that questioning mode at age four or five, their brains are in an incredibly ex-



pensive state. They're with their parents and feel comfortable asking their mother or father questions. It's a perfect environment for questioning. They go to school while they're going through some changes in their brains as they get older and consolidating what they're learning. There are also social pressures with new kids around in a strange environment.

I also think we have to look at our education system. It's very answers-based. In general, you don't get rewarded for asking a good question; you get rewarded for memorizing and repeating back the answers. Kids pick up on that very early. They figure out where the rewards are, and they're getting the signal that questioning is a distraction. If kids get the message that asking questions is a distraction, then they're going to move away from questioning. They're not going to see it as valuable important.

I would love for kids to know that the great discoveries and things that they love, like iPhones, came from questioning. They came from people asking questions about what exists, what doesn't exist, and what might exist. If more kids understood that, maybe questioning become cool.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I'm just nodding away as you're speaking because I'm reminded of a chapter in my book, *The Best Place to Work*, on how rewarding intelligent failure seeds future success. There's a story about a college professor that sets aside 5% of his grades towards students writing down the biggest mistake they made this semester and what they learned from that mistake. It develops a reward structure around intelligent failure, promoting this idea that a perfect grade depends on more than just having the right answers. You actually need to fail and you need to do so intelligently. We're trained from a very early age that right answers are rewarded, not the right questions. Perhaps what we need to do is have more assignments around asking questions and rewarding that, instead of answers.

**Warren Berger:** Absolutely. There's a great group called The Right Question Institute. They have developed a model for classrooms where the class is broken up into groups. A problem is put up on the blackboard and the kids ask questions about that subject or that problem. They can't have answers or opinions. They have to formulate questions around the idea that's being discussed. When you shift to encouraging questioning, the kids really get into it and the goal is to ask a good question. That's a good model for what has to happen. There has to be this flip, where questioning is seen as something to strive for, as opposed to a secondary thing.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** The title of your book is *A More Beautiful Question*. I'm curious why you chose the word "beautiful" as opposed to a more intelligent question or a more insightful question.

**Warren Berger:** It really was an accident of fate. I was thinking about this book and how important questioning is for researchers and innovators. I was writing a lot for *Wired* magazine and interviewing really creative and innovative people. I found that they were always questioning. One of the innovators I interviewed was a designer named Bruce Now. He would talk a lot about stupid questions. He said, "You have to ask, you have to be the one who is willing to ask the stupid questions."

So for a while I had the idea of stupid questions as a theme that I might explore in a book, but there are such negative connotations to that. So I thought, "I'm going to have to always overcome the negative." Then I saw a great quote by the poet E.E. Cummings: "Always the beautiful answer, who asks a more beautiful question." I love that quote, particularly the



end part of it, "...a more beautiful question." I thought, "That sounds like a book title."

Then I started thinking that there is something beautiful about a question that brings about change. That is the kind of questioning I wanted to focus on in the book, the kind of question that can cause people to shift their whole way of thinking. The kind of question that can change an industry or change a company or change the way we live. There's something very powerful and beautiful about that. It's more than just a smart question. Smart questions are great, but there's another level that a question can go to, when it becomes transformational. That is a really special kind of question to me, and that is a good thing to strive for. I'm not saying those are the only good questions or we should always be asking those kind of questions. But that's like the Holy Grail. If we can get to that kind of question, then we really have done something.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** What's an example of a beautiful question?

**Warren Berger:** I have a lot of them in the book, and the best ones were almost accidental. I'll give you a classic story that involves the Polaroid instant camera. According to the founder Edwin Land, the instant camera came about when he was taking a photograph of his four-year-old daughter on vacation. He took the photograph and started to walk away, but his daughter wanted to see the results. He said, "No, I have to send the film out." Her question to him, a very innocent child's question, was, "Why do we have to wait for the picture?" That question was so powerful that it caused him to step back from his assumptions. He was an optics expert but he wasn't in the camera business. Polaroid was doing other work at the time. He stepped back and said, "That's a great question. Why do we have to wait for the picture? What if you could have a camera where you didn't have to wait? What if there was a way to bring the dark room into the camera?" And that just changed his whole way of thinking. Four years later in New York, he unveiled the first Polaroid instant camera.

The book has a lot of examples like that — questions that were so powerful that they caused this shift and suddenly momentum formed behind the question. Next thing you know, the world changed in some way. That's what a beautiful question does. Companies like Airbnb, Netflix, etc., started with the founders asking that kind of a question. In Airbnb's case it was, "Why is it that people can't get a bed at a certain time? And all these other people that have an extra room or an extra bed, why hasn't someone put these two things together?" There's a multitude of examples in the tech world and innovation space of people asking those kinds of questions. When they do, it puts ideas in motion and ends in an amazing, beautiful transformation.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** What are some practical things that I can do to get myself asking more beautiful questions?

**Warren Berger:** It starts with observation. I've noticed that these questions do two things that seem almost opposite of each other. They lean in so they can see what is going on and get a lot of understanding. Then they're able to step back and remove themselves and look at it in a fresh way, like a four-year-old child. They say, "Now I'm going to ask really fundamental questions or 'what ifs?' or imaginative questions." They have that ability to do both of those things: go deep in and then step back and look at the problem in a totally fresh way.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Many of us feel like we're leaning in all the time. We're at work and



we're thinking about our assignments, and we're mulling them over in the shower, on the weekend, as we're driving our kids to gymnastics. Do you have any tips around stepping back?

**Warren Berger:** It's hard to say; people do it all different ways. A lot of stepping back involves removing yourself a little bit from the daily grind. It's similar to why we get ideas when we're off on a walk in the woods or on vacation. Edwin Land was on vacation when that happened to him. There is something to be said for the idea that you need to create a little bit of distance from the problem that you're working on.

I think of it as stages. There's an initial stage where you're immersed in the problem and coming to understand and learn about it. That's the "why stage." You're trying to figure out why it's a problem. Why hasn't anyone solved it before? There's another stage where you need to remove yourself from that kind of intense focus on the problem, allow yourself to let it percolate, maybe go for a walk or go to a museum. The second part of questioning happens at a distance from the problem.

Whatever you can do to create that kind of distance is great. Something happens in our brain when we step back. We should allow ourselves to and let our brain do what it does best.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** It helps to know that there's research backing that up. We've had those experiences where we struggle with a problem and we go off to the gym or we take a shower and that's when the solution comes. But it's hard to do it in practice. When you are struggling with a problem, it's difficult to let go, to allow yourself to step away from the computer and go off on that walk, whether it's in the middle of a day or even on the weekend. What can we do to make sure that happens, so that we're not immersed in problems in a way that gets us stuck?

**Warren Berger:** What helped me to do that kind of thinking was to have a place where I could retreat for a few hours, unplugged from technology. It was very quiet. I was cut off from distraction.

Distraction is one of the big issues today. Lateral thinking and connecting ideas tends to happen best when you are in a quieter situation and not dealing with distractions or things that need to be dealt with right away. It's like we have two brains. We have the practical, get it done kind of brain that our current environment tends to keep engaged all the time because you always have to answer something. This other part of our brain that tends to be more creative is being neglected.

What we need to do is find ways to create that detachment from the immediate concerns so that we can do that deeper thinking and reflection. That is when we might ask some really creative questions like, "What if we could solve this other problem that we're not dealing with it all, this much more creative issue that we're not dealing with?" You need to create space for that kind of question.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** One of the fascinating points that you uncovered in your research is that non-experts are actually better at asking these sorts of big picture questions than experts. Why is that the case, and what do you do about it if you yourself are an expert?

**Warren Berger:** There's a great quote from Frank Lloyd Wright, who said: "An expert is



someone who has stopped wondering because he already knows he's right." This is the problem that experts have. When you develop a certain amount of expertise in your field, you start to make assumptions. You decide that you've figured out the best way to do this job. "I've been doing it ten years and I know exactly how it should be done." When people develop that attitude, they cut themselves off from new approaches and new ideas.

This is particularly an issue now because, with the way things are changing, expertise is actually worth less than it used to be. In the past, you could coast on your expertise for a pretty long time. In a time of exponential change, jobs are constantly being updated and impacted by new technology. If you are in this mindset that you have figured it out and don't have to adapt, you're going to get into trouble because how it was done yesterday is not how it will be done today or tomorrow.

Experts realize that they have to be learning, updating, adapting, and asking questions all the time. You could think of experts as people who have gotten out of the habit of questioning, but they can easily pick up the habit again. Expertise gives you this substance behind your questioning that can be really great, but you have to overcome that trap of expertise.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Is it simply a matter of putting more effort into asking questions?

**Warren Berger:** Yes it is. It's all about effort. It starts with being conscious of the importance of questioning. That's the first step because people aren't even conscious of why it's good to ask questions. They take questions for granted or think they slow things down. The first step is to gain a new appreciation of questioning, and to understand why this is important and connected to growth, learning, and innovation.

Then it's a matter of developing your own systems and habits to make you question more. You may decide to think about some things and ask some questions first thing in the morning. Maybe you say, "I'm going to create some quiet time at the end of the day or on weekends where I force myself to sit down, think about big issues, and try to look at them from a different angle and ask some questions." The system you use is totally up to you. It's about finding ways of doing this that work within your schedule and that work for you. Anyone can develop those systems; it's about first acknowledging that you should do it and then making the effort to actually do it.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** The other thing that can potentially help is injecting a new team member into your group, one who perhaps doesn't have that level of expertise. There have been studies showing that when you have a newcomer join an existing team, the people who are already in the group start coming up with better ideas. This occurs not because they feel like they have to explain themselves to the person who's new, but rather because knowing that there's this new person leads them to re-examine their own assumptions in a way that's beneficial.

**Warren Berger:** That's why consultants can play such an important role as questioners in a company. I looked at the work of Peter Drucker, the father of consulting, and he understood this right from the start. Companies like Coca-Cola or GM would think that he could come in and say, "This is what you need to do to turn your company around."

Drucker said, "That wasn't really my role. I would have to explain to them that my role is to come in and ask questions, which in turn helps you ask questions that you weren't asking and should have been. So my role is to help you step back and see your company in a fresh



way and then ask these questions of ‘Why are we doing this?’ or ‘What about this area over here, Why aren’t we exploring that more?’ ”

That gets lost in the consulting world of today. You find some consultants that come in and feel like their job is to tell you exactly what to do and say, “You have to do this and you have to do that.” I tend to agree with Drucker. The value of a consultant or any outsider coming in is to help you figure it out for yourself, not to give you some off the shelf answer for your company, but to help you understand your company better than anyone and to help you go through these questions and figure things out for yourself.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Occasionally, the value is not in simply asking the questions but rather that you’re positioned to raise points that others in the company wanted to raise themselves but felt like that would not be rewarded. That leads us perfectly into the next question: Let’s say you’re working for a manager who doesn’t like to be questioned. Do you have tips on framing questions in a way that doesn’t come off as threatening?

**Warren Berger:** This is a big issue with questioning. You have to pay a lot of attention to the language. There’s a school of thought on what’s called Appreciative Inquiry — framing questions in positive ways. An example that has become very popular in companies like Google is the phrase, “How might we...?” The design for an IDO uses it a lot. It’s about coming upon a problem and instead of saying, “How are you going to solve this? What are we going to do?” you phrase it in this very empowering question. You say, “How might we find a better way to do X?” Or, “How might we address the problem of Y?”

Something about that language opens up people’s thinking. It creates a very collaborative feeling. It takes a little of the pressure off. It doesn’t feel like criticism. It’s very positive and you can make them collaborative. Instead of saying, “Why are you doing this? Why are you doing that?” it should be, “How could we address this issue?” or “How might we find a way to build on our strengths to address this weakness?” If you can do that in a business environment, you’re going to have better results with questioning.

As far as your original question about the manager who is resistant to being questioned, that’s a very tough problem. For someone working under them, the only thing I could say is to approach it very carefully. You have to use positive language as much as you can and make sure the question doesn’t sound like you’re overstepping your bounds or being critical of their management style.

The biggest solution to that problem has to come from above. The leadership of the company has to make it clear to middle management that questions are welcomed and desired. The leadership has to tell management to get comfortable with being questioned because it’s a good thing that we want to happen. We want all our people to be asking questions because that’s how we’re going to tap into their ideas. If you’re not comfortable with that as a middle manager, you better get comfortable with it. That is what’s going to change those middle managers that are worried about guarding their turf. They’re under a lot of pressure from above and below, so they need to be encouraged into this behavior and thinking.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** It’s interesting because often the advice that’s given is, don’t just present a problem to your manager, but offer a solution so that it feels like you are doing something about it rather than simply complaining. However, in some ways that is the exact opposite of what we’re trying to do here because it prevents people from asking those big questions.



**Warren Berger:** I have a big issue with that. You hear a lot of CEOs and executives say that and it's become a cliché. They say, "Don't bring me problems; bring me solutions." They want people to be proactive; they want people to think of themselves as problem solvers. That makes sense and I get that. What they need to realize is that some problems and some questions are big and ambitious. One person can't solve them in two hours. They're important.

If someone has a question about the basic way we're conducting business or a fundamental thing that we might be missing or doing wrong, that person can't be expected to come up with the answer. That is like asking for a new business model. If you see a problem in our business model, then you have to develop a whole new business model. You wouldn't really expect someone to do that, right? You have to be cognizant of that and recognize that there are going to be questions that people in our company observe but don't have the answer for. That doesn't mean it's not a great question and that doesn't mean there isn't value there.

Going back to Polaroid, Edwin Lands' four-year-old daughter did not have the answer to that question. Edwin Land didn't say to his daughter, "Hey, you know, don't just ask that question. Come back to me with an answer." Edwin Land adopted that question for himself and he worked on finding the answer. That's the attitude that leaders and companies should take. If someone brings you a great question, they're also bringing you a great opportunity. This could be your version of the Airbnb, Polaroid, or Netflix question. It could be the question that opens up a whole new possibility for us, a whole new world.

**Ron Friedman:** So from a leadership perspective, we've talked about a few things that managers and leaders can do. One is to raise the questions themselves, to model the right behaviors. The other is bringing questions to their team and framing them in terms of, "How might we...?" so that it's viewed as collaborative rather than accusatory. Are there any other tips you can share?

**Warren Berger:** I found that the most effective questioners are acting on their questions and always moving forward. The model I hold up in the book has to do with a cycle of asking "Why, what, if, and how?" It seems to be a very effective way to tackle problems because you can think of why questions as the questions at the initial stages that will help you understand the problem: Why is it happening? Why hasn't someone solved it before? Why would it be worth us doing it?

You're asking these kinds of exploratory questions at the beginning and then at some point you want to move to "what if?" questions. This is where you start to ideate. You start to use your imagination to come up with possible ideas and those can be crazy. What if we combined what a Hollywood studio does with an accounting firm? It could be all kinds of crazy "what if?" possibilities. That is your brainstorming blue-sky stage.

At some point you want to work towards "how?" questions. How questions are the practical kind of questions: "How are we actually going to get this done? How would we pay for it? How would we test out the idea initially to see if it works? How can we prototype it?" That's the action stage of questioning.

Think about that cycle of questioning when you're working on problems. Think about how you should always be moving forward. You should be moving from the question that just asks "why" something is, the question that starts to move you toward ideas and that starts



to get very practical about how we're actually going to make this real. That cycle can be very productive.

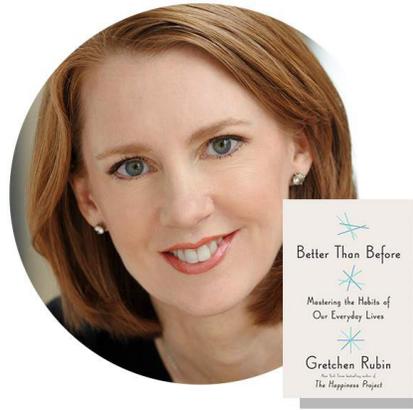




## Practical Tips from Warren Berger

- Coming up with great questions involves first “leaning in” and fully immersing yourself in a topic, and then “stepping back” and finding a way of seeing that information in a new way.
- “Stepping back” requires mental distance, which you can get by unplugging, slowing down, and relaxing the brain in an environment free of distraction.
- Distrust a mindset of certainty. Any time you feel completely certain, you are in danger of cutting yourself off from new approaches and ideas.
- You can make questioning a habit by setting aside quiet time at the end of the day (or on weekends) for reexamining important issues and pushing yourself to think about them from a different angle.
- Being questioned can feel threatening to others. To raise questions diplomatically, start by asking, “How might we...?”
- As a leader, if you want the people on your team questioning more regularly, you need to model that behavior yourself. Act with humility and resist the temptation to act as if you have all the answers.
- Questions that begin with the word “why” get people thinking. To make progress, however, it is important to then move on to questions that begin with the words “what if.”





## Gretchen Rubin on Changing Your Habits

Gretchen Rubin is the author of several books, including the blockbuster *New York Times* bestsellers *Better Than Before*, *The Happiness Project*, and *Happier at Home*.

In *Better Than Before: Mastering the Habits of Our Everyday Lives*, she provides surprising insights and practical advice drawn from cutting-edge research, ancient wisdom, and her own observations about how we can make our lives better than before. She investigates the multiple strategies she's identified that help us make and break our habits. After all, habits are the invisible architecture of a happy life, and when we change our habits, we change our lives. The secret to changing a habit? First, we must know ourselves, so we can suit our habits to our own nature.

Her previous books include the #1 *New York Times* and international best-seller *The Happiness Project* —an account of the year she spent test-driving the wisdom of the ages, the current scientific studies, and the lessons from popular culture about how to be happier. *The Happiness Project* has sold more than one million copies, has been published in more than thirty languages, and spent more than two years on the *New York Times* bestseller list.

She has an enormous readership, both in print and online, and her books have sold more than two million copies worldwide in more than thirty languages. On her weekly podcast, *Happier with Gretchen Rubin*, she discusses good habits and happiness with her sister, Elizabeth Craft. The podcast hit #6 on iTunes on the day it launched. It ranks in the top 1% of podcasts and has listeners in more than one hundred and ninety two countries. Rubin started her career in law. She was clerking for Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor when she realized she wanted to be a writer. She lives in New York City with her husband and two daughters.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** When most people think of habits, they tend focus on negative behaviors like smoking or drinking. But you argue that there's another side to habits that



we don't pay nearly enough attention to. What are some of those habits and why should we pay more attention to them?

**Gretchen Rubin:** Research shows that about 40% of what we do every day is shaped by our habits. We are far more likely to be happier, healthier, and more productive if we have habits that work for us. If we have habits that don't work for us, that's going to be much harder. Habits shape our existence and they shape our future.

It's funny that you say that many people first think of the bad habits; that's one of the things that surprised me when I was writing *Better than Before*. I love to develop habits and they have a very positive connotation for me. That's one of the things that got me curious about habits. People have different habits, they have different aptitudes for forming habits, and they also have very different attitudes towards habits. Aptitude and attitude will shape the way your ability to master your habits.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Can you give us an example of a positive habit?

**Gretchen Rubin:** A positive habit is anything that works for you. I found that there is no magic, one-size-fits-all solution. There's no magic and there's no habit that's sort of a universal, specific habit.

One habit that has really made me a lot happier is giving up sugar. I really don't need sugar. That may not work for a lot of people. That's why I talk about the difference between abstainers and moderators; you really have to think about what's going to work for you and what's going to be a good habit for you. Searching for universals can be tricky beyond the basics like getting enough sleep.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Before we get into the different types of personalities that might influence our habits and how we form them, one of the things I really like that you wrote at the beginning of *Better than Before* is this idea that having a habit, eliminates the need for self-control.

**Gretchen Rubin:** Yes.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** What do you mean by that?

**Gretchen Rubin:** Habits are freeing and energizing because they get us out of the draining attempt to use self-control and decisions. You could spend a good hour wearing out your self-control and making yourself crazy trying deciding whether to go in to the gym in the morning. "Should I go today? Should I go tomorrow? I went yesterday; maybe I get a day off? Oh, it's raining. Oh, my foot hurts! I've been so good that I deserve a day off. Oh, I won't go in the morning. I'll go later, not exactly sure when, but I'm sure I'll get around to it." You can just deplete yourself with this kind of self-talk.

Habits get you out of that. You don't spend a lot of mental energy deciding whether to brush your teeth; you don't have to. It can be the same for going to the gym. The more it becomes a habit, the more quickly and easily it will follow because you've put that behavior on autopilot.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** All right, so let's say I'm interested in going to the gym three times a week and I want to rule out my foot hurting as an excuse. What are some practical steps I can take to make that happen?



**Gretchen Rubin:** It depends. I have to ask you a lot of questions. Do you want to get into it?

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Sure.

**Gretchen Rubin:** Okay. So you want to go to the gym three times a week. When exactly are you going to go? That's the strategy of scheduling—put it on the schedule. When exactly are you going to go?

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Let's say 5:30 in the afternoon.

**Gretchen Rubin:** Are you going to be able to stick to that?

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I don't know — that's why I'm asking you.

**Gretchen Rubin:** In the past, if you've made an appointment like that, have you been pretty good about sticking to it?

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Yeah. I guess. This is really is becoming kind of a therapy session. The issue is that going to the gym at 5:30 sounds great, but getting a few more emails out also sounds great.

**Gretchen Rubin:** Do you tend to do better when there's accountability, like working out with a friend you're meeting, going to work out with a trainer, or taking a class where they take attendance? Does something like that make you more likely to show up?

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Yes, definitely.

**Gretchen Rubin:** What form of external accountability do you imagine that you could build into those three times of going to the gym?

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So the idea is to find someone else who's holding you accountable, not just yourself.

**Gretchen Rubin:** Some people need that. Many people find it helpful. For some people, it's a turnoff. The idea that somebody is expecting them to go makes them even less likely to go. You have to know what kind of person you are. The idea that there's external accountability doesn't really matter for me. It might be useful, but it doesn't really make a difference for me. For some people, it really makes a difference.

You're saying that for you it would really make a difference, so you need to come up with that form of external accountability. There's also the question of what kind of exercise you are going to be doing at the gym.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I like racquetball and swimming.

**Gretchen Rubin:** With racquetball, you're going to have to play that with somebody else, right?

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Yes.

**Gretchen Rubin:** Do you know who you're going to play with?



**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** It would depend, but I have a few people I play with, so yes.

**Gretchen Rubin:** That's the strategy of clarity. The strategy of clarity is being clear about what we're expecting of ourselves and how we're going to follow through. If you're playing racquetball, that's going to be a little bit tricky because you're going to have to cooperate with other people and set that up. On the other hand, when we do things with other people, it tends to be more fun. If somebody is meeting you at the gym to play racquetball, they're going to be annoyed if you're not there; that's going to be a form of accountability. Now, would you ever do something like the stationary bike, the treadmill, or swimming — something like that?

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** No, unlikely.

**Gretchen Rubin:** One of the things that works for people who do that kind of exercise is something called pairing. You can do pairing with anything, which consists of pairing something you need to do with something that you want to do. If you really love *Game of Thrones*, you might say, "I'm only going to watch *Game of Thrones* or listen to my favorite podcast when I'm at the gym." I have a podcast, *Happier with Gretchen Rubin*, and a lot of people say, "I only listen to your podcast when I'm going for my daily walk." They may be more inclined to stick to a good habit because it's something that they like or want to do. In college, I only allowed myself to take a shower if I'd gone to the gym, so I ended up going pretty often.

Another thing is that we are massively influenced by how convenient or inconvenient it is for us to follow through with a habit. How convenient is it for you to go to the gym?

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** It's pretty convenient.

**Gretchen Rubin:** Can you make it more convenient? Could you get a locker or maybe a double set of clothes? Could you make these appointments with people to play racquetball so that will be more convenient? That way you won't say, "Ugh, I just I can't even deal with trying to schedule with Pat to make a game so I'm just not going to do it, and since I don't have a game, I'm just not going to go." How can you make that kind of commitment easier and more convenient?

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I really like those tips. One thing I can do, for example, is get a locker as part of the service that the gym provides; they actually take clothes and clean them for you and that makes it easier. The other thing I could do to apply some of the ideas that you're suggesting here is just have a standing game every Tuesday, for example.

**Gretchen Rubin:** Yes, 100%...That's the ideal. There's no logistics or discussion. I hate spending money. I really resisted getting a locker for a long time because I rationalized that I just live a few blocks from the gym. But it actually makes it a lot more convenient.

You've already talked about the strategy of other people, which is how can we enlist other people into our habits. You have a friend that you're going to play racquetball with, so that person's going to make it easier for you to exercise. Are there other ways that you could bring other people into this to make it easier? Alternatively, are there people who are potentially going to be undermine this? Are there co-workers who are going to be like "Wait a minute. Hey, can I just talk to you for ten minutes?" Is there a significant other who's going to say, "I need you to do this for me before you head out"? You can think about how other people could play either a bolstering role or an undermining role.



**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Right, so identifying people who might stand in the way and figuring out how I'm going to deal with that if that's at the time of me being at the gym.

**Gretchen Rubin:** Or getting to the gym. One of the strategies is thinking about how other people influence us; another one is the strategy of safeguards. The strategy of safeguards is thinking about everything that might get in your way when you're trying to form that habit. If you go on vacation, or you get sick, or your kid gets sick, or your racquetball partner doesn't show up — what's your plan for that? If you plan to go to racquetball and at the last minute there's a cancellation, are you going to go to the gym anyway? Having the strategy of safeguards helps plan for failure because you anticipate stumbling blocks. When something comes up, you can say, "Oh, okay, I know what my plan B is here."

A lot of times we feel committed to a good habit, but we stumble and we don't know how to get back on the saddle. That's related to the strategy of the loopholes. There are ten categories of loopholes that we tend to use when we're trying to let ourselves off the hook. You rationalize, saying, "I totally mean to go to the gym and yeah, I'm committed to going three times a week except that I couldn't help it because I got this important email so I couldn't leave my desk," or "I was so good last week, I went all three times so I think I deserve a day off." Or we say, "I'm going to be so good next week; I think I deserve a day off today," or "You know, it's going to hurt somebody's feelings if I don't show up to do this thing right away, and I can't go a little late. I need to be there right on time." Or maybe, "You only live once and it's such a beautiful day, who wants to be inside a gym? I should be outside taking a nap in the park!" These are all different categories of loopholes. Once you're aware of loopholes, and most of us have a couple favorites, then you can be on guard when you're trying to come up with a reason to let yourself off the hook.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Got it. It sounds like you've got a lot of great strategies and it starts with figuring out what it is you're trying to do, then planning a specific time...

**Gretchen Rubin:** The first thing to do is to figure out what's true for you; different things work for different people. There is this tiny group of people I call rebels for whom putting something on the calendar is actually a negative. So I wouldn't even necessarily say, "Hey, everybody should put it on the calendar," because a rebel that sees it on their calendar is not going to go or follow through. Rebels could sign up for class and just not go. They need to feel like they are choosing. They need to feel like they're acting from freedom.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** How do I know my type?

**Gretchen Rubin:** Most people can tell from just a brief overview. I have a quiz on my site, GretchenRubin.com, that you can take to find out your tendency. I call this framework "The Four Tendencies," and it has a lot of implications for habits. The types are: upholders, questioners, obligers, and rebels. They relate to how you read an outer expectation, such as a work deadline or requests from a spouse, or an inner expectation like your own New Year's resolution or your own desire to go to the gym.

Upholders readily meet outer and inner expectations. They meet a work deadline or they keep a New Year's resolution without much fuss and their expectations for themselves are just as important as the expectations of others.

Next are questioners; they question all expectations. They'll do something only if they think it makes sense. They hate anything arbitrary or irrational or unfair. They'll do some-



thing they endorse, but won't do anything they don't believe in.

Obligers readily meet outer expectations but struggle to meet inner expectations. Like a friend of mine who said, "I want to exercise and when I was in high school, I was on the track team and I never missed track practice, but I can't go running now." When she had a team and a coach, she had no trouble showing up for outer expectations, but her own inner expectation wasn't enough to get her to follow through. Those are the people for whom accountability is so important.

And then there are rebels, who resist all expectations, outer and inner alike. They want to do what they want to do, when they want to do it, in their own way. If you ask or tell them to do something, they're very likely to resist. If someone signed them up for a weekly spin class, they would do the opposite and say, "You're not the boss of me; you can't make me so I'm not going to go."

Knowing your tendency is very helpful in knowing what you need in order to support your habits. For an obliger, the external accountability is absolutely crucial. For a questioner, understanding why this matters is very crucial. If they're going to do a certain kind of exercise, they need to know why this exercise makes sense. Is it efficient and is it medically shown to be effective? Why am I buying into the system? That's very important for them. So it sort of plays out in different ways depending on what your tendency is.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So you've really narrowed it down to what is your personality type, and then, how do you build your habits around your personality, rather than simply having a one-size-fits-all solution.

**Gretchen Rubin:** Right, and there are many things. This is one aspect of your personality, but there are many things that come into play. We get discouraged about our habits because we think, "Oh, I tried this already!" People feel unsuccessful because they perceive that they have no self-control or willpower, often saying, "What's wrong with me?" If you set it up in a way that's right for you, you are going to have much better success.

This comes up a lot with morning people versus night people. If you're a morning person trying to go for a run, it might make sense to go before work. If you're a night person, you're not going to be getting up early to go for a run. You can barely get out of bed in time to get to work.

If you're an obliger, you really need a form of external accountability. For you, that is crucial. For other people, maybe that's helpful but not necessary.

Start by thinking about all the things that are true for you. One thing that's helpful to think about is when you succeeded in the past. Then think about what was different then from what's different now. I try to identify those elements because sometimes people don't understand why something worked at one time and is not working in another. They kind of misattribute the problem, and I try to point out the crucial things to think about.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** We're going to make The Four Tendencies quiz available to folks on this page.

**Gretchen Rubin:** Beautiful.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Now let's say I'm interested in helping a colleague develop some



habits. What do I do? Do I take the quiz with him or her in mind?

**Gretchen Rubin:** A lot of people are interested in changing someone else's habits and it's really helpful to know someone else's tendency.

When I started writing *Better than Before*, I figured I was pretty average. It turns out I'm actually on the end of the spectrum, an upholder. I learned that upholders have a lot of impatience with other people. They rationalize, "We keep expectations pretty easily so what's the big deal for you?"

My husband's a questioner. If I want him to do something, I need to explain why I want him to do it. If you asked me to do something, I would just do it. That's enough for an upholder. But he says, "Why am I going to do that?" Recognizing this leads to a lot less conflict.

You see this in at work situations where an upholder manager might not understand why obligers need deadlines and supervision. Or an obliger manager might not understand why everything they do makes a rebel less and less likely to cooperate.

Questioners can be great in the workplace. They're the ones who are asking if this is the best way to do something, or why it should be done at all. They say, "Maybe we should be using this format." But sometimes they exhaust other people with their questioning. Sometimes they exhaust *themselves* with their questioning. Sometimes they get analysis paralysis because they want more and more information.

If you understand where everybody's coming from and what they need to move forward, then it's much easier to manage conflict and take advantage of the strengths of everyone's tendency, and for you to figure out ways to counterbalance the negatives.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** What can I do to get a clear understanding of others' tendencies?

**Gretchen Rubin:** When you work with somebody closely, you start to see a clear pattern. When hearing about the four tendencies, people sort themselves into groups and know what other people are. The more extreme the personality, the more obvious their tendency and the more of an issue it becomes. It's obvious when someone's a really extreme questioner because that is going to be a really big part of their behavior. People pretty much get it.

Or you could have them take the quiz and figure out what they are that way.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Interesting, and it might be a good exercise to have your team take the quiz together. It can actually spark some interesting discussion.

**Gretchen Rubin:** That's absolutely true. This really fascinates people.

I was once speaking to a large group and had a little more time than I usually do, so I had them divide up into the four groups. There were two rebels, eight upholders, and there were so many questioners and obligers they had to split into two groups each. I had them talk amongst themselves and they felt like they had found their people. They were all very interested in talking to people who saw the world exactly the way that they did.

It might have been interesting to put them in groups where there was one of each type and



ask, “How does this make you feel?” or “What’s your reaction when the boss says we need to have this report by Friday?” Especially when you know that boss isn’t going to look at it until Wednesday. “What do you think about that? How does that influence your thinking?”

Sometimes, all you need to do to manage a conflict is to understand how somebody else is coming to it. It’s easy to just assume that everybody sees the world in our way, or that they should see the world in our way. But when you see how they’re coming at it with a different mindset, you can find that place where everyone can come together. There are very different ways of seeing the world.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** We’ve talked about building positive habits. What if I want to get rid of a bad habit? For example, what if every time I’m on a conference call I can’t help but check my email and it’s a habit I really desperately want to break. What should I do?

**Gretchen Rubin:** You use the same strategies to make or break a habit, so it’s the same. The first strategy is the one of clarity, which is figuring out exactly what you are trying to do. So you’re on a conference call; how are you checking your email?

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** On my phone.

**Gretchen Rubin:** What if you turned your phone off and put it in a drawer in another room? Just make it inconvenient. A lot of the time people say, “I want to get off my cell phone, but I also want to carry it in the back pocket of my jeans.” You are not going to say, “No” to that cell phone when it’s in your back pocket. It’s too easy. Don’t try to control your mind, your motivation, or your emotional state — control your circumstances. You can put that cell phone someplace where it’s out of your reach and very inconvenient. That’s a strategy of inconvenience, and you’re going to have a much better, much easier time not checking your email.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Some push back that I get a lot on that is, “Well, I need to stay in touch with my family. If they’re texting me over the course of work day I need to be available to them so I can’t get rid of my phone.” What do I do then?

**Gretchen Rubin:** This is very different. Are you talking about not having it during a conference call or not having it during the entire day?

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** A lot of times at work you’re brought into a two-hour conference call and you can’t just leave your phone in your desk.

**Gretchen Rubin:** Right. Well, if you’re going to have a long meeting, I’m a big believer in saying that we’re going to have a break in the middle so everybody can check their phones. If people know they can check their phone, they’re less likely to check it spontaneously.

Here’s where it gets to the strategy of clarity: Do you feel like it’s a legitimate thing that you want to do, or do you feel like it’s something you don’t want to do? If you keep saying you don’t want to check your email and yet think you should be able to check your email, what are you asking of yourself? Are you saying you want to check your email and you think that’s good and that’s something that you need to do and you want to do? Are you saying you don’t want to check your email? A lot of people want to be free from email but they check it all the time — what do you really want?

If you want to check your email periodically, then maybe you should check it at the very



end of every hour. Check in periodically, but don't check it constantly.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I really like that idea of saying, "Let's just admit the fact that we're interested in checking our emails and not pretend we can have these calls for two to three hours."

**Gretchen Rubin:** Right, have a break and say "We're going to have a break where everybody can catch up with wherever they are." Then people know that they can check their phone and don't feel they have to do so constantly.

If you're checking your phone because you're bored, that's very different from, "Oh, I just got a text from my daughter's school and I really have to look at what it says." You have to be honest with yourself. You know what you're doing and why you are really doing it. People experience very different levels of urgency in their jobs. They need to decipher if it is true urgency or fake urgency.

This is a fun thing to think about. If you feel like you're under constant stress at work, imagine that you are someone different with a totally different job. I would imagine that I am a heart surgeon and I'm thinking, "Is Gretchen Rubin's life that stressful that she needs to check her phone every half an hour?" I would say, "No". There's something about being in our own experience. When you imagine it from the outside, you realize you could go thirty minutes without checking the phone. The more you check in, the more you create a sense of yourself and how much you have to check your phone. The more you lengthen the time, the more you realize that nothing's happening in an hour that can't wait another hour for you to get back on your phone.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** How has writing a book on habits changed the way you work?

**Gretchen Rubin:** I found that I had pretty good habits to begin with. I'm sure that aptitude for habits is one of the reasons that I've wanted to write this book.

Over the years, I've become more of a believer in the power of sleep. I'm very focused on getting enough sleep right now. This is especially true if your main tool is your mind. If that is not working at top performance, then you're the only one who suffers. So I really am very focused on that.

I've tried so many habits. Little things like running down the stairs instead of just walking, because it's very energizing to get your feet off the ground. It's very childlike and sort of playful. I tried meditation for about five months and I attained the habit, but it made me kind of crazy instead of calmer or clear. I'm sure I'll try again at some point.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I can relate to that experience of meditation being stressful, but there are different types of meditation that you can do to fit your personality type. Perhaps that's a topic for a different blog or another book.

Let's shift to the topic of sleep. What have you done to get more sleep?

**Gretchen Rubin:** Part of my strategy is monitoring. We tend to do a better job with any behavior if we monitor it. If you want to eat more healthily, keep a food journal. If you want to get more exercise, use a step counter. If you want to stick to a budget, track your spending. I use a Jawbone Up band to keep track of my sleep. I realized that, even though I am a sleep zealot, I was underestimating how much sleep I got. We tend to have fun remembering all



the times we do things right and discount the number of times we do things wrong. Monitoring really helped me to stick to it.

My bedtime is 10:30. If it's 10:00 and I'm sleepy, I might go to sleep early, but at 10:30 I start thinking it's my bedtime, and if it's 11:00, I'm up half an hour past my bedtime. I really started paying much more attention at night to what time it was.

I used to find that I was so tired that I didn't want to go to bed because it seemed like too much trouble to get ready, take out my contacts, wash my face, and brush my teeth. Now I try to get ready for bed earlier so that there's very little I need to do when it's actually time for bed. I used to think the advice to brush your teeth after you eat dinner, as a way to end night snacking, was too good to be true, but it's been amazingly effective for me. It was as if it didn't cross my mind to eat somehow. So, getting ready for bed earlier had two consequences. One I expected, which was it was easier to go to sleep, but there was this bonus benefit of helping cut down on night snacking.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** It's interesting. I use a Fitbit to monitor sleep and I've noticed that I get to bed later every night during the week. Friday night, I actually get the lowest amount of sleep because going to sleep requires effort.

**Gretchen Rubin:** Yes.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Just like you described, it's actually a point in your day when you have the least amount of energy left.

**Gretchen Rubin:** Yes, that's an excellent point. I never thought about that, but it's true. That's the strategy of foundation. There are certain elements of life that go right to our self-mastery. They are eating and drinking, sleeping, moving around, and uncluttering. The last one is sort of an odd one, but it seems to really make a difference. When you're exhausted, you can't use the self-mastery that you need to get more sleep. It's this horrible downward cycle because when you don't have the self-mastery, you just dig yourself in deeper and deeper. It's sort of this cruel poetic justice of habits, where we're often punished for the bad habit by the habit itself.

What is the punishment of not getting enough sleep? You get even less sleep. They have done studies where women who are very worried about their weight comfort themselves by eating. Another one shows that gamblers who are very concerned about their finances try to steer themselves right by going gambling. You've got to break that negative cycle of a habit because we want to do what makes us feel better, but we end up just making ourselves feel worse.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I recently heard you talk about how you very deliberately split up your day into three chunks. You have an original writing chunk, a blog writing chunk, and an email-writing chunk. Could you tell us why you split up your day that way?

**Gretchen Rubin:** I go out of my apartment to do the original writing chunk. I get away from the Internet because it's just like not keeping your phone in your back pocket — put it far away. In my office I have three monitors and I've got everything wired up, so I go to this little library a block from my house and I don't connect to anything so I can really focus. I consider that big chunk my highest value work, so I try to do that in the time of day that I'm the most fresh and energetic.



**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Before you go on, why do you need three monitors?

**Gretchen Rubin:** Three monitors are amazing. Some people have those giant monitors where they can have like six panels, but I have three monitors so I can have three screens up. A lot of people think, “Oh, that would be bad, it’s multitasking,” but it’s a huge time saver. I got them because I read a study that said productivity for information workers jumped dramatically when they had three monitors.

I could have one document up and paste something in from another document. If I’m writing something about The Four Tendencies and somebody sends me a really interesting email example and I’m like, “Ooh, I want to incorporate that person’s comment into my document,” I don’t have to click click click; I just swipe it through. It allows me to move between lots of different ideas.

If I want to be very focused, I have to go to the library. There’s no talking permitted in my library, so that’s a very different kind of mindset. Email and my blog writing tends to be much more casual and less intense. A lot of it is managing my mental energy; I think, “How much intellectual firepower do I need to do this task?” I do something which all the habit experts tell you not to do; I begin my day with a very low form of work — a solid hour of email and social media. I just can’t focus on anything bigger and more abstract until I clear the decks. I also have something called quitting time; this is good for people who want leisure. I don’t check my emails anymore and I don’t do anything more for work so that I really have a feeling of leisure. I won’t read something for work or review a document or check my email. I have many hours of unexamined email by the time I get up at six a.m., every single day.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I have to tell you about this idea of that not being what you’re “supposed to do” In many cases it’s unrealistic not to check your email first thing in the morning and, for you, you have a different space associated with that high focus work so you have that separation where you walk over to the library. I’m sure that makes a big difference.

**Gretchen Rubin:** Huge. It reminds me of a writer — I think it was John Cheever — who got dressed up in suit pants and a button down shirt every morning and would walk around his house before he sat down at his desk. He had this idea that you needed to be suited up for work, that you needed some kind of commute, however small. I’m a big believer in using your circumstances to put you into certain state of mind or to accrue certain habits.

I’ve also found that working is one of the most dangerous forms of procrastination. If I’m in my home office, there are many things that I can do that are productive, but not as productive as doing original writing, which is my highest and best form of work. I will file or I’ll print some documents or I’ll answer some emails or I’ll do a little research. My big temptation is doing research. I love to do research. It appears productive — it’s not like I’m sitting on the couch reading a magazine — and yet it’s not doing what I want to do, my most valuable work. So when I go to the library, I just say to myself, “Well, I’m here for two and a half hours a day. I’m going to write or nothing.” I either write or just stare at the stack of books in front of me, and since I’m stuck there, I end up writing out of sheer boredom.

If you allow yourself to be distracted by a lot of other occupations, days can go by where you’re doing a lot of stuff and maybe somebody looking at you from the outside would think that you’re being productive, but you’re not making progress on whatever that es-



sential task is. So putting aside that time where I'm going to do this or do nothing, that's a strategy of scheduling that is very effective, especially for people who are prone to procrastination—which is just about all of us.



## Practical Tips from Gretchen Rubin

- To achieve peak work performance, you need to establish positive habits that make productivity automatic.
- There is no single, one-size-fits-all approach to building better habits. However, most people belong to one of four categories that Gretchen calls “personal tendencies”: Upholders, Questioners, Obligers, and Rebels. To identify your personal tendency and learn about strategies that work for your group, visit [this website](#).
- Don’t assume that strategies that have worked for you will work for others. To help others change their habits, you first need to consider what personal tendency category they fall into.
- To make a habit stick, you need to get clear about the outcome you are trying to achieve. Saying, “I want to go to bed early,” is not enough. Instead, get specific by saying, “I want to be in bed by 11:00pm.”
- Track your behaviors so that you have objective feedback on your progress. For example, keep a sleep journal so that you can monitor when you get to bed.
- If you are trying to get to bed earlier, try brushing your teeth right after dinner. It gets your nighttime routine going and discourages you from snacking.
- If you want a habit to stick, make it easy to achieve. In Gretchen’s words: “Don’t try to control your mind, your motivation, or your emotional state, but control your circumstances.”
- If possible, consider getting more than one computer monitor. It allows you to keep multiple programs open simultaneously, which reduces time spent minimizing and expanding windows.



## Michelle Segar on How to Get More Exercise Without Going to the Gym

Michelle Segar, Ph.D., MPH, motivation scientist and author of *No Sweat! How the Simple Science of Motivation Can Bring You a Lifetime of Fitness* is Director of the Sport, Health, and Activity Research and Policy Center (SHARP) at the University of Michigan, and Chair of the U.S. National Physical Activity Plan's Communications Committee. Her three hundred and sixty degree perspective is informed by more than two decades of award-winning research, individual fitness, self-care coaching, and consulting. She is uniquely positioned to help organizations understand and leverage the emotional drivers and internal rewards of consumers' health decisions.

Segar is pioneering new approaches to sustainable behavior change in the fitness, health care, and wellness arenas. Her evidence-based ideas about what motivates people to choose and maintain healthy behaviors are changing the conversation across fields. She consults with global organizations on these issues and delivers keynotes and sustainable behavior change trainings.

Her clients include Adidas, Beaumont Health System, EXL, Google, Influence Health, National Business Group on Health, PepsiCo, Walmart, and Zingerman's. She has a doctorate in Psychology (Ph.D.) and master's degrees in Health Behavior/Health Education (MPH) and Kinesiology (MS) from the University of Michigan. Segar lives with her husband and son in Ann Arbor. She loves walking, speaking Spanish, eating great food, and hanging out with friends and family. She ran with the Olympic Torch at the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** In *No Sweat*, you make the case that exercise is about a lot more than just looking good or losing weight; it's about performing at our best on a mental level. Tell us about some of the ways that exercise can benefit our performance at work.

**Michelle Segar:** What's been really under-emphasized in the last thirty years of messaging about exercise is how good it actually makes us feel. It is, in a way, an elixir of life. It lifts



our mood, it gives us energy, it helps us focus, and it leads to innovative and creative ideas. When you have more energy and a lifted mood, you're more enthusiastic and engaged with everything you do. It really has huge implications for how engaged we are at work.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** The remarkable thing that you mention in the book is that despite all of this great evidence about how exercise benefits our creativity and our mood and our engagement — knowing all of that still won't necessarily make us any more likely to actually visit the gym. Why not?

**Michelle Segar:** People may know these things on an unconscious level. When someone decides to take a thirty-minute walk outside and refresh themselves, they recognize the mental benefits. But we don't focus on that as the primary outcome from being physically active. People don't make these explicit links in their mind, even though some people might notice it on some level.

It's interesting to ask someone why they are regularly active. I did this with my husband when we were dating. I said, "Why do you exercise regularly?" He said, "Because of health, because I want to prevent the illnesses that my father got when he was young." Then I said to him, "Is that why you get up at five a.m. every day to exercise?" And he said, "Oh no, because I feel terrible if I don't exercise."

That shows that regular exercisers think that they're exercising for health, but motivation and decision-making are different issues. When you drill down to what actually makes people decide to get up in the morning and exercise, they'll tell you that it's because of how it makes them feel. Once you create that connection with people, it becomes a very strong driver.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I'm interested in something you said, which is that motivation and decision-making are not the same thing. Can you elaborate on that?

**Michelle Segar:** Sure. Behavior change and motivation are very vague concepts. That's been driving how we think about physical activity and other behaviors that I refer to as self-care behaviors.

Decision-making reflects the choices that we have to make over and over again every day, that lead to the actual behavior that we desire. Decision-making isn't about motivation. I'm motivated to go to the movies; I don't decide to go to the movies because it's not a priority for me. When we talk about decision-making, we're addressing the core lever that determines whether someone is physically active, makes certain dietary choices, or gets enough sleep at night.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Essentially what you're saying is that motivation — just sheer wanting to exercise — is not enough. You've got to make the decision simpler and easier and more appealing.

**Michelle Segar:** That's exactly right. There is a motivational component to creating a sustainable behavior change like physical activity. We can think of motivation as a desire for a behavior. That's not the same thing as having a reason to make physical activity a priority. There's another level that we have to get used to — converting an ongoing drive into the decision to make it a priority day in and day out.



**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** A good part of *No Sweat* focuses on dispelling some of the myths that people have around exercise. Can you tell us about some of those myths? What are we getting wrong when we think about exercise?

**Michelle Segar:** One of the biggest myths is that, for physical activity or exercise to count, it needs to be done in an intense way. It has to be hard and vigorous, it has to make you sweat, and it has to be done for a specific duration of time to be worth doing. That's simply not true. It's a great way to exercise if that's what you enjoy, but the research shows that we can move in ways that are less intense for shorter periods of time and we're still going to benefit.

This opens the door for people to move in ways that they not only like, which is essential for this desire or motivation pathway, but also are going to fit into their complex lives. A lot of people cannot fit forty minutes of exercise into their lives. If that was the only true way to exercise, those people would be out of luck. So many don't even bother.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** To build on what you're saying, most people would assume they need a forty-five minute block on the treadmill to fit in exercise. But there are more bite-sized ways of fitting in exercise over the course of the day. They may not be as lengthy, but they are still useful in terms of promoting health and mood.

Can you give us an example of a bite-sized form of exercise that we should start considering and putting into that category of things worth doing?

**Michelle Segar:** Absolutely. I'm really trying to get people to think about the idea of a physical activity continuum. This continuum goes from getting out of bed to running marathons and participating in triathlons, with a lot of points in between. Every time we move our body, it counts. It's important for people to do things. If bite-sized is what is going to work for you, especially to get started and to develop the type of mindset, then that's what you should do.

Walking is a form of physical activity that lends itself very well; I focus on that a lot. You could get up from your desk a couple times in the morning to re-energize yourself and take a cognitive break from the work you're doing. You could decide to take a fifteen-minute walk during lunch with a colleague that you enjoy spending time with or a friend who lives across the country by walking while on a phone call.

There is really an unlimited number of ways you can create a bite-sized snack of movement. It's important for people to think about the schedule of their day and the types of activities that they do to evaluate when they may need a burst of energy and can fit it in.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I really like that reframing of exercise as getting some movement. Stop thinking of it as a physical chore, and start thinking of it as a burst of energy and investment in your future mood.

One of the eye-opening statistics in your book is that on average, two out of every three gym memberships go unused. Why are so many people willing to put money down and commit to exercise, yet failing to follow through?

**Michelle Segar:** People may have made assumptions based on what they've learned. It goes back to the messages that we've all been given, such as the assumption that by com-



mitting ourselves to lose weight or get healthy on New Year's, or on our birthday, or ten months out from a wedding, those future goals we really want to achieve are going to make physical activity essential in our daily lives.

What happens is that people initiate what I call “the wrong whys,” which are reasons for exercising or other self-care behaviors that are targeting future abstract goals. In the moment of commitment, they may seem really important. However, once we get beyond the initial burst of motivation and daily life gets messy and complicated, those reasons become less relevant. It's not their fault; it's how we've learned to approach exercising.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** In some ways, it's assuming that the level of motivation or the willpower that we have when we're putting five hundred dollars down for a membership at Bally's will still be there on a Tuesday at 6:30pm when we have to choose between being with our families or getting on the treadmill.

So what should we do to ensure that we stay committed and actually follow through when we're making that investment and getting that gym membership?

**Michelle Segar:** That's goes back to what you asked at the very beginning: “What are all the ways in which being physically active helps us feel and function and live better every day?” It is also about how physical activity can affirm who we are as individuals and how we want to live our lives and feel what matters most.

That is an abstract way of talking about it, but let's drill down. Do you feel like you could be a more patient parent, and is that important to you? Do you feel like you're not so connected to work, and would you like to be more focused and engaged?

Think about the specific experiences that you would like or ways in which you would like to live your life differently, identify them, and do small experiments during the day and week and see when you're physically active. Turn it into a real experiment, schedule it and assess it.

For instance, create a list of numbers about how engaged you feel at noon on Tuesday. Take a ten or fifteen minute walk. When get back to work or when you start interacting with your child again, ask yourself if you actually feel different and notice any benefits.

For people to decide day in and day out to be active, they have to see it in the context they find most meaningful. We can help them see how physical activity affects what they care about most.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I really like that idea of rating how you feel. Nobody ever says, “I really wish I hadn't taken that walk,” right? It always has a positive impact. , “Sitting is the new smoking” in terms of being really, really terrible for our health. Can you, as an exercise expert, tell us why sitting is so bad for us?

**Michelle Segar:** Absolutely. Physiological research shows that sitting, as opposed to moving, creates cellular changes that are precursors to developing illnesses like diabetes and cardiovascular disease. There's some wonderful work by a researcher named Mark Hamilton. Around 2007, he came out with a recommendation to change how we're promoting physical activity to individuals in order to get them to sit less. It's not just about moving at a certain level of intensity or a certain duration of time; we need to get people to move



more because of this body of evidence that stagnation and sitting is unhealthy.

There's growing evidence suggesting that we need to move our bodies for health reasons beyond weight loss. I'm not sure how compelling those are for the decision-making aspect, but that type of data is helpful for getting organizations investing in programs that get their employees to move more or clinicians prescribing physical activity. On the individual level, we need to go beyond health to well-being, energy, and performance.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Right. So while there are major health reasons to get more exercise, that's not necessarily going to motivate people to go outside and take that walk.

Before 1995, we did not spend our entire day in front of a computer. Now we're tied to our computers all day long. It's one thing to know that sitting is the new smoking, but most of us are tethered to our email and need to be in front of our computers. How do reconcile needing to get more exercise with needing to be at our computer for most of our day?

**Michelle Segar:** That hits really hard on how we manage and negotiate physical activity in our busy lives. We have to address the realities of our lives, stop aiming for gold standards, and start aiming for real life amid constraints like our family situation, the type of work we do, etc.

It's important to help individuals consider what is realistic, not ideal. We have to move away from ideal and gold standard prescriptions. What is realistic for you to fit in? That's how we need to work with physical activity and other self-care issues. We simply can't ask people to move mountains, which is what our old approach did.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I can appreciate that we shouldn't strive for perfection, but I'm curious about what you do when you're working, writing a paper, working on a book, or preparing a talk. What do you do to make sure that you're not simply sitting all day?

**Michelle Segar:** What I do is not consistent, so I don't do the same thing every. My husband gets up every morning and does a hard workout on his stationary bike. I do things differently. Some mornings, I decide to take a walk — especially on the days when I'm planning to do marathon work sessions like writing a manuscript or working on a book or presentation. I tend to do marathon sessions because that's how my creativity flows out the best.

There are a lot of individual differences when it comes to these issues that people need to start assessing for themselves, "Do you work better if you set your alarm to take a break every hour, move around for two minutes, then sit back down? Or do you work better if you find the time before you get into it, or as a transition?"

If we started to ritualize these things and make them meaningful, as opposed to clinical, we'd convert the behavior into something that we are much more invested in. I walk in the morning as a ritual to honor myself and my energy needs. It's also a way for me to know that I'm taking care of this aspect of myself before I get into that period of work, which I also want to do. I want to do the marathon sitting because it fuels me, too.

We have these competing self-care needs, and we need to figure out what's foundational and how we each need to fit things in. It's going to be different for everyone.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** It's become fashionable to get a treadmill desk or standing desk. In



your book, you said that it is not for you and I'm curious, since you are an exercise expert, why not? I imagine that you've experimented with them. Why did you find that wasn't working for you?

**Michelle Segar:** Actually, I haven't tried a treadmill desk. I think it would distract me. I might be able to do it for email. I've also heard that there's some research showing that you don't want to stand all day long, that you need to do things incrementally for body posture changes. I need to focus intensely to do my best work, so I imagine I would not be able to do my best work at a treadmill desk.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I think you're on the right path. There's actually some research on treadmill desks, which I cite in *The Best Place to Work*, that shows that your performance increases because your mood is improving, but it takes a good six months to adjust to the physical movement. You're actually making a lot of mistakes in typing, so you're not going to just jump on a treadmill desk and do your best work. You're going to have to acclimate to it.

Is there a specific amount of exercise that we should aim for? Are there some specific metrics that we should look to fit in?

**Michelle Segar:** There's a lot of research on optimal doses, but it depends on your goals. If you're using some external standard based on research in a laboratory or across a population of people, that may not actually work with your life and your schedule. I stay away from those types of recommendations because it creates standards that are very demotivating for people and don't fit into a lot of people's lives.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Is there an ideal time of day when we should be trying to get exercise?

**Michelle Segar:** I'm going to go back to the standard answer — it depends on who you are. On the days that I get my walk in first thing, I feel great. On other days, I might fit in a shorter ten to fifteen walk in the middle of the day instead of my longer forty or forty-five minute walk in the morning. People have to identify what's going to work for them. Does that morning exercise session make you feel complete?

Some people with little kids get up before their children. They may meditate during that time or they may be physically active. Maybe they need that solid eight hours of sleep and can't get up before their kids. Then you ask, "What other spaces are available in your day and how can you identify those?" We need to create an experimental learning mentality for people who haven't figured out how to do this. Then they can discover what point in their day is going to be better for them, and discover how they can be flexible with their goals so that their plans for physical activity can ebb and flow with life's challenges.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** One of the tips that I really liked in your book is this idea that we need to stop trying to get more exercise and start focusing on ways of making the exercise that we do get more fun. Can you talk a little bit about that?

**Michelle Segar:** Sure. A lot of people think they don't like to exercise. There are a million different ways to be physically active. It's like saying you don't like ice cream and you've only tasted chocolate. That was probably why the thirty-one flavors of Baskin and Robbins was so successful; they open the door for possibility and invite people to pick their preferences.



Every day, we expand the idea of physical movement. We ask people to take ownership. It's your move. You can do this, but you have to do it in a way that feels right and feels good to you and maybe that you enjoy doing with other people. That way may change every day, just like what we eat. We want physical activity to be as flexible as other things we do.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Can you name three activities that we don't typically think of as exercise, but that we should put in that category?

**Michelle Segar:** Walking to work is one. A lot of times people decide to park in the closest parking lot, and probably pay a premium to do it. What if you viewed your trip to work as a way to build in steps that are going to fuel you during your day?

A lot of people don't consider yoga a physical activity because it doesn't get their heart rate up. But yoga benefits us in many ways and definitely counts as a physical activity.

I don't think people count or consider creating intimate time with our spouses and partners. What if, instead of sitting down and watching a show on TV, we decided to take a leisurely walk? Leisurely is the key word here. We hold our partner's hand and share our day. It doesn't take a lot of energy, which a lot of people don't have at the end of the day, and it's a lovely movement that creates a space where we can connect in a really meaningful way. It provides many different benefits and opportunities.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So we need to reframe exercise as movement. Once you start viewing walking as a form of exercise, there are so many ways that you can incorporate that, whether it's being on a conference call using a headset, or taking a walking meeting with some of the people in your office rather than simply sitting in a conference room. All of those are ways that we can then incorporate movement into our day-to-day lives without thinking about them as separate blocks.

**Michelle Segar:** Right, absolutely.



## Practical Tips from Michelle Segar

- Reframe exercise. It's not just something that's good for you — it's actually one of the greatest natural sources energy, focus, and joy.
- Don't focus on the long-term benefits of exercise. Instead, think about the way it will lift your mood the moment you start moving.
- Physical strain is not an essential part of exercise. Movement is the important thing — simply taking a few fifteen-minute walks is good enough.
- Identify physical activities that you enjoy and are drawn to doing. You are far more likely to stick with an exercise regimen if you enjoy it.
- If you're not sure what type of exercise is most enjoyable for you, try rating your mood on a seven-point scale (one = very negative, seven = very positive) before you start an activity and then rate your mood again after you're done. Try a few different exercises over several days to determine what works best.
- When it comes to exercise, aim to do what's realistic — not what's ideal. Better to have the goal of going to the gym twice a week and being completely successful than to have the goal of going five times a week, getting discouraged, and not going at all.
- Ritualize exercise into your behaviors. You could park your car in a spot that requires you to walk longer than you otherwise might, or get in the habit of taking a walk around the building before getting that second cup of coffee around 10:00 am.





## Laura Vanderkam on What the World's Most Successful People Do Differently

Laura Vanderkam is the author of *I Know How She Does It: How Successful Women Build Lives That Work*. This book, based on a time diary study of one thousand and one days in the lives of professional women and their families, takes a practical approach to the question of how people combine work and family while enjoying their own sweet time.

Laura is also the author of *What the Most Successful People Do Before Breakfast* (Portfolio, 2013), *168 Hours: You Have More Time Than You Think* (Portfolio, 2010), and *All the Money in the World: What the Happiest People Know About Wealth* (Portfolio, 2012). She is also the author of a novel, *The Cortlandt Boys*, available as an eBook.

Laura is a frequent contributor to *Fast Company's* website and a member of *USA Today's* Board of Contributors. Her work has appeared in numerous publications including *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *Reader's Digest*, *City Journal*, *Fortune*, and *Prevention*.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** You've written a range of fascinating books that are chock-full of insights on time management and daily routines. Let's start by talking about *What the Most Successful People Do Before Breakfast*. What should we do to get more out of our mornings?

**Laura Vanderkam:** Mornings are a great time for getting things done. It's a perfect time to tackle anything that is important to you and life has a way of crowding out. As I interviewed successful people about their lives, I kept noticing that many had morning routines to start their days right and advance them toward the lives they want.

Morning is really a great time for things that are in that important but not urgent category; things like nurturing yourself or your relationships, exercising, spiritual pursuits, or journaling. A lot of people really enjoy having family breakfast. It's also a good time for nurturing your career. If you have professional aspirations that can't be contained during the workday, mornings are a great time for that.



**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Can I ask you what you did this morning?

**Laura Vanderkam:** I have a five month old baby, so the morning starts around 5:30 these days. The first thing I do is feed him. Then he and I hang out until the rest of the house gets up.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Before he was born, how would you describe your typical morning?

**Laura Vanderkam:** I also have older children. We had very narrow windows between their baby stages, but before he was born I was getting up around six and working for an hour before I would deal with my family and get the kids ready for school. That was a quiet time to focus on projects that required a lot of discipline to stick with. I would get my coffee, sit down at the computer while I was still fresh, and crank out quite a bit in an hour. Eventually he'll be as old as his siblings were at that point; I look forward to having that time again.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** It sounds like you use your mornings in a way that allows you to do your most important work first, is that right?

**Laura Vanderkam:** I think so. I'm not naturally a morning person. Life has kind of made me into a morning person as I've had children and lots of people want to talk in the morning. People want to do interviews and things by about ten a.m., so you have to get up early if you want quiet time

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Interesting. So you're planning to get ahead before the start of the day, to get some of the most critical things that you want to get done accomplished.

Another book that you've written is about what the most successful people do at work. What separates high achievers from their less successful peers in the workplace?

**Laura Vanderkam:** We spend a lot of time at work and we're often not as accountable for that time. We have a tendency to focus on the work that's right in front of us, instead of thinking about what we are doing to move forward.

Really successful people think about investing their minutes in ways that bear returns over time. Some work is just done and there is nothing that has happened as a result of that. Other things, like reaching out to old contacts and renewing those ties, tend to bear fruit over time as those turn into better connections and opportunities for both of you. Spending time mentoring a colleague also bears dividends over time. So that's how you can make time count more—doing things with it that will pay you back over the years as you go.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Almost like the way you would diversify your finances, here you're describing doing activities that can help you in the short term, and you also want to have some of your time devoted to activities that are going to pay over the long term.

**Laura Vanderkam:** I think of this in my own life, where writing books sometimes feels a bit thankless because it's a long process. Then you have to get out and talk about them and all that. On the other hand, that book is then out there. I don't have to be in a place for my ideas to be there. I'm not sitting with someone who's just downloaded it, but my ideas are out there speaking for me in the marketplace. It's a way of multiplying my own influence and my time because I couldn't talk to all these people individually, but I can write a book for them.



**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** How would someone who's not a writer apply that insight?

**Laura Vanderkam:** Anything you do to be a thought leader is important. You don't have to be a writer to write articles for industry publications, or to put thoughtful comments on other people's writings, or do white papers or give talks about what you're doing. All those things can be recorded and put out there. Then people can interact with it even if you can't physically be in the situation. Those are some activities that bear returns beyond what you could actually create yourself.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** That is a really great point. Dorie Clark writes a lot about this idea of positioning yourself as a thought leader, even if you're not necessarily the number one expert on the topic. You can do that by writing white papers, putting out a podcast, or writing a blog. Having your ideas out there can pay dividends even when you're not necessarily in front of a client. Just creating products that have value to people on some level later on is a different way of seeing your job and in some ways is really a necessary way of reframing the work that we do.

**Laura Vanderkam:** I love Dorie's work. It is true that you can write and share ideas even if you're not the world's foremost expert. Even if it is the employee blog that no one reads except people in the company themselves, it's good to influence your colleagues. That has an effect over time as well.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Maybe I should reframe that. I think no one reads it, including your colleagues.

**Laura Vanderkam:** Including your colleagues? Well then, that's a different matter.

**Ron Friedman:** Maybe they're the least likely to read it.

Moving on...Another one of your books is *168 Hours: You Have More Time Than You Think*. In that book, you lay out the case that we actually have a lot more time in our weeks than we recognize. I wonder, why is it that our experience is so different from the reality?

**Laura Vanderkam:** A lot of people haven't added it up. People say 24/7, but no one ever multiplies it through. Because we haven't done the math, we don't have a really good sense of what time is available to us. If you just continue in this math theme of doing a few equations here: If you work fifty hours a week—which is a more than full time job—and if you sleep eight hours a day—which many people claim not to do—that's fifty-six hours a week. That still leaves sixty-two hours for other things, right? Sixty-two hours is a lot of time. That's almost nine hours a day, so the idea that you can't have a fulfilling family or personal life just because you're working fifty hours a week seems odd given how those numbers work out. I'm not denying that you may need to move things around creatively to make it all fit, but the math suggests that the time is there.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** What can we do to optimize the time that we have?

**Laura Vanderkam:** Being mindful is the first step. When people say they want to spend their time better, I always tell them to try figuring out how they're spending it now. There's dozens of time tracking apps out there if you're into that. I'm really an Excel sort of girl.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So you tracked what you did in certain hours of the day?



**Laura Vanderkam:** Yeah, I've actually been tracking my time continuously for the past two months as an experiment to see how it goes. I use Excel and not any of the apps. If you kept a very detailed journal, that would work as well. The point is simply to keep you accountable for your time. People often see that there are chunks of time during which they haven't really thought about what they're doing. It's easy to let that time disappear into things that are not particularly meaningful or enjoyable. That's time that can be redeployed to things that would be of better use.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I really like that idea of self-reflection around how we use our time. When we think about time, we think about how we're going to spend it tomorrow or over the next week. We don't really think about where the last twenty-four hours went.

You mentioned that Excel spreadsheet — are there also some apps that you started playing around with and could you tell us a little bit about what that experience was like?

**Laura Vanderkam:** I'm really not an app person. I know several of my readers have said Toggle works for them and the basic version is free.. If you don't like it, you can try something else, but at least get into the hang of it by doing that. I have an extremely old phone that doesn't even run most apps so it's still Excel for me.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** From your self-experiment over the last two months, have you uncovered any great insights about where your time is going?

**Laura Vanderkam:** I have. There are stories we tell ourselves — some true and some not true. I felt like I wasn't working as much as I had been in the past and found that was true. I'm working fewer hours now than in previous times when I've kept my time logs. That's partly from having the baby and that constraint on my time. The good news is that I am sleeping. I added up my sleep and it's been rising as the baby gets older, so that's nice. It's less sleep than I would ideally like, but it's not a bad number.

One interesting thing I've been telling myself is that I never get together with friends. This is just a time of my life where it's hard to do that. I'm working and I've got four small children; when am I going to see friends? Yet, when I look at my time log for two months, I've gotten together with quite a few friends. There are a lot of special occasions and I guess every time it happens I tell myself this never happens, but clearly it does.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So clearly there are a lot of hours that we're spending differently than we remember them. Maybe the experience of how we spend our time is actually quite different than our memory of those experiences, and having that information can lead you to make better decisions.

I've noticed that I can give you some pretty concrete things that I've gotten done between 9:00am and 1:00pm, but there's a black hole between the hours of 2:00pm and 5:00pm. Have you had any similar experiences around your productivity level varying over the course of the day?

**Laura Vanderkam:** Definitely. The hours that you mention are pretty common; a lot of us are better focused in the morning. Our energy levels dip in the afternoon, so that's really a good time to do work that doesn't require quite as much focus. Maybe schedule phone calls and emails in the afternoon, leave the morning for more of the deep thinking and focused work, and be sure to take breaks in the afternoon too. If you don't take real breaks, you take



fake ones where you are just cruising the web, not really sure what you're doing. It looks like work because you're at your computer, but you're not really getting anything done. It'd be better to just stand up and walk away and return a little bit more refreshed.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Let's move on to weekends. You've also written about how successful people use the hours in the weekend to come back focused and refreshed. How should we be using our weekends?

**Laura Vanderkam:** The key thing with weekends is that being mindful of the time can go a long way. I certainly don't think that people should plan every minute of the weekend. I'm not into this sort of regimented idea of blocking it out in fifteen minutes like we would with the work week, or sending calendar invites for dinner. That's really not necessary, but there's a huge distance between doing nothing and planning every minute, and we find the happy medium somewhere in there. I tell people to plan maybe three to five anchor events. Three to five fun things that you are looking forward to that will make the weekend feel restorative. That still leaves a lot of open space.

There's sixty hours between 6:00pm Friday and 6:00am Monday. Even if you sleep eight hours every night, that still leaves thirty-six hours. If you have three two-hour things, you've still got thirty hours to completely chill and do nothing, or as much of nothing one can actually do. Having those three things planned will make it feel, like you've actually done something right. You have things that you can look back on fondly from the weekend, things you could talk about Monday as you're processing what happened over the weekend.

The good thing about planning them ahead of time is that research into how the brain works is finding that anticipation accounts for a major chunk of human happiness. We're never perfectly blissful in the moment. You can be at a concert for your favorite rock band and feeling like your toe itches. But if you're looking forward to that rock concert, you are enjoying a lot of that bliss as it's stretching out many hours or days ahead of time. By planning it beforehand, you'll increase your enjoyment.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** That's a great tip. Do you plan what you're going to do on the weekends on Monday?

**Laura Vanderkam:** Not on Monday, but usually by Wednesday. By Wednesday I've been thinking about what I'd like to do and looking forward to the weekend. This weekend I'm going into New York Friday evening for dinner. Then I have a long run with a friend planned for Sunday morning, and we're off to vacation after that. That's a somewhat unusual weekend, but I'm really looking forward to it.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** What are some of the criteria that we should try to base our anchor events around? In other words, should we try to spend time with friends? Should we try to spend time going to great restaurants? What should we look for in those anchor events?

**Laura Vanderkam:** Yes, all of those. Those would be great. If you look at scales of experienced human happiness, when people say they're most enjoying themselves, they're doing things like socializing and even exercising. Being active and being engaged in spiritual pursuits are all very high up on the list. Those are great ideas for the weekend. It could be any sort of mix you wanted. It could be volunteering, it could be some quiet meditative time or socializing together with friends. Then plan something active, whether it's a walk



through town or a bike ride or going for a swim, anything along those lines.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** You've also written a lot about the impact of money on our mood. For many years psychologists and scientists believed that the connection between how much money you make and how happy you are is weak. But you argue that more important than how much money we make is how you spend the money that you earn.

From a happiness standpoint, how should we spend our money?

**Laura Vanderkam:** Money certainly can buy happiness if you spend it right. Most of us spend it in ways that do not actually increase our happiness over the long term. Again, looking at the scales of human happiness, if things that make us happy are relaxing, socializing, and being active, then you can use money to buy yourself time so you can go do those things. If you could get some items delivered instead of getting in your car and going to the store, that frees up time that you can then spend hanging out with friends.

If you move closer to work, that might be a little bit more expensive and it would have to be over the long term, but spending less time commuting every day would be a major happiness boost for most people. Being able to bike to work would also allow you to get that active time in, which is a known mood booster. The difference between sitting in your car in traffic for an hour and biking for twenty minutes in the morning like that is a different life. It is a different level of happiness, and that's something that you could spend your money to enable.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Is it fair to say that when it comes to spending money, maybe we should focus a little less on things that are going to deliver pleasure and focus a little more on things that frustrate us? Maybe we should use our money more strategically to eliminate sources of discomfort.

**Laura Vanderkam:** That would be a good approach to it. The absence of those things gnawing at you will give you a measurable happiness boost. Any way you can spend money to bring you closer to other people would also be a great happiness boost. Taking a friend out for lunch or splurging on plane tickets to go visit family are probably better uses of money than getting a more expensive car.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Another potentially good way of spending money is investing in exercise equipment that makes you want to go and exercise.

**Laura Vanderkam:** As long as you want to, yes. There are plenty of treadmills in people's basements holding clothes. You have to think about whether you will actually use it. We just got a treadmill for Christmas and it's been a good investment. I don't use it much right now, but it was great to have in January.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Tom Rath mentioned taking a treadmill and actually putting a board over it and placing his computer on it.

**Laura Vanderkam:** I guess that could work, as long as you don't turn it up too fast.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Right. In your newest book, *I Know How She Does It*, you focused on successful women and how they manage their lives. I'm curious about what you found there that was different from your work on successful people in general.



**Laura Vanderkam:** I actually had people keep track of their time for seven straight days so I wound up with a thousand and one days in the lives of women who both earn six figures and have kids. These are people who, we might say, have it all and their strategies for making it work. I did interview them, but I feel like a lot of the literature on women's work and life is very centered on anecdotes, and anecdotes are not helpful. I wanted to focus on data. I looked at exactly how much people worked, how much they slept, when they worked, when they slept, how much time they had for things like exercise and reading, and what time they spent on housework and errands. It was very enlightening. The difference between that and my previous books was this new, original data set that I could draw from. It showed pretty clearly that women with demanding jobs have more balanced lives than we often think they do. I think that would hold true for many men as well. Just because you have a big job doesn't mean you can't do things outside of work as well.

**Ron Friedman:** This is interesting. Do you think that for that sort of prototype that we have in our brain about the person who is super successful, people who once were earning millions of dollars, are actually the ones in the camp of having no work/life balance, whereas people who are making over a hundred thousand — doing well for themselves but not the ultra-successful CEO types — actually have more balance in their lives?

**Laura Vanderkam:** It's hard to know. I'd have to do a time diary study of the seven figure people. I'm not sure it would be entirely different. There's a CEO time use project that's going on out of the London School of Economics They have looked at CEOs across various industries in different countries, and the average work week was around fifty-two hours a week. So it's long, but fifty-two hours is not even close to flirting with the three-figure level.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** You've now written a very large and impressive number of books on how to be happy and how to be successful. If you had to sum them up into just a few tips about things that everyone should know about how to be more productive, are there some things that just come to the top of your mind?

**Laura Vanderkam:** Being aware of where the time goes. I really don't think you can spend your time better until you know how you're spending it now. Then asking what you want to be doing with your time goes a long way. Many of us assume we have no time. When we assume we have no time, we don't think about what we want to do with it. If we start from the assumption that we have more time than we think, we can start thinking about what we'd like to do with it. That's a very productive way to spend time.

Finally, don't let perfect be the enemy of the good. We often think that having small amounts of time available to do something doesn't count, or that it doesn't count if we can't do it every day at the same time. That's just not true. You can find ways to squeeze in a little bit of exercise here and there and get to it four times a week pretty easily. It's not an hour after work at the gym every day, but who said it needed to be? Don't let perfect be the enemy of the good as we try to build the lives we want.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Where else does that apply besides exercise? I really like that idea, and I think it's a lot more self-accepting and a way to lead a life less stressful. Where do you see that fitting into the workplace?

**Laura Vanderkam:** The example that I often use is having family breakfast. People hear the message that family dinner is the sign of a functioning family and if it doesn't happen there's something wrong with you. If the point is simply to share a meal together, it doesn't



have to be dinner. In fact, breakfast allows you to strategize about the day before it happens. It can be even more exciting and beneficial for your family than dinner. You can get out ahead of things and kids like waffles and strawberries more than they like broccoli, so breakfast is often an easier meal at which to interact with small people.

Even using small minutes works. People say, “I never have time to read.” Well, could you take fifteen minutes that you’d otherwise still be checking your email and pick up a book? Most of us could probably do that. It might not be setting aside hours and hours to read *War and Peace*, but it can work if the point is to bring some peace and happiness into your life.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I often hope for a Laura Vanderkam piece on how successful people manage their email. If you were to write a piece like that, what do you think you’d focus on?

**Laura Vanderkam:** I think I have fifty-six thousand emails in my inbox. People are shocked when I say that, but it doesn’t matter. I don’t waste time filing them. What’s the point? You can search them, so why file them? I don’t delete everything because, again, why bother? It’s not like it’s a dishwasher with a limited capacity. I get to what I can, and some stuff doesn’t get answered. It’s okay, I’m really not that important. Most things can continue without my input, so I try to spend less time on it. I try to schedule what I call email triages every couple of days, where I go back through to see if there is something that I meant to respond to. There often is, and I get to it then. But not everything gets done and that’s my strategy.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** That might fall into the category of, “Don’t let the perfect be the enemy of the good” in terms of email.

**Laura Vanderkam:** Yes.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Laura, thank you so much for taking the time. It sounds like it’s a very busy time in your life and I really appreciated you spending some of it with me.

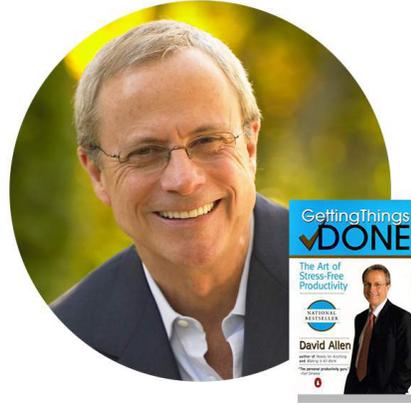
**Laura Vanderkam:** Thank you so much for having me.



## Practical Tips from Laura Vanderkam

- Use early mornings to move the needle on tasks that are important to you but are not necessarily urgent.
- Diversify your time investments between tasks that will yield immediate gain and tasks that will benefit you in the long term.
- Keep a spreadsheet and monitor how you spend your time. The key to optimizing the time you have is first determining how you're spending it now. If you prefer an app to a standard spreadsheet, try Toggle.
- Do focused work in the morning and save responding to email and making phone calls for the afternoon.
- Plan your weekend on Tuesday or Wednesday so that you have something to look forward to and feel positive about throughout the week.
- To elevate your happiness on the weekend, schedule events that include exercise and socializing with others.
- Money can make you happy if you spend it right. For example, spending money in ways that draw you closer to other people has been shown to measurably improve our satisfaction in life.
- Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good. Going to the gym for fifteen minutes is better than not going at all. The same is true for taking a quick walk with your spouse, or reading to your kids for only five minutes.





## David Allen on Getting the Right Things Done

David Allen is an author, consultant, international lecturer, and Founder of the David Allen Company.

He is widely recognized as the world's leading authority on personal and organizational productivity. His thirty years of pioneering research, coaching and education of some of the world's highest-performing professionals, corporations and institutions, has earned him Forbes' recognition as one of the top five executive coaches in the United States, and as one of the "Top 100 Thought Leaders" by Leadership magazine. *Fast Company* hailed David Allen "One of the world's most influential thinkers" in the arena of personal productivity, for his outstanding programs and writing on time and stress management, the power of aligned focus and vision, and his groundbreaking methodologies in management and executive peak performance. Time Magazine labeled his first book, *Getting Things Done*, as "the defining self-help business book of the decade."

David Allen is the author of three books; the international bestseller *Getting Things Done: the Art of Stress-Free Productivity* ("G.T.D." as the method is popularly known), *Ready for Anything*, and *Making It All Work: Winning at the Game of Work and Business of Life*. *Getting Things Done* has been a perennial business bestseller since its publication in 2001, and is now published in twenty-eight languages.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Let's start with a question that allows those who aren't familiar with your work to get a sense for your ideas. You wrote a book that's become a classic in the business literature and perennial bestseller called *Getting Things Done*. Now, suppose I haven't read it and I just want to know: How do I get more done? What would you say?

**David Allen:** We've uncovered and unpacked a five stage model about how you get your life, your head, and your world under control. We didn't really make it up; we just started to recognize it. It's five steps you use to get your kitchen under control, to get a company under control, to get your meeting under control. It's a very simple set of behaviors that are helpful to capture the stuff that has your attention and to clarify exactly what it means



and what you're going to do about it. You can organize the results in appropriate places so that you can step back and review and reflect on the totality of your commitments. You can then objectively make a judgment call about what to do and what not to do.

Most people are still using their head as their office. The human head is a terrible office. You'll be driven by the latest and loudest commitments. Also, the work in your head is based on the *Getting Things Done* methodology, which is about unloading all that stuff out of your head. You need to apply a thought process to clarify specifically what these things mean to you and what you are going to do about them. Then you have an organization of reminders so that you have the agenda when you go to the board meeting, or you know what to focus on when you're going to spend your weekend with your family. In a way, you're building an external brain. It's a simple idea, but most people have a much more complex, intricate, and varied life than they realize.

Back to the simple answer: Get your head empty, write it down, and then start to look at those things and make decisions about what they are and what they mean. Then create an organizational system so you're not using your head as your office and your reminder system— it wasn't designed to do that.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So write things down?

**David Allen:** Yeah, you have to get it out of your head. Any way to get it out of your head is fine, but your head evolved over millions of years to keep you alive on the savannah so that you could eat and not be eaten. It was designed to maintain four meaningful things; that's about it. Research has shown that your head's really bad at remembering. It's great at recognizing patterns. It's great at walking into a room or looking at a list and knowing what you're looking at, but it's silly to use it as your storage system. People are still living a lot of their life in their head. *Getting Things Done* was really about how to clear the internal space. You don't need time for good ideas; you need room for good ideas

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** One of the things that makes your book so interesting and unexpected is that you start off with an unusual comparison. You talk about how being good at your job, in many ways, is like being very good at martial arts. What's the connection?

**David Allen:** The surprises we get throughout the day. During any ten minute period in a work day, you could get an email from your grandmother, a FaceTime call from your kid, a client call about some problem, or you could have a staff person about to break into tears and you recognize the need to take them to lunch. That could all happen in ten minutes and it's like a martial art navigating each of those things and putting them in their proper place and perspective. If you're not wasted, but you're fresh and you're clear, you're a martial arts master.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So it's about being clear so we that can have the bandwidth available when we need it.

**David Allen:** You don't want to do is over- or under-react. The problem is that most people take one meeting to the next; they take home the work in their head as opposed to getting closure. They should put placeholders to appropriately stop and prevent multitasking. Rapidly switching without stopping is a big cost. If you watch a martial artist fight four people, they don't actually fight four people at the same time; they take them one at a time, refocusing quickly and carrying no residue from one to the other. The military refers to this as situational awareness. I need a clear head so I can see multiple horizons at any one point



in time, and prevent over- or under-reacting to anything. That really is the challenge with this world of being connected 24/7, and the flood of potentially meaningful information coming at us. You can't just sit back and assume that life will be okay if you're engaged with all of those things and they represent commitments your commitments and interests.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So writing things down helps us stay clear and focused. Why do you think it has such a great impact on our ability to think?

**David Allen:** I don't really know. The brain scientists have done all the research in the last ten or fifteen years. There are two new books out, *The Organized Mind* and *Brain Chains*, about the aggregation of cognitive science research that's shown that your head's for having ideas, not for holding them. Writing it down makes a huge difference. I've never met anybody who, when they felt at least slightly overwhelmed and confused, didn't feel at least a little more focused and in control after they sat down and made a list. Control and focus are the two key elements of self-management and organizational management. The only time you need to improve your time management, your prioritization, or your organization is when something is not as under control as it ought to be. Other times, you feel like something is not as meaningfully focused as it needs to be. Control and focus automatically happen once you start to externalize your commitments and take a look at them from another altitude. But you can't do it in your head; it's not designed for that.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** You recently told *The New Yorker* that taking down ideas using pen and paper is superior to taking them down using an iPad or a computer. Why do you think that's the case?

**David Allen:** I'm not sure. I'm not a researcher, but there's a lot of anecdotal evidence. Some research evidence show that, when you're more physically involved with these things, something happens in terms of the externalization that triggers part of our psyche that's more mature and more cognitively optimal.

I know a lot of high tech people that are actually going back to low tech in terms of their list management because they find that the brain can wrap itself around the ideas more easily. You can see them mapped against each other. Here's all my projects, then here's all the phone calls I need to make, and here's my strategic plan. That's a lot easier to see in physical space than it is in digital space.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Right. The other thing that often happens when you sit down in front of a computer or pick up your iPad is that you're inundated with distractions.

**David Allen:** The rabbit trails can be infinite.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Exactly. One piece of advice from your work that's really resonated with me is your recommendation not to simply compose a list of projects or ideas – but to note the next physical action you need to take in order to move the situation forward. So, for example, if I notice that the break light on my car is out, I wouldn't write down “break light.” I'd write down “call mechanic to schedule appointment.” Why does that extra step make a difference?

**David Allen:** The main reason people procrastinate is not having a sense of control, not knowing the next step that should be taken. If you don't get the thinking down to the next physical-visible activity required to do your taxes, to fire the person, to increase your credit line, or manage the vacation coming up on your holiday, these phantoms begin to grow



and seem like so much to think about and plan. And you just freak yourself out.

The people who procrastinate the most are the most sensitive, creative, and intelligent people because a million horrible consequences flash through their mind and freak them out. Getting it down to the next physical action is getting it down to a chunkable piece. Once you get down to that level that part of you that actually likes to engage and create wins, especially when it's about something bigger. It's a way to get rid of the demons of all the stuff that must be done.

In order to be appropriately engaged with any of your commitments, you must finish your thinking down to the next action level. It doesn't mean you have to plan it, it doesn't have to be perfect, and it doesn't have to be thought through in terms of all the details — you just need to know what the kickstart is. What you need to know: Mom's birthday is coming up and the next step might be calling your sister or surfing the web for possible presents. If you don't get it down to that level, there's a part of you that says, "What are you going to do about it?" and this continues to occur like a little monkey jumping in your psyche. This will wake you up at 3:00am and you'll be worrying about something you can do nothing about. Once you park that stuff in there, you know you'll give as much attention to the fact that you need cat food as needing to redo your strategic plan. That's why externalizing all this stuff, keeping it out in front of you and keeping it current, clean, and clear can be transformative.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So if you've got a client presentation you're working on next week, you could just write down "client presentation" on your To Do list. But you're saying no, you want to write that next step or, for example, "research previous presentations that I've done." The act of identifying the next physical action makes us calmer about how to approach the project.

**David Allen:** And then it makes you appropriately engaged. The big secret to G.T.D. is not getting things done. It's being appropriately engaged with your life. Are you appropriately engaged with that presentation, with your cat, with your life partner, and your health? It doesn't mean doing all of that; it just means that you've clarified what you've committed to finish or change about those things. Parking the appropriate reminders to make sure that the action will be taken at the right time and in the right place doesn't happen by itself. This is actually a martial art. You have to train yourself to think about it in that way and you have to park these things in appropriate places in a trusted way.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** A lot of people keep their To Do list for work separate from their To Do list for home. You've written that it's better to keep a single unified list. Why?

**David Allen:** You want to be able to see everything as an orientation map, wherever you are, so you can be optimally productive. In the old days of people doing paper-based bill paying, they just collected their bills during the week and kept them in a drawer or file or basket or whatever was on their desk, and paid their bills on Saturday. They didn't need to carry that around with them because they knew that they had a trusted behavior and a trusted system that managed it.

If you have some phone calls you need to make and you're walking around on your lunch hour and say, "Hey, well, I could make some calls," that's not optimizing your ability to move the needle on what's meaningful to you. It's really about what's useful for you to be able to see at any point in time. It's about understanding the eco-system of your life, your



engagements and your commitments, and being able to see the right maps at the right time, which could then optimize your ability to do that.

The world has changed, and for many of us there's no distinction between work and play. There's no distinction between a home office and a real office; they're all the same place. This is very cool in one perspective; it's a great time to be alive because technology is allowing us to do these things. At the same time, it's a terrible time if you don't know what you're doing because you can get sucked down a million rabbit holes. Often, one feels terrible that they weren't doing what they should have been doing. The good news is that it's challenging everybody to become a lot more of their own executive in their life than in previous times.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Let's say I've started every item on my To Do list with a verb, I've identified my next steps, and I've even figured out my next physical action. What do I do next, to make sure that I follow through?

**David Allen:** You need to make sure you've got your eco-system and maps about the things that you should look at during any point in time. Before I go to sleep, I glance at my landscape for tomorrow, asking, "What are the things that will die if I don't do them?" I have an idea of what other things would add value if I did them in between the things I have to do. I just kind of tee that up.

However, I'm a freedom guy and I'm into planning as little as I can. I enjoy being spontaneous, and I want the freedom to be able to do what I want without excessive planning. That freedom doesn't come free; it only comes when I know what I'm not doing. I need to be able to constantly refresh, recalibrate, and reevaluate the inventory of my commitments such as phone calls, projects, etc. You don't go unconscious to all that. You need to engage in an appropriate way so that your mind knows what it needs to do right now. It's all about getting comfortable and present with what you're doing. But as I say, "You can only feel good about what you're not doing when you know what you're not doing," so you need to be reviewing and then recalibrating against that.

Back to your very practical question: Getting everything out of your head and deciding your next actions and outcomes are like projects that you're committed to finish gives you a very powerful operational inventory of your work. Getting tires on your car and handling your next vacation is as much work as the strategic plan or launching the ad campaign, so that whole inventory needs to be reviewed regularly and put out of your head. Then you just trust your intuition about what and what not to do.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** When you say a "regular basis," do you do it once a week, once a day, or once a month?

**David Allen:** There are certain things you should be reviewing several times a day. You need to review whatever it is you need to review, to get it off your mind as often as you need to get it off your mind. How often do you need to be reminded that you need cat food in order to get cat food off your mind? How often do you need to be reminded about your strategic plan for the company? Maybe that's quarterly, maybe that's monthly. It depends on one's needs.

One of the things we came up with was the weekly review because the most people need to make an operational review at least once a week. Step back, take a look at your list, and get



current. Then take an inventory of projects you're committed to finish; the action items for those projects should be complete and current. You should review past and future calendars to see where you might forget something. That doesn't happen by itself; you actually have to build that in. If you're still getting pinged by emails, interruptions, and phone calls or running down rabbit trails, you will not do that.

Regular reflection time, such as a two-hour block once a week, is critical for anybody to stay sane these days.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** A two-hour reflection block. What do you do with those two hours?

**David Allen:** You review all your lists, catch up on the inventory of things that you are tracking, and use that time to step back and reflect from a higher perspective. Most people walk around with this gnawing sense of anxiety that there's something they should be doing, but they don't know what the hell it is. They can't relax with themselves because they haven't renegotiated all those inventories of their commitments.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Let's talk a little bit about email. One of the things that you focus on is getting our minds to quiet down so that we can be in the present moment. The average worker gets about one hundred and twenty emails a day and that number is expected to rise. What can we do to keep our minds focused and clear when we're constantly being bombarded with other people's requests?

**David Allen:** There's a little link on most emails called unsubscribe. Get off those lists so that you only get the stuff that you want. I've emailed heavily since 1983. A lot of people listening to this weren't even born then. How could we live our lives without the ability to be able to be connected no matter where we are? Email is great, but if you're getting a lot as part of life and work, then you should structure your life to be able to manage those by going into your mailbox on a regular basis.

This is where the "real martial art-ness" of this starts to come into play. It's called "don't let yourself keep opening and closing it and over and over again." That is a huge waste of your time, your energy, and your psychic space. Learn to make quick decisions like, "What is this and can I dump it?" Do I need to just file it as reference or is there something I need to act on? In *Getting Things Done*, we defined that algorithm about what you need to decide about any input that is potentially meaningful to you. You need to decide its meaning and then build a system in your digital world, or wherever you're working, so that you can then park those things appropriately. It takes most people thirty to ninety minutes a day just to stay current with that volume of incoming email, and most people listening to this have a huge backlog. You're going to have to deal with that. There's no light at the end of that tunnel if you're just letting it pile up.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** In a lot of organizations you're being bombarded with email and often it's not lists you can unsubscribe from, although I'm sure lots of people would like to unsubscribe from their manager's emails or from their clients' emails. How do you stay proactive when you're constantly being attacked with opportunities to be reactive?

**David Allen:** To a large degree, that is our life. I've put a whole lot of things in motion and they're moving me toward things that I want to get done. There's nothing wrong with being reactive — I call it responsive. It could very well be that 80% of your day is just responding to things that you're committed to. You're getting project information and updates. You're



responsive to your boss because you need to pay attention to his or her priorities. Their priorities will take precedence over yours, no matter what. Life is like that. If people keep complaining about the phone ringing, but their job is to answer the phone, they made a bad career choice.

The one organization that never has crises is the fire department. They're organized for that. They're always preparing for the next surprise. It shouldn't shock people that their work consists of those tasks, since their job requires them. You should be dealing very efficiently as a martial artist, to be ready for whatever the next surprise is coming toward you.

When I'm not doing anything else, I'm cleaning up email to get to zero. I'm cleaning up my basket to zero because there's a surprise coming toward me I can't see. How much backlog of unprocessed yet potentially meaningful things do you think I want when that surprise hits? Zero. I never actually get to zero because there's always stuff coming in, but I want to maintain as minimal of an inventory as I can so that I have the freedom to respond without feeling something is falling through the cracks.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** What I'm taking away from this is that we really need to be mindful of how much cognitive surplus we have because if we want to be creative, we really need to have some quiet. Also, it's an opportunity to daydream and think ahead about our next big idea.

**David Allen:** Exactly! The cognitive science demands that your brain rests. You must sleep. You must daydream. You must do these things in order to maximize your cognitive process because the cognitive process itself tires out. It is a muscle. You've heard of decision fatigue. Your brain can only handle so many decisions without having rest. If you're not implementing the *Getting Things Done* methodology, it's hard to do. You're trying to focus on something and you keep thinking, "I need cat food." If you're trying to rest and be contemplative while remembering the cat food, your mind cannot focus or process effectively.

It's now accepted as scientific fact that, if these unmanaged commitments aren't handled well, your cognitive process is hindered. I've known this after thirty years on the street dealing with some of the best and brightest people implementing this methodology and watching how much difference it made, but it's nice to know that the scientists, the researchers, and the academics all agree that it really does work this way.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I read *The Organized Mind* -- that book you mentioned—and the author, Daniel Levitin, cites you as the solution to a lot of the problems that we face in everyday life.

**David Allen:** Dan's a great guy. He actually started writing his book before he read mine and when he read it he said, "Oh my God, this guy actually came up with the same sort of thing." We came to the same conclusions through very different paths.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Let's talk a little bit about you. A lot of folks might assume because of the success you've had with *Getting Things Done*, that you've been working on this your entire career. But as it turns out, you've actually had a fairly varied career. You worked in thirty-five different professions by the time you were thirty-five years old; do I have that right?

**David Allen:** Yeah, that's right, but I stretched it. I mean, how many things have I actually been paid for? My first job was at age five. I was a magician and charged five cents for my



magic show on the sidewalk in Texas. I included all of those types of “jobs.” It was just a fun exercise to say how many things I actually have done for money. And it was true that in a way I didn’t really know what I wanted to do out here in this world. I was more inner-directed, towards my own spiritual and personal development interests.

I was a philosophy and history major in college. I was fascinated by enlightenment and consciousness. I’ve been launched on my own inner path. Mainly, people do not get paid to learn who they are or learn about truth and the universe. I had to have paying jobs, so I went and looked around. I didn’t like to be bored, so I found some interesting things to do and had a lot of friends who had their own visions about what they wanted to do, so I became a pretty good “number two guy.” I helped a guy manage a landscape company. I helped a couple friends start a restaurant. I helped another guy with a moped distributorship, and I helped another friend who had a service station and a car restoration business. I just wound up helping people improve their own systems. Eventually I got bored, so then I would change careers and professions and move on.

One day I said, “Well, I guess they actually pay people to do that. They call them consultants and they pay them money.” So in 1981 I created my own little consulting business and said, “Let me just show up and see if I can improve situations.” That made me very hungry to find good models that I could really trust, so that I could walk into a business I didn’t know and still improve the condition from their perception, no matter what. That’s how I began to cobble together, uncover, discover, and unpack these practices that became G.T.D.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Interesting. Quite a path.

**David Allen:** But it took me twenty-five years to figure it out. I thought everybody else had already figured this out ahead of me. These executives are making a lot more money than I’d probably ever see in my life. I figure they must have figured this out. No. The higher up and the more sophisticated people were, the more attracted they were to this methodology. One day I had the big ah-ha. Oh, it’s because it relieves “drag” on your system and the people most aware of “drag” are the fastest people. Maybe that doesn’t mean working harder or sweating more. For a lot of people it means an improved quality of life, getting home earlier and being able to watch their kids without being on their smartphone. That’s where a lot of the real transformational kinds of testimonials we get from people implementing this methodology come from.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** What’s one thing that you know today about “getting things done” that you wish you had known when you started along this path?

**David Allen:** It’s about creating space and what people can do with the room internally. I sort of had an inkling of that early on because I was attracted to the sort of space used for strategic vision, what I now refer to as the strategic value of clear space. But I wasn’t that conscious about it to begin with. I knew it created the ability for people to be able to get more done with less effort and to be able to feel better and more on top of their game. But it was more of a subtle understanding of how powerful these techniques and these practices really are for people, especially as the world is bombarding them with more things that start to create static and residue in the system. A lot of my awareness was how useful and powerful these tools and practices were as people had more to deal with.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So to sum up the ideas: Take everything that you have in your brain and put it down to figure out what the next actionable steps are, make some time to go over



your list so that you're not working on busy work but you're actually working on things that are important, and have practices in place to help you focus your mind on the right tasks.

**David Allen:** Indeed. This all sounds sort of reactive and passive as a way to try to manage your life, but if you actually start engaging in those practices, they start to trigger access to deeper levels of your intuition to elicit more inspiration, more creative thinking, and more innovative thinking. There's a very positive aspect once you start to clear the deck. It's not like you clear the deck and suddenly have nothing on your mind. The more you clear your mind, the more room you have to be creative and innovative in your thinking. At a certain point you sort of get into the zen of the whole game. Life's just like that, but you need to keep clearing space as you keep having more, expanding more, and increasing sophistication of things you're committed to do.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** What can you do as a manager or leader to get more people around you using these techniques? How do you get them using them in their everyday work?

**David Allen:** First you need to use them yourself. As you start to manifest and model these behaviors, it automatically affects everyone around you. If you're responding to emails within twenty-four to forty-eight hours, people feel a little embarrassed if they don't report to you. It's not about you legislating some new thing. G.T.D. is really nothing but good business practice. If you reported to me, Ron, and you showed up in my office, I would give you a list of all the projects I've given to you and that you're working on because I have some other cool things I'd like to give you, but I just want to see what your inventory is. If you can't produce it, you're fired. Or I would say, "Ron, why don't you read this book? You might feel a little better about what's on your plate."

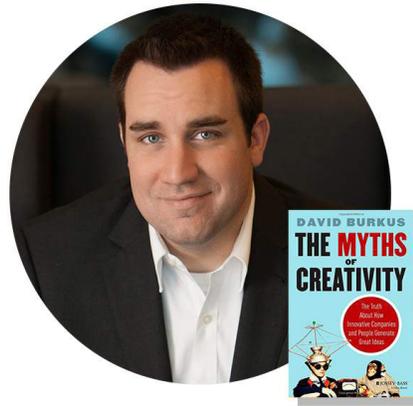
It's not about any one particular thing; it's really about building this lexicon of practices about outcomes and actions. What are we doing about the things we're committed to? We have watched whole cultures change simply with meetings that start by saying, "What are we trying to accomplish by what time?" You don't end discussions and meetings without saying, "What's the next action?" I mean, these are very common sense, but that doesn't mean they are commonly done. Learning to learn, just starting to use the vocabulary, using these behaviors, and then expecting that people apply these practices and behaviors can make a huge difference. And of course, give them my book!



## Practical Tips from David Allen

- Being productive requires being present in the moment. To achieve that focus, you need to minimize both external and internal distractions.
- To reduce internal distractions, make a habit of writing down tasks or commitments you need to get done in the future, so that they don't clutter your thinking in the present.
- Consider keeping your list on paper, so that there are fewer distractions for you to resist both when you write things down and when you review your list at a later time.
- Instead of charging full steam ahead at all times, set aside an hour or so each week to review whether the items you are working on align with your long-term objectives.
- Start each item on your list with a verb that represents the next physical action you need to take to move the project forward.
- Avoid multitasking. Like a martial arts fighter, focus on one opponent (or task) at a time.





## David Burkus on How to Elevate Your Creativity

David Burkus is a best-selling author, an award-winning podcaster, and associate professor of management at Oral Roberts University. His latest book, *Under New Management*, reveals the counterintuitive leadership practices that actually enhance engagement and drive performance in companies. He's delivered keynotes to the leaders of Fortune 500 companies and the future leaders of the United States Naval Academy. David is a regular contributor to *Harvard Business Review* and *Forbes*.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** My first question has to do with your writing around creativity. You argue that in many ways we get creativity wrong and that those misconceptions prevent us from reaching our full creative potential. So let's start at the beginning. How do we get creativity wrong?

**David Burkus:** I've found that a lot of our beliefs about how creativity works, our creative ability, and creativity among teams are based on myths and stories that try to explain this mysterious concept. The problem is that clinging to these myths in the face of reality can really limit us.

There are at least five decades of real, solid empirical research on creativity; yet we still cling to the stories. We talk about how we need to feel inspired, or creative ability is just a genetic gift. If that's true, we must all have some level of creativity in our genes. I've been to kindergarten and every one of those kids is creative. There are questions beyond genetics, like, "How did some people develop the skill more than others and what can I do to redevelop the skill no matter what age I am?"

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So where does creativity really come from?

**David Burkus:** The best explanation I've seen is Teresa Amabile's Componential Model of Creativity. She says that we're most likely to have a creative idea when certain key factors are in play

One of those factors is motivation. We know that intrinsic motivation is better than extrinsic motivation, but it's possible to give an extrinsic bonus to something you're already



intrinsically motivated to do.

There are also creative thinking skills — not creativity, that’s something we all have, but actually the skills to know when it’s time to brainstorm. When is it time to have deep, focused work? When do you need to use convergent thinking, divergent thinking, abductive reasoning, inductive reasoning, or deductive reasoning? That’s a skill that can be learned, trained, and developed over time.

You have to have some level of expertise. You have to actually know something about the field in which you’re trying to make creative insights. Frank Gehry had to have some level of expertise with physics, engineering, and architecture in order to design amazing buildings. You have to be careful, though — too much expertise might actually be a bad thing. Experts can fall into the trap of believing they already know what will and won’t work and thus fail to experiment.

The fourth factor is the social environment. I like to think of the first three as three circles surrounded by the fourth. That overlap is where creativity comes from. You have to be plugged into a social environment that is supportive of creativity and things like limited risk taking so that you can actually test out crazy ideas. Your environment must support the sharing of information within the organization, to tear down the existing paradigms, and outside the organization, to benefit from a diversity of ideas. Limited risk taking requires some level of entrepreneurial spirit, but your social environment must inspire the idea that anybody can try this and anybody can implement a creative idea. Without that, in that sort of old school parochial classroom where the desks are in a row and you get slapped on the knuckles with a ruler for acting out of turn, you learn that it’s easier to stay quiet and save the skin on your knuckles. Creativity dies in that type of environment. In corporate life, you learn that it’s best to be a good little automaton rather than raise a ruckus about your great idea. Without the right social environment, you can have the other three factors at play and a person will still find that it’s easier to just opt out.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** You’ve written a lot about brainstorming. I’ve been in corporate environments where everyone gets pulled into the conference room and told to brainstorm ideas for three hours. You indicate that brainstorming is often misused and can actually stand in the way of coming up with better solutions. Tell us about that.

**David Burkus:** Yes. I have a love/hate relationship with brainstorming. I love brainstorming because it represents divergent thinking, this ability to get a lot of ideas in a short period of time. The problem with brainstorming is that divergent thinking alone does not equal creativity. The ability to come up with lots of ideas is a measurement of one aspect of creativity, but it’s not the whole pie. We get into the room and say, “We’ve got this problem, so let’s just throw out a bunch of ideas.” then we’ll come out of that room after three hours and we’ll pick the best idea. That’s no way get an idea that’s actually going to solve the problem. Brainstorming is part of a larger process that involves doing a ton of research.

I’m a huge fan of the design thinking method. One company in particular, Continuum, starts every project with what they call Phase Zero. They get a design brief from a client. They assume that the client did not actually take enough time to understand the problem, so they go back and research what the client thinks the problem is. They often find that they need to solve a very different problem in order to make the client happy.

We need to know we’re asking the right questions before we go into the room to brain-



storm. Even after we have done all of our divergent thinking, we need a time of conversion thinking to eliminate and merge ideas that benefit from a little bit combination.

I find that, in most organizations, you come out of brainstorming and think, “Well, we have one good idea, let’s try that one,” or you look at the wall and you go, “Oh, we don’t really have any ideas.” That’s because you’re still not done. The best thing to do is to prototype and test the top three to five ideas. Refine them as you get actual real feedback on the idea from inside the organization or actual clients and customers. A much larger process comes from researching that we have the right question and then failing our way forward towards the perfect solution. Brainstorming is one little piece in the middle. It makes us feel like we’re doing lots of work and we get everybody together so they’ll feel included, but it’s just one step; it’s not the process. If we mistake the step for the process, we end up frustrated with our results. That’s what causes most people’s love/hate relationship with brainstorming. They know that they need to do something that looks like brainstorming; they just don’t realize they still have more to do when it’s done.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Very interesting. All of that speaks to how we can get teams behaving more creatively. Let’s shift by talking a little bit about what we can do on an individual level. What are some practical things that I can do to elevate my creativity throughout the workday?

**David Burkus:** There’s a couple different things. The way we structure our workday is important. I actually use email very deliberately. I think it was Stephen King who said: “Write with the door closed, edit with the door open.” That refers to knowing when to plug in to cultivate that diverse network and when to take the time for that deep, focused work. We think that to be creative we should be off in our solace. What we should be doing when we’re looking to ideate is have lots of conversations with different people.

When we have a problem, we go to the same three to five experts instead of trying to cultivate a diverse array of ideas and getting a bunch of different people in it. When we’re talking to people, we also need to be careful to whom we’re speaking. We need to be sure to cultivate networks without too much expertise in one area and lots of different options.

We need to be comfortable with the idea of testing stuff. We think the very first time we hear an idea it has to be the perfect pitch, the perfect proposal, or it won’t get any traction. We need to get comfortable with the idea of beta testing and throwing ideas out there to get some feedback so that we can refine it and move forward. One of the biggest things that limit the expression of creativity and prevent us from reaching our creative potential is this fear of being judged immediately and failing. We avoid trying because then we can’t fail. We won’t win, but we also won’t lose. When we actually try, we get feedback that can lead to a more creative process, product, and outcome; but we have to get comfortable with that idea.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** You had an article in *Forbes* that talked about the benefits of a messy desk. A lot of people view their office as a reflection of who they are and don’t want to give off the wrong signals. Messy can sometimes mean disorganized, but you argue something differently — that the environment in which we work can actually impact our creativity in some surprising ways. So what’s the benefit of having a messy desk?

**David Burkus:** I love that you’ve actually read the piece; that’s awesome. I found out afterwards that Albert Einstein once said, “If a cluttered desk is the sign of a cluttered mind,



what is an empty desk the sign of?”

I really like organizing my desk at the end of the day, but there's some benefit it being cluttered. We were talking earlier about divergent thinking and being able to make lots connections and come up with lots of different ideas, etc. If your desktop looks like a single document, that is what you're focusing on now; that's great when you need that focus. When you're coming up with lots of different ideas, you need lots of different stimuli from lots of different sources and that reflects to your desk. That doesn't mean that I just happened to have a quote about reading and writing and editing. That was serendipitous. That doesn't happen all the time, but it's almost like the messy desk is a reflection of our mind, and us. It's okay to sort of zip around when we're still in the divergent thinking stage.

There's also a time to clean off the desk and get focused. I was talking on my podcast with Joshua Davis, who has this book called *Two Awesome Hours*, and we were joking that having two desks would be the perfect thing. I'd have my messy desk for when I need divergent thinking and then I could just turn around and go to my clean desk when I need focus. That's probably the best way to do it.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I have to tell you, I actually have two desks for this purpose. When they invented the cubicle, this was the idea that they actually were looking to create: multiple surfaces on which people could work. The idea ended up getting hijacked for the movable partitions so they ended up being able to cram more people into less space, but if you look at the invention of the cubicle, the invention really was intended to give people privacy and multiple surfaces on which to work.

So the idea of the messy desk is valuable because you're exposed to ideas that may not necessarily be related to your current project, which then prompts you to view your assignment in new ways.

You wrote about a related concept in a piece on the impact of sitting in a cafe. How does taking your thinking into a cafe, where you are exposed to different people, also get you thinking creatively?

**David Burkus:** There is actually research into what the right level and kind of ambient noise is. They put people into a lab facility and vary the level of ambient noise they were listening to. In some cases, they would use a recording of coffee shops. They found that the right level of noise was right about mid-range —quieter than a construction site outside of your window, but not total silence. They've found that total silence can be really distracting. That white noise machine or cafe style level of ambience serves to unlock the mind from being too focused on the task, but is still possible to drown out when you need to be focused. It's a really interesting study on that balance. You don't necessarily need to work at the coffee shop, though there is also good research connecting coffee and creativity. The point is that our environment really does matter. The best environments for doing creative work are ones that can distract you when you need to be distracted. When you need to focus, they don't steal you away all the time by being too loud or too soft.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Speaking of distractions, you've written about the idea that email can be beneficial. A lot of times, we view emails as a necessary evil we have to get on to respond to clients or fellow colleagues, but you argue that a well-timed email break can actually elevate our creativity. How so?



**David Burkus:** This is something I've found in my personal life and bring up in my talks. I actually ruined it recently when I bought one of those Apple watches. I had to turn off most of the notifications within a day. The Apple Watch has a cool setting where it'll put a little red dot at the top of the clock face instead of actually vibrating your wrist off with notifications. I think we hate email because it pings; like it's a push and we hate "push email" we're working on something.

It actually happened to me just now because I forgot to put my computer into Do Not Disturb. I got a text message while we've been recording this and suddenly something was stealing a bit of attention.

Will all of that said, there is a time when we're doing deep, focused work that we actually need a break and to think about something else. This goes back to work by a bunch of different creativity researchers on incubation. The idea is that any good creative process has a time where we step aside and stop working on that project. It's like the stories of Archimedes in the bathtub and Newton with the apple and long walks. I get all my best ideas in the shower. All of those "nice" moments are great for incubation. I can't exactly go take a shower in the middle of a workday. It doesn't really reflect well on me as a productive employee to just go take a shower or say I'm going to go take a walk because I need an idea. It doesn't work.

I've found that, if you turn off those notifications, email can be a really good incubator. The research supports that it makes no difference whether you take a walk, sit in silence, or just do an unrelated task. Checking email is not related to the project itself, but still productive and gives you all of the benefits of incubation, letting your subconscious mind take over, and letting some things click. I've turned off most of my notifications, except the red dot. When I need that moment, I go to the well. Like you said, most email is important but doesn't require too much intelligence. It's mostly messages like, "Tuesday at two sounds great or actually this would be Wednesday at four." Or, you know, responding to those mass emails. Occasionally, I have to end my day with long reply emails, but those little ones are perfect incubators if you batch them and save them for when you need to take a break from that deep work project.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Now, to clarify, you do want to have periods of time before you do that incubation, where you're taking in as much information as possible about the project you're working on and only then have your incubation period.

**David Burkus:** Yes, great clarification. Usually the perfect time is after you've done that research part and decided what the right question is, or maybe you even played around with a couple ideas. Any time that you feel yourself thinking about a problem and coming up with the same wrong answer, that's a pretty good time to take a break. Also, take that incubation moment right then instead of trying to plow through because your mind is just going to keep going back to that.

There are actually four or five different explanations for why incubation works. One is called selective forgetting, the idea that you forget that wrong answer and become more open to other possibilities. So, right after you do the research and hit those same wrong answers because your mind is following the same easy path, that's a great time to incubate.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Interesting. So we've talked about things that we can do as individuals to be more creative. Now, let's say I'm a manager and I want my team thinking more



creatively. Do you have any suggestions for leaders who are looking to stimulate that creative thinking in the people around them?

**David Burkus:** Yes. One of the best things you can do for your team is teach them to fight. Teach them to have conflict. Teach them to challenge each other's ideas, but not in a "no, your idea is wrong and you're a terrible human being" way. More of a "yes, and" — we could also do this or we could also add that. Most of the time when you come into an organization where everybody is getting along, where there's no fighting and there's no conflict — I'm referring to task focused conflict, not people actually fighting — when everyone agrees, there are no ideas being generated. You have a team of yes men.

My favorite example is an apocryphal story about Alfred P. Sloan. Peter Drucker says it's true so I'll believe it's true, but I can't find it in Sloan's memoirs. There was a board meeting where Alfred P. Sloan was talking about a big decision for General Motors. He said, "I think we're all in agreement about what needs to be done here." And one by one all the people in the room were nodding their head, "yeah." So then he says, "I propose we suspend this meeting until one of you has a different alternative." That was huge. It gave his people permission to think, which goes back to shaping the social environment, and taught them to fight with each other.

Sometimes, you need to give people permission to come up with ideas. You need to suspend judgment as long as you can, so that they don't feel like they have to wow you with their pitch, they're just pitching it as an iteration. They pitch it as something that can get better and they get to keep that permission. If people have to wait for that perfect golden idea in order to tell you anything, they're not going to tell anyone anything. If people think they can go to their bosses with ideas that they can test and refine, that's a totally different environment. That is the social environment piece that can really stimulate group creativity.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I really like the idea that if you have too much agreement, it's not so much that you have a great idea but that you're surrounding yourself with people who don't feel empowered to disagree. That speaks to this other idea that you've raised, which is that we don't necessarily have a lack of good ideas in organizations, but rather we are not skilled at recognizing good ideas when we're faced with them. How do we get better at recognizing good ideas?

**David Burkus:** Organizations will call me in to give talks or run workshops and literally tell me that they need their people to have more great ideas or have better ideas or that "we want our people to be more creative." My response is always the same: They're probably just as creative as you need them to be; the problem is their social environment. I call this the mousetrap myth, from that saying, "If you build a better mousetrap, the world will beat a path to your door." We think that if you come up with a great idea, it'll be magically recognized and, therefore, it's okay to dismiss someone that comes to you with a terrible idea because we'd be able to recognize the great ones. We think we're great at recognizing good ideas, but great ideas get rejected all of the time. Kodak invented digital cameras. Xerox invented the personal computer. The *Rite of Spring* is famous for the riot that it caused on its opening night because it was such a controversial piece. I'll show it to my three year old, but it caused a riot because it was such a divergence from the status quo.

For an idea to be creative, it has to be judged to be new and useful. It has to depart from the status quo, but the status quo and our past experiences are the only things we have to judge



ideas with. When we hear a creative idea, we hear — by definition — something that's new and departs from the status quo. We already have this hidden bias against it because it's new and untested and we have no data.

Jennifer Mueller's probably the best researcher in this field. She's shown that, in times of uncertainty, leaders and as managers say they want creative ideas but reject those ideas when we're given them. We have an explicit promotion of creative ideas, but an implicit bias against them.

So we're terrible at judging great ideas. How do we get better at it? We can talk through a couple of different ways to get your pitch accepted, and I lean on a lot of the work by Everett Rogers on the five factors. I'm more interested in the question of permission because, as you said, Innovation is not an idea generation problem, it's an idea recognition problem.

We need something like Creatives or Innovators Anonymous. "Hi, my name's Dave and I'm terrible at judging great ideas." As a leader, you need to recognize that, when a team member or peer tells you their idea, the person just took a huge risk because most great ideas get rejected the first time. Then, ask yourself how you can — whether you like the idea or not — show appreciation for their act of courage and give them a way to build upon the idea? Maybe you say, "Hey, great idea! How do we test it?" Roger Martin has this great question: "What would have to be true in order for this to work?" This is great because it just says, "Help me understand the idea better and what would have to be true for this idea to work," then you go find out whether or not those things are true and you know whether or not you have a good idea.

Adobe just came out with this thing they called Kickbox. It's a Birchbox-sized thing that contains some instructions on rapid prototyping and testing, a thousand dollar prepaid Visa card, a bar of chocolate, and a Starbuck's gift card. Those last two are probably important, but the biggest thing is that thousand dollars. Adobe said, "We have a million dollar R&D budget, so we can take a million dollar bet or we can take thousands of little bets and give our people permission to test the idea." They don't have to judge ideas right off the bat, they're democratizing that initial round of judgment and letting people get their own feedback. That's huge because, as I've said, our problem is not a lack of idea generation. We need leaders who are giving people permission. Then they are able to see those ideas. We have an idea recognition issue.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Fascinating example. So to tie it all together, I'm curious about how becoming a creativity expert has changed the way that you work. What are some of the things that you're doing today that you weren't doing before you went down the path of studying these ideas?

**David Burkus:** First of all, I am a reluctant creativity expert, if expert is even the right term. I started out wanting to write a leadership book, which is why that I'm so passionate about the piece that we were just talking about; that's the biggest leadership implication.

To answer your question, I have two things: First is that email method that we talked about, where I've actually gotten rid of a lot of notifications and am structuring my workday around the actual rhythms I need when I'm doing creative work. The second is I don't get to say that I'm exempt from this bias because I wrote a book on creativity. I'm not exempt from this bias; it's a cognitive bias, it's something every human has. So as a leader, I have that question in the back of my head all the time: How can I make sure that these people



feel like they have permission?

Another thing is, if I get a little personal, that I'm a father of two boys. The main reason that I write about workplace issues and evidence based psychology, evidence based management and organizational psychology and leadership issues, is because I want the world they work in to be better than the one I work in. When it comes to creativity, this is a huge deal because my oldest son is three and my other son is one. And I don't know what my oldest is saying half the time because he's just so creative. He's coming up with these different ideas and he might have an imaginary friend — we're not sure yet. It's really weird because I have to teach him how the world works and, after writing this book, I know I have to do it in a way that doesn't squelch all of his creativity.

Paul Torrance, one of the most famous educational psychologist and creativity researchers, talked about the fourth grade effect. Somewhere around fourth grade in North America, children's creativity plummets. That's around the time that the world is telling them that there are not a lot of correct answers, there's just one right answer. I have a few years — he's not even ready for fourth grade. I have a few years to figure out how, when he goes into the school system and they're telling him there's just one right answer, I can reinforce that so he can learn but at the same time tell him not to discard all of his ideas.

I don't have that answer yet. I'm optimistic because, if I can figure out how it works on a three year old, I've got a really good shot that it'll work for a thirty-thousand-person organization. I'm still figuring that one out, to be totally honest, but I know it starts with that permission. It starts with that social environment, to go back to the Amabile's model. That idea of not judging ideas right as you hear them, but giving people permission to come up with ideas, test them, refine them, etc., is a huge piece of that.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Do you think this idea recognition problem is one that only applies to organizations and teams? Or do we have that problem in our own lives, in not recognizing our own good ideas?

**David Burkus:** Oh, I totally think so. It's especially true as we grow in expertise in a certain field. We have all of these past experiences with things that we've tried and didn't work. If we connect a new idea with one of those things that didn't work, we automatically dismiss it.

If a new idea just sounds totally crazy and off the wall, then we get really scared because we have no way to judge the validity of the idea. I don't mean to pick on you, Ron, but the very first time you heard about the idea of running a virtual summit like this, you might have thought, "Oh, that sounds crazy, it sounds like a ton of work" or whatever. Right before we started recording this, you were telling me how much fun you were having, right? Aren't you glad you took the risk? It would've been just as easy not to; there are people out there that come up with crazy ideas like this and go, "That'll never work because of 'x' or because I've never done anything like that before" and they don't try. So they sit where they are. That's fine if you love where you are. But I hope always, no matter where I am, to be going somewhere better.



## Practical Tips from David Burkus

- To elevate your creativity, diversify your social network. Exposing yourself to new people and fresh perspectives can lead you to find new ways of seeing things.
- If you're looking to generate new ideas, avoid working on an empty desk. A messy desk can be a tool for creative thinking.
- When you're looking to find new ways of seeing things, you need diverse stimuli from lots of different sources.
- Working in a café can be good for your creativity. The ambient noise level serves to unlock your mind from being too focused, keeping you at a big picture level.
- The best creative ideas require a period of incubation — a period of time after you've thought extensively about a problem. Taking a break can foster creative insights.
- You can use a walk or a shower to incubate ideas. When those two aren't an option, taking your mind off the problem by checking your email can also be beneficial.
- There is a time and place for workplace distractions. When you're doing focus work, try to minimize alerts and notifications. But when you're generating new ideas, distractions can actually be helpful.





## Dorie Clark on How to Network Like a Thought Leader

Dorie Clark is a marketing strategy consultant, professional speaker, and frequent contributor to the *Harvard Business Review*, *TIME*, *Entrepreneur*, and the *World Economic Forum* blog. Dorie is recognized as a “branding expert” by the *Associated Press*, *Fortune*, and *Inc. Magazine*. Her book, *Reinventing You: Define Your Brand, Imagine Your Future* (Harvard Business Review Press, 2013), has been translated into Russian, Chinese, Arabic, French, Polish, and Thai. Her most recent book, *Stand Out: How to Find Your Breakthrough Idea and Build a Following Around It*, was released by Portfolio/Penguin in April 2015.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** A lot of your writing revolves around the idea that if you want to be truly effective at your job, you need to take control of your personal brand. How does our personal brand affect our ability to get things done?

**Dorie Clark:** You are not going to be successful if other people don't recognize your talent or what you have to offer. You're not going to get access to the right job offers or opportunities. People won't come to you with the kinds of things that you want to be doing. If your personal brand, your reputation in the marketplace, is as you would like to be seen, if your true talents are seen by other people, then you are actually able to live out your potential. You're going to get the offers and connections because people will say, “Oh, she's really good at that, let's have her do that.” That leads more personal and professional satisfaction and, I would say, a better world, because you're able to fulfill your calling.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** In the past, just being good at your job was sufficient in a lot of ways because people spent their careers within one company. But today that's no longer enough. Things have changed.

**Dorie Clark:** It's definitely changed. The Internet is a big factor; our audiences and the group of people that we're working with have exponentially grown. Thirty years ago, most people stayed at the same company their entire life. You'd work with the same group of ten or twenty or even fifty people for years on end. Of course they're going to know what you're good and not good at. Of course they're going to have a sense of what your brand is, just



from rubbing elbows with you.

Now it is incredibly common for people in all aspects of an organization to be collaborating closely with team members and colleagues in different cities, in different field offices, and even in different countries. I think about people that I've talked to just this week and they're literally stretched out around the world. There are people who get a certain vibe off of you, from how you are at Skype or how you are on email or something like that, but you really need to be mindful of your brand at large. What is there about you when people do a Google search? How do you make sure that in all the aspects of your life, all of the touch points, your reputation is what you want it to be? When there's a disconnect, problems arise.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Our audience has grown, but to build on your point, our colleagues are no longer around us for extended periods. You're likely to be working within at least one or two or three people who have just arrived at your company in the last couple of years. They have no idea about what your capacities are so it's up to you to develop the right image.

**Dorie Clark:** That's exactly right. Sometimes, even the people that you have worked with for years can only pay so much attention to you, because we get emails and have our own work objectives. Sometimes, the people that have known you the longest actually might have the most out of date or incorrect views of your brand. You used to work in politics, Ron, and I'm willing to bet that there are probably still people who, if you ran into them, would say, "Oh hey, how's life working in politics?" That's no longer a job that you have, but you're sort of frozen in time in their mind and they haven't clued in to your new identity yet.

As stewards of our personal brand, it becomes essential to make sure that the people around us know who we are today and what we're doing today. Otherwise, you get these tragic situations where people say, "Oh, how's life in politics?" Then you say, "Well, I'm not in politics any more. I'm doing marketing consulting or I'm doing this or that or the other," and they'll say, "Oh gosh, I wish I knew that! Someone just asked me last week if I knew anyone." That's the last thing we want, so we need to make sure that other people really understand where we are and where we're going, not where we were five years ago.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Ok, let's make this actionable. Let's say I'm interested in figuring out what people really think of me. If I'm in marketing, one of the first things I'd do is run a focus group or a field a survey. I can't really do that for myself. I mean, I could, but that would be incredibly awkward. So what do I do to get objective information on how people really view me?

**Dorie Clark:** There's a few different ways. One is to do what we could call a "record search." Something that any employee can do relatively easily, if you're organized, is take your performance reviews and stack them up. Re-read them sequentially and see what it is that people are commenting on. This is not necessarily the definitive you because usually it's one person writing it, but it can give you clues as long as you're able read it without getting defensive and saying, "Oh, she's only saying that because of blah blah blah," and just look for themes. What is it you're being praised for? Where do they say you've got some weaknesses? It's just one interesting piece of information.

Another thing that can be interesting is to find somebody that doesn't know you that well.



You could go on a site like Upwork — that’s the new name for Elance/Odesk — or Fiverr and pay somebody that doesn’t know you ten bucks to Google you and write a one-page report based on the impression the form comes up online. You can ask what they see as somebody that doesn’t know you at all.

The third thing that I’ll suggest is to have a focus group. Many people that I’ve worked with have done this to great effect. Over the course of a week go to about half a dozen friends or colleagues and ask them a really simple question. You can make an excuse, such as, “I was listening to this online summit and they suggested I do this, so I want to try this experiment.” And you ask, “If you only had three words to describe me, what would they be?” It doesn’t take more than a minute for someone to answer this question. By the time you get to the fourth or the fifth or the sixth person, I’m willing to bet that you are going to see patterns in what they say. It can be incredibly instructive to see what is most significant about you in other people’s minds. I did this exercise with an Entrepreneurs Organization, and they decided to make one guy in the group the guinea pig. They all knew each other pretty well, so we sent him out and everybody wrote down their three words for him. When he came back in, they all read them. The first word seven out of ten people in the room used for him was creative. I’m sure he knows he’s reasonably creative, but I’m not sure he knew that was the defining way that people thought about him. You can get really good intelligence this way.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Let’s say you get some feedback and it’s not what you want to hear, and you need to shift perceptions. What do you do first?

**Dorie Clark:** The starting point is you want to chart out all the current feedback. Where do I want to go and what is that route to get from here to there? It’s going to vary a little bit, depending on what the things are.

Let’s say that you want to be the next CEO. You get a lot of feedback that you are detail oriented, good at executing things, etc. Those are wonderful things, but they’re not the mark of a CEO; they’re the mark someone good at a lower level. You want to be a visionary strategist if you’re the CEO, and that’s what you need to drill down on. So you ask yourself, “What are the things that I could do that could essentially scream visionary to people so that message gets conveyed in a big way?”

There are a variety of different things you can begin to think about. What plays to your strengths? What opportunities are at hand? What is most appealing to you? One way to do it could be blogging about strategic issues in your industry. Another way would be to convene or take the lead on a project; you could volunteer or start one about the future of XYZ in your industry. There are often working groups or things like that which you can get involved in. If you’re strategic in your choices or if you raise your hand and say, “I think we should be doing this a lot of the time,” nobody is going to say, “No”. If you’re volunteering, they’ll probably say, “Okay yeah, you want to start a working group on that? Go for it!” It could be what you make it. Maybe there are tactical elements; maybe the feedback is that you are not delegating enough, you’re holding on to everything, you’re doing all the little nitty gritty stuff. Maybe you can work with a coach, take a class, or just being more mindful about how you can delegate effectively and free yourself up to work on strategic pursuits. Those would be some examples.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Great ideas. I really like the idea of volunteering in areas of interest,



where you want to take your career. A lot of times people get into roles that they don't necessarily like and they think there are only two options: either continue doing what you're doing and be dissatisfied, or quit your job.

And in fact, there is an opportunity for co-creating your job. You don't necessarily have to accept the role that's been given to you and assume that's your limitation. Instead, identify the things you want to do and the directions that you want to take your career, and start creating opportunities within your current company for yourself to do some of those things.

**Dorie Clark:** That's exactly right. I was on the board of the Lesbian and Gay Association in college. They knew I really wanted to be active, but the only seat available on the board was for the dance chair. I absolutely hate dances, but I wanted to be on the board so I volunteered to do it. I ran all of the dances for a semester, which was torture, but because I had done a good job, I was able to talk somebody else into taking over as dance chair at the end of the semester.

I had enough stature and standing to get the board to agree to create a new program with a new seat. Something created just for me called the "cultural events chair." I had access to our group's budget to bring in speakers. I spent spring semester bringing in these amazing speakers: writers, authors, and musicians, cool people that I wanted to meet and associate with. I was able to do this because I had put in my time and then was able to pivot and shift strategically. That's something you could absolutely do inside your organization. You get in, see where you want to go, and make enough contacts and build up enough goodwill so that if you say, "You know what, I'd really like to do this. I think we need to do this," people are usually going to say okay.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** In your new book, *Stand Out*, you talk about ways we can go beyond reinventing our personal brand and establish ourselves as thought leaders. Why do you think that's important? Why do we all have to be thought leaders? Can we be thought followers?

**Dorie Clark:** We could certainly be thought followers on many fronts. We can't be experts in everything, but it's increasingly essential for professionals to have some area where they distinguish themselves, make a mark, and are known for a certain issue. We're entering an era where, because of a worldwide pool of candidates and increased competition, companies are able to select the cheapest option. You need to give them a reason not to do that.

Professions that were once very safe, such as radiologists, are at risk. Now you can email slides and doctors in India can look at them. What keeps you safe is developing a reputation as someone who is an expert or the best at something, because people will pay for quality. Tiffany's is more expensive than the corner jewelry store, but I am buying Tiffany's because they have a brand and a reputation. I know that it's going to be high quality. People pay for those reassurances, whether it's a product they're buying or whether it is the time or the employment of an individual. They pay for quality because they know that, if they want it done right, they're going to want Ron to do it.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I think I heard you use a term within this context—you've described it as "career insurance." Is that right?

**Dorie Clark:** Yes, absolutely. We're in a world where nothing is certain. Companies are off-



loading pension obligations. Now you're responsible for your own retirement. Even if you have a steady, safe job, there's going to be upsets in that. In the paper today there's a story about Microsoft, one of the most successful tech companies out there. They're cutting seventy-five hundred jobs because of their failed merger; we're never fully safe.

This is something that I know personally and I've become a real evangelist about it because I was laid off from my first job. I was a newspaper reporter covering politics in Boston. After a year on the job, I got laid off. I had joined newspapering at the wrong time. It was 2001 — the beginning of the decline of the newspaper industry at the hands of the Internet. Over the course of the next decade, about 40% of newsroom journalists in the US lost their jobs. When you have your first job and get handed your walking papers a year later, it makes an impression. It really drove home that a "safe job" is not safe. The only thing that makes you safe, the only thing that gives you insurance, is that a reputation that is sterling enough that, no matter what happens, you can always get another job or another consulting assignment tomorrow.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** In some ways, you may have been fortunate to have that happen to you. It led to your current career and gave you a level of understanding that was way ahead of its time.

So let's say you're ready for this and you want to be a thought leader, but you're not necessarily an expert or have some ideas that are good, but not necessarily unique. What can you do to get people to care about what you have to say?

**Dorie Clark:** In touring around and talking about *Stand Out*, that's a question I get a lot. People say, "I have some ideas, but they're not that different. It's not like I have this amazingly unique idea." I want to push back against that notion, because the idea of uniqueness is very much overstated. People tie their own hands because they assume they need some unprecedented revelation from the heavens or that you need to discover some new element on the periodic table. That not at all true.

My favorite example of is Howard Schultz. The dude did not invent coffee and the dude did not invent coffee shops. He simply had an idea about a different way to present a coffee shop in the US. If I was telling you, "Hey Ron, I have this great idea. I want to do a different kind of coffee shop," you'd probably be thinking okay, well that's either going to fail or you might have a nice little business for yourself. Instead, he was able to turn it into a multi-billion dollar international empire. It does not take a huge deal of originality.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** If I wanted to be in the profession of helping people achieve a better brand, can I just repeat everything you've just said here? Or are there some other techniques that I can use to reframe the content and present it in a new way?

**Dorie Clark:** There needs to be some distinguishing characteristic. A lot of times, particularly if you're thinking about professional service businesses or something like that, that characteristic comes from your identity as an individual.

This is where personal branding and authenticity are discussed together. It's almost like a mantra: "You need to be authentic, you need to be authentic." Authenticity is important because we're in the Internet era and trying to be duplicitous is just not going to work. We live in an era of vast transparency where people have cell phones. They're filming things and they have the ability to do Google searches.



If you are presenting yourself in a way that is untrue to who you are or how you've been in the past, that will be discovered. But above and beyond that, authenticity is really important because your secret sauce, the thing that you can offer that no one else can, is based on who you fundamentally are.

I like the example of Kris Carr. There are a lot of people in the world who have had cancer. There are a lot of cancer survivors in the world. They might write books about it, they might give workshops; it's a big issue in contemporary society and there's a good market for it. Why would you listen to some new person? Why wouldn't you just go to Dr. Oz? Kris Carr has built a brand around the idea of what she calls "crazy sexy cancer." She's a beautiful young woman who speaks to people because, if you're twenty-five years old and you have cancer, you can certainly learn a lot from a sixty-five year old cancer patient or survivor, but you're not going to hear a lot about dating with cancer or what cancer means for me getting married or what it means for having kids or establishing a career.

When you speak from your own experience to people like you, who share a philosophy or certain interests, that message becomes fresh. Even if Kris Carr is saying things like, "You should eat more vegetables," it matters because you're hearing it from somebody like you that says it in a way that you can take in and appreciate. There are plenty of people with marketing messages similar to mine. If you're a motorcyclist, do that. If you focus on African-American professionals, do that. It becomes unique with your own unique voice and it enables a different group of people to hear you and relate to you and say, "Yes, that makes sense to me." That can be quite powerful.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So really, own your point of differentiation as a means of distinguishing yourself.

**Dorie Clark:** Absolutely. Authenticity is key here because if you own it, if you are leaning into your differentiation, people are going to be really drawn to it. Conversely, if you're trying to tamp it down or if you're trying too hard — if you are a skater or motorcycle guy putting on your suit to be serious and do things the way you feel like they "should" be done — that discomfort is going to come through and people going to say, "That's not really genuine, that seems weird, he seems really uncomfortable," and it's going to make them relate a lot less.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** One of the skills you need to develop to be successful in just about any field today is networking. But for many people, networking can feel uncomfortable or even sleazy. What advice do you have for those of us who are networking-phobic?

**Dorie Clark:** You're exactly right. I talk about this a lot. I wrote an e-book called *Stand Out Networking* on the topic. A lot of people are uncomfortable with networking because they have a very distinctive view of what networking is. They might think it's a Chamber of Commerce mixer, or trading business cards, or that weird guy saying let's follow up next week and have coffee. They probably don't think of networking as cool things that they like to do like going out for drinks after work on Friday with your co-workers or meeting somebody cool at a conference and saying, "This is really great, we live in the same town and we should get together for lunch." That's networking.

A friend of Francesca Gino from Harvard Business School has done studies on the feeling that people get when engaged in what they call transactional networking or instrumental networking. The name says it all. It's treating other people like an instrument and asking,



“What can I get out of this?” Not surprisingly, the people feel physically, morally dirty when they are engaged in instrumental networking. But that’s not what networking actually is.

Networking is relationship building. Networking is life, making friends, and just getting to know people. Some of those people you might work with someday. Some of those people you might get jobs for. Some of those people might get jobs for you. Some of those people might introduce you to your next boyfriend or girlfriend. That’s networking. I have fun organizing dinner gatherings that bring together ten random people that don’t know each other and are in different fields. I just get them together and have a really nice dinner so that people can connect with no agenda.

Some of the people have nothing direct to offer me other than interesting conversation and ideas. I just invited a woman that has invented a title for herself. She’s called an End of Life Doula. She was a hospice nurse providing counseling for people to help their dying loved ones. I thank God I don’t have anybody who’s currently in that situation, and that’s not the usual networking opportunity, but it’s a networking opportunity in the sense of, “Oh well, that’s an interesting person. I’d like to learn more about that.” Maybe that will turn out to be networking opportunity in the traditional sense one day. Maybe she will be the most important person in my network at some point. God forbid, but maybe someone in my life will be very ill and need a service like that and I can say, “Hey, I know this woman you should meet.” That is a form of networking. That is a form of being of service. The key is dissociating networking with an immediate ROI and just saying, you know, let’s get to know people.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Building on that, there’s a suggestion you present in *Stand Out*, which is never let a networking opportunity end with a handshake. What do you mean by that?

**Dorie Clark:** This goes back to those misconceptions about networking, thinking that networking is going to a big event and saying, “Hey, nice to meet you, Ron, here’s my card, bye.” Everybody focuses on accruing a contact list and handing out business cards because that’s the sexy thing. What is a lot less sexy, but far more important, is how you engage with that person and turn a one-time meeting into an actual relationship. Who cares if I met you once? If we had a five-minute conversation, you’re probably not going to remember it a month later and you certainly won’t remember it two years later. It doesn’t do any good.

How do we take a five-minute meeting and actually turn it into something so that I can get to know you in a substantive way? If you just say, “Okay bye, Ron, take care,” that hasn’t accomplished anything. Instead, you need to think about what comes next. How do you follow up? What’s a natural way to do it? Is there an event that I can invite you to? Is there a conference that we’ll both be attending so I can ask to meet up there for coffee or go to a couple of sessions together? Is there a logical thing for us to talk about?

Maybe I’ve discovered that you’re a big fan of a certain sports team. I know you really love the Giants, so the next time the Giants win I’ll send you an email to congratulate you or something like that. Maybe you mentioned that you blew out your ACL and you’re having surgery in two weeks, so I send you a note to ask how your knee procedure went. Those are the kinds of things that make it real, where you have a natural follow up, and that turns a one-time connection into an actual relationship.



**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** That's a great idea. I meet a lot of people and it's hard for me to remember all that information. Are there any tools that you use to keep all that information straight?

**Dorie Clark:** That's an important thing because at a certain point you just can't keep it all in your brain; it's not humanly possible. There are a lot of different services. Depending on how into it people are and how many people you're meeting, they may be worthwhile. I use a service called Contactually; there are others. What I like about Contactually is that it allows you to do a few things. You can make lists of your contacts and you can say, "These people are my current clients," and you can specify a follow up time. With my current clients, I want to make sure that I'm talking to them at least every thirty days. Then there are the prospective clients — I want to talk to them every sixty days. And then maybe there are just general professional contacts that I need to be in light touch with every one hundred and twenty days. I need to be in touch with those people, and I can set it up however I want. Then it interfaces with your Gmail and LinkedIn to chart how often you've been contacting them. If I have you listed as one of my prospective clients and we have not been in touch in sixty days, it will send me a reminder and say, "Dorie, you need to reach out to Ron." I've pre-programmed it and I'll think, "Oh yeah I need to do that!" It gives me that nudge to remember to reach out to the most important people in my life.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** That's very interesting. Do you submit information about different people into Contactually, so that you're reminded about what their hobbies are, for example?

**Dorie Clark:** Contactually has a notes function, and different columns that you can plug in. So yeah, I could plug in the name of your wife in the notes function and I could put in your hobbies. I always like to write down where I met a person. If you meet someone at a party or event, it's a good discipline to enter their information in the next day. Even if you do it every week, you'll probably remember. If you get much beyond that, then the memory is going to fade.

It's really useful. In a given week, I might have met you at a Harvard Club event, or I might have met you at my friend's birthday party, or at some other tech meet up. I'll want to know the difference because, even if I don't remember that much about you and just put down where we met, I can say, "Hey, Ron, so great to see you before. Are you planning to go to any Harvard Club events? I was thinking of going to this lecture next week; were you planning to be there?" This gives us something to talk about and it gives me something to invite you to, and it gives us a point of commonality.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Another very interesting point that you make in *Stand Out* is that we often fall into the trap of networking with the wrong people. Who are the wrong people to network with, and how do we ensure we're connecting with the right people?

**Dorie Clark:** It's a very common problem in modern society — with a lot of things, but we'll focus on networking — that we tend to be very reactive rather than proactive. We're barraged with information and the person that we're probably most likely to network with is the person who emails us and says, "Hey, Ron, let's have coffee next week. Let me know when you're free for coffee." Most of us don't have a networking plan and want to clear our inbox, so the path of least resistance is to say, "Okay yeah, let's have coffee. How about Thursday?" You make the plan and you network with that person, even if they have no relevance to you. That person may not be with whom you want to spend time, but — in the



absence of an actual plan — you are going to default to their needs rather than your needs.

It's really important to be thoughtful and strategic about with whom you want to be spending time. I would encourage people to make a list. This is not a Machiavellian exercise about whom can I influence and penetrate, it's about really thinking, "From whom do I want to learn? With whom do I want to surround myself?" This is cited so many times that it's become trite, but the Jim Rome quote: "You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with," is very apt. Are you spending time with the people that you want to learn from and surround yourself with? If you can think about that and then actually reach out and say, "Hey, can we have coffee? Will you come to this event with me? Hey, I have a spare ticket; would you like to come to the game with me?" Taking the time to be can make a real difference for you.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Let me shift gears here slightly and ask you a little bit about how you work. I've noticed that in addition to speaking, you do a lot of interviews and a lot of consulting, and yet you still manage to get six or seven articles out in some really high-level publications every month. I'm curious about how you managed to stay as productive as you clearly have been over these last few years.

**Dorie Clark:** Thank you. I have a few thoughts about that. On a really tactical sense, the blank page can be scary; I never like to have a blank page. I always like to have plenty of ideas to write about. I make it a point, whenever I have an idea while walking around, taking a shower, or whatever, to grab my smartphone and write the idea in the notes function. Then periodically email that to myself and transfer it to a Word file that has grown to seventy pages of very detailed outlines and fragments — ideas that I can write about. I do this so that I'm not wasting time when I sit down at my computer wondering what to write. That let me be a lot faster.

I try to make sure that I'm leveraging my work whenever possible. In *Stand Out*, I tell a story about Robert Scoble, the technology opinion leader. He said a lot of times people email him with questions. He'll write back and say, "I'm happy to answer your question but not on email." He asks them to post it on his question and answer website and he'll answer it there. That way, he's able to help far more people. If somebody asks me a question, I might write them an answer, but I'll transfer that answer to the folder and later write a blog post about it. Or I might say, "I'll get back to you in two days." In the interim, I'll write a blog post as a response to their question and send them a link to the blog post. I'm doing the work once, but getting a maximum value out of it.

Since I started out as a journalist, I have experience and training in writing a lot. I got very comfortable with it. I got very non-precious about it, which is important. A lot of people always want the perfect word or they get held up because it's not good enough. If someone's really doing crappy writing, then you shouldn't publish it. If it's actually good, but not perfect, then you should probably publish it. As a journalist, you learn that good enough is just fine. You want something that flows nicely. You want something that's readable and interesting. If you're spending twenty minutes saying, "Well, should I say it's awesome or should I say it's brilliant?" that's not going to matter to your reader. As long as it's good enough, you need to get it out the door.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** That's probably true not just for writing but also for a lot of projects. We have that high bar that we set for ourselves, and in fact, it probably doesn't matter all that much to other people.



**Dorie Clark:** Absolutely.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Earlier this year you published a piece that I thought was really interesting, titled “How to Protect Your Time Without Alienating Others.” I’m curious about any tips you can share around saying no to projects that we don’t think are a good use of our time; or rather, how can we be better about making sure that we’re using our best hours to do work that matters?

**Dorie Clark:** At a certain point, you have to learn to be a little bit ruthless. I don’t mean ruthless in a mean way, but if you are going to be able to get your stuff done, you need to know how to set limits in a firm, yet nice way.

Let’s go with an example of people saying, “Hey, let’s get coffee.” This is the sort of standard invitation that people make. Sometimes I’ll want to do that, but a lot of times I’m really busy. Especially if I don’t know the person that well and I’ve got a lot going on, it’s just really an impossible request. The question is, “How do you reframe it? How do you redirect it?”

I have a few different ways of doing that. If I like the person and generally want to see them, but I just can’t do it at that moment, I’ll say, “Well, you know, I can’t have coffee with you, but I’m having this dinner in two weeks. Why don’t you come to that and you’ll get to meet all these other cool people too?” Usually the person won’t see that as a blow off; they’ll usually see that as an improvement and upgrade, and that’s pretty exciting.

Another scenario that is useful for when people ask for coffee: As long as you’re nice, you can say, “I’m so sorry. I’ve got a huge amount going on right now.” You can explain that your book is about to launch in a week or whatever and that you’re not in a place where you can meet, but that you would love to help if they have some questions, and you’d be happy to answer them on email. That’s not quite as good, but they’re still going to be happy because they’ll have an interaction with you. That way you can handle it on your own terms, on your own time. If you’ve already written a blog post about it, you can send the blog post instead. If you haven’t written about their questions, put the idea in a folder for a blog post. You kill two birds with one stone because you write your answers out and then with fifteen minutes work, you’re able to turn it into a blog post you can publish.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** What if these are people you work with? You and I are entrepreneurs, so we can do that, but what about if this is your colleague from a different department or even within your department asking you to join a meeting you don’t want to go to, or asks you out to coffee? What do you do instead of saying you’d be happy to answer their questions over email?

**Dorie Clark:** That’s a bit of an offer you can’t refuse. You have to weigh certain things. If it’s your boss, then you do what your boss asks. If it is a colleague that you work with, it may not be valuable from a time perspective, but is it valuable from a relationship building perspective? Is this something that will help make things better over the long term because you will have created an atmosphere of trust with this person? If it is, then it may actually be a good investment through a different lens.

Another possibility is using your schedule to push them off. If this is just a social thing that you’re being invited to, someone saying, “Dorie, can you have coffee?” and you saying, “I’m so slammed this week, but you know what, Julio and I were going to have lunch together



next Wednesday. Why don't you join us for that?" That's a reasonable counter-offer. You can bundle up your social encounters that way. That's a pretty good way to do it. If it is a work inquiry rather than a social one, that's the place where you actually can apply rational metrics. This is not necessarily about somebody's feelings; it's about the workload and whether you really need to be there.

You want to find out as much as possible in advance, about why they want you there and what your role is and what that accomplishes. The answers may make it apparent that you don't need to be there. If that's the case, then you can make that point nicely. If there's a meeting and you ask these questions and realize that you don't need to be there, you could say, "That sounds really helpful and useful, but it sounds like you guys are circulating minutes and it also sounds like you don't necessarily need me there for the decision making, that this is mostly just to inform me. So because I'm working on this project, it seems like a better use of my time to just read the minutes afterwards." If my boss wants me there, then I'm happy to be there. Otherwise, in the interest of being as efficient as possible, this is what I'll do. And that's hard to argue with because appeal to efficiency and being effective and things like that is pretty good grounds to stand on.

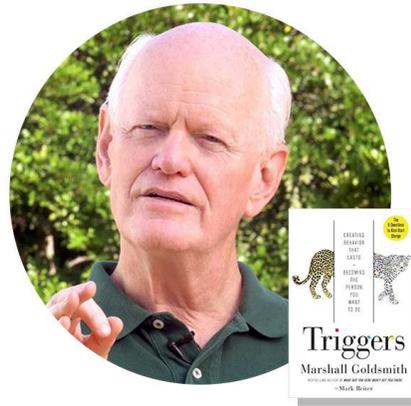
**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I really like the idea of getting out of the mindset of yes or no answers, and trying to find solutions that might satisfy the individual who's requesting your time in a way that they can find appealing as well. Upgrading them to the joint dinner, having them tag along to a lunch, and then, worst-case scenario, pushing them out a few weeks— those are all very useful tips.

**Dorie Clark:** It's a little harder with a colleague you're seeing all the time, but if it's somebody that you don't see all the time and you're not sure if you should really get together, put the onus on them. You can say, "This sounds great but I'm so slammed right now. I've got this big project that's due the first of next month." You then say, "Could you ping me afterwards and we can connect then?" If they actually are motivated enough to remember to ping you, you know it's important to them and can say, "Sure, I'll have coffee with you now." If they're just making an offer to make an offer, odds are they'll forget and you won't have to do it and then it's a win-win.



## Practical Tips from Dorie Clark

- To perform at your best, you need to have an accurate understanding of how you are perceived by your manager, colleagues, and clients.
- You can develop a good sense for how people in your professional life see you by doing the following:
  - Reread your performance reviews in chronological order.
  - Hire someone to research you online and write a one-page summary.
  - Ask a dozen friends and colleagues this question: “If you only had three words to describe me, what would they be?”
  - Here are two methods of establishing yourself as a subject matter expert within your company: (a) blog about the topic, and (b) volunteer to take on additional assignments in that area.
- Positioning yourself as a subject matter expert contributes to job security. Within the Internet age, almost everyone is replaceable. But demand is likely to remain high for specialists who are viewed as the best in their field.
- When blogging about a topic, don’t pressure yourself into thinking that you need to generate groundbreaking content. The important thing is to connect the topic to your personal experiences in a way that differentiates you.
- Stop thinking about the immediate ROI of networking. Instead, reframe networking as making friends and getting to know people. Viewing networking this way makes the process more enjoyable, which in turn improves your chances of clicking with others.
- To turn a one-time connection into a growing relationship, take a few notes about the person, like their hobbies or something you have in common, and follow up some months down the road.
- Develop a system or find a digital tool (like Contactually) that prompts you to circle back with your contacts, so that you don’t forget.
- Avoid asking for favors, especially at the start. Focus on authentically building the relationship.
- Instead of declining an invitation to a coffee or lunch that you’d rather not accept, think about ways you can combine meetings.



## Marshall Goldsmith on How to Lead Like a CEO

Dr. Goldsmith is the author or editor of thirty-five books that have sold over two million copies, been translated into thirty languages, and become best-sellers in twelve countries. He has written two New York Times bestsellers, *MOJO* and *What Got You Here Won't Get You There* – a Wall Street Journal #1 business book and winner of the Harold Longman Award for Business Book of the Year. His new book *Triggers: Creating Behavior that Lasts – Becoming the Person You Want to Be* was published May 19, 2015.

Dr. Goldsmith's Ph.D. is from UCLA's Anderson School of Management, where he was recognized as the Distinguished Alumnus of the Year.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** In *What Got You Here Won't Get You There*, you describe a series of bad habits that sabotage people's careers. Tell us about those habits and why they're so destructive.

**Marshall Goldsmith:** I was interviewed in *Harvard Business Review* and asked the question, "What is the number one problem of successful people that you have worked with over the years?" My answer was, "Wanting too much." If it's important, we want to win. Meaningful? We want to win. Critical? We want to win. Trivial? We want to win. Not worth it? We still want to win. Winners love winning.

I have a case study I mention in the book. You ask your wife, husband, partner, or friend if they want to go to dinner at a restaurant. After a heated argument, they pick a restaurant and you go. The food tastes awful and the service is terrible.

You have two options here:

- 1) You can critique the food, point out your partner was wrong, and say this mistake could have been avoided if they had just listened to you.
- 2) You can shut up, eat the stupid food, try to enjoy it, and have a nice evening.

Almost all of my clients would critique the food, when they should just shut up. That's very



difficult for smart, successful people who constantly go through life winning. When you're at the bottom of the organization, winning is a good thing. The higher up you go, though, it becomes less about personal victories. You need to make everyone else a winner. CEO's don't need to be heroes; they need to create heroes. It's a totally different job.

A second related bad habit is called "Adding Too Much Value." Say I'm young, smart, enthusiastic, and I come to you with an idea. You think it's a great idea. Rather than just saying "great idea," our natural tendency is to say, "That's a nice idea. Why don't you add this to it?" The quality of the idea may go up 5%, but my commitment to execute the idea may go down 50%. It's no longer my idea; now it's your idea. Effectiveness of execution is a function of a) what's the quality of the idea multiplied times x? and b) what's my commitment to make it work? We get so wrapped up trying to improve the quality that we risk damaging the commitment.

I asked my client JP Garnier, CEO at GlaxoSmithKline, what he learned about leadership as a CEO. He said, "I learned a hard lesson — and I try to teach this to everyone who is a high potential leader because it becomes more real as you become more successful — that my suggestions become orders. If they're smart, they're orders. If they're stupid, they're orders. If I want them to be orders, they're orders, and if I don't want them to be orders, they're orders anyway. My suggestions always become orders."

I taught at the new admirals' school for the United States Navy for nine years. This was the first thing I taught them. The moment you get that star, your suggestions become orders. Admirals do not make a suggestion. When an Admiral makes a suggestion, the response is, "Sir, yes sir." It's very hard for smart, successful people not to constantly win and prove they're right and prove they're smart. It's hard to recognize that we need to change our role as we move up in leadership. Alan Mulally, former CEO of Ford, was ranked as the third greatest leader of the world last year. He made a great comment: "When you're a great achiever, it's all about leaders. When you're a great leader, it's all about the achievers." It's hard to make the transition from "I'm a great achiever" to "I'm a great leader," because it's a very, very different job.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** What you're suggesting is that \ having those early wins is really valuable early in your career, but as you move up the chain it's actually counter-productive.

If you're not supposed to be adding value, if you're not supposed to be giving people orders, what are you supposed to be doing as a leader?

**Marshall Goldsmith:** My friend JP didn't say he never added value. He said he only added value about half the time. Alan Mulally is a great case study. He Ford around; the stock went from one dollar to over eighteen dollars without taking any taxpayer money, so he did a pretty good job. In meetings at Ford, he had a fascinating process. He asked every leader to rate their top five priorities as red, yellow, or green. Green is on plan. Yellow is not on plan, but a strategy to get there is in place. Red is not on plan and there's no plan to get there.

In his first meeting, there are sixteen leaders with five priorities each. The company is losing seventeen billion dollars and everyone has their priorities rated green. Everyone says they're on plan. He said, "This is puzzling. We're losing seventeen billion dollars, yet everyone is on plan. I guess our plan must be to lose seventeen billion dollars. Let's try again."



Finally, Mark Fields, who is now CEO, says red. Alan stands up and applauds. Then Alan says something very few leaders said, “Number one, thank you for having the courage to admit you have a problem without a solution and number two, I’m not going to give you a solution.”

He said, “Why am I so arrogant to believe that, just because I’m the CEO of Ford Motor Company, I know the answer to your question more than anyone else in this entire company? We’ve got hundreds of thousands of people who can hire other help. My job is to help you find the solution, not to be the know-it-all that gives you the solution.” And one of those problems was solved in ten minutes. Why? He didn’t solve it himself. He was the facilitator to make sure it got solved.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So asking the right questions, getting people on track, making sure they’re on the right goals -- that’s the function of a good leader?

**Marshall Goldsmith:** In this case, yes. Also, not always having to be right and not always having to be the technical expert.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I want to read you a quote from one of your books. You wrote, “One of the most pernicious impulses of successful people is their overwhelming need to prove how smart they are.” Tell me why seeking to appear smart is ultimately self-defeating.

**Marshall Goldsmith:** One of the great leaders that I’ve worked with has a simultaneous MD and Ph.D. with honors in anthropology, received from Harvard in five years. As soon as I read his bio, I thought, “Oh my God! How screwed up are you? Talk about a high need to prove you’re smart. Why would you do that? You’re basically showing off.” After our first interview, I told him, “I took notes so I could read them back to you; here’s six times in the last hour you’ve told me how smart you are. I read your bio. I’m not that slow myself. I really didn’t think you were stupid. How deep of a drive do you have to prove you’re smart and have a simultaneous MD and Ph.D. with honors from Harvard in anthropology in five years? That stuff is deep. You don’t have to do that any more. You’re the CEO. You don’t have to prove you’re smart.”

I was on Peter Drucker’s advisory board for ten years and had the privilege of spending about fifty days with him. He taught me a wonderful lesson. He said, “Our mission in life is to make a positive difference, not to prove how smart we are. Our mission in life is to make a positive difference, not to prove how right we are.” And he said, “In life, whoever has the power to make the decision is going to make the decision. Make peace with that. The decision maker is the customer. Your job is to sell what you can sell. Make a positive difference with what you can and make peace with what you can’t change. Your mission in life is not to go through life proving how smart you are and how much better you are than everyone you meet.” That’s a great lesson from Peter Drucker.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Let’s say you’re not the CEO. Is it still the same advice? Is seeking to appear smart counter-productive?

Let’s assume that it is the same advice. What should you aim to do when you’re in front of an audience who you actually do want to impress?

**Marshall Goldsmith:** Well, that’s fine. My coaching clients are current or potential CEOs of big companies. If you’re a first line supervisor or in a job interview, sometimes you really



need to be smart and impressive and that's okay. That's fine; it just depends on the audience. The people I'm dealing with really don't have to do that anymore. It's time for them to let other people be heroes.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So it can be beneficial, but only up to a point. Once you get to that point, it starts being counter-productive and that's what you need to recognize. When you get to that position of leadership, then you need to stop.

**Marshall Goldsmith:** Exactly. It becomes more and more counter-productive each time you get promoted. It's very counter-productive at the CEO level.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Let's say you get to that CEO level or that you're at a senior leadership position. You've got these habits ingrained into your behavior and you're not entirely conscious of them at all times. How do you stop?

**Marshall Goldsmith:** The first thing is to realize that we all fall into something called the superstition trap, thinking, "I behave this way and I'm successful and therefore I must be successful because I behave this way." Wrong. The people I work with are not only successful, they're ridiculously successful. They're successful because they do many things right. They're successful in spite of doing some things that are stupid. I've never met anyone so wonderful that they don't belong on the "in spite of" list.

The people I coach get confidential feedback from everyone around them. They pick an important behavior to improve. I work with them for a year-and-a-half and, if they achieve positive long-term change in that behavior, I get paid. If they don't, it's free. It's a very unusual approach. I only get paid for results. I'm very proud that twenty-seven CEOs endorsed my book *Triggers*. Those are all people that had the courage to stand up and say, "I may be a CEO, but I'm humble enough to admit that I can improve."

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** What if I can't afford Marshall Goldsmith? What if I can't afford any coach? What do I do to change?

**Marshall Goldsmith:** You can go online, MarshallGoldsmith.com. I've got hundreds of videos and articles. They're all free. You can use my material anywhere you like. If you're charity, business, nonprofit — I don't care. Put your name on it. It makes no difference to me.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** In your new book, *Triggers*, you talk about how we need to leverage our environment if we're serious about changing. We have to identify these triggers that are leading us astray. Can you give us an example of how a trigger can lead someone towards a pattern of bad behaviors?

**Marshall Goldsmith:** There's a huge disconnect between what I call the planner and the doer. The planner is planning on ordering a healthy foods diet, but isn't hungry. The doer is hungry and staring at the chocolate cake. The planner is planning the exercise program. The doer is tired at the end of the day and says, "maybe not." There's a huge gap between the planner and the doer. There's a huge gap between what I know and what I do. As we go through life, triggers constantly bombard us. A trigger is any stimulus that may impact our behavior. It could be a smell, sight, sound, feeling, or even a voice. Some triggers are going to push us in a positive direction toward achieving or even exceeding our goals. Most of them push us in the other direction, away from our goals.



We all have what Buddhists call the monkey mind. Our mind is like a monkey swinging through the jungle from vine to vine to vine. A great example of this would be the Internet. The Internet is like amphetamines for the monkey brain. You can look something up online that should take about five minutes. Three hours later, you're still online and have no idea why you went online in the first place. What happens? All those URLs—click, click, click, click — our mind just takes off. It is incredibly difficult to keep focused on what you need. I've learned that change is incredibly easy to talk about and incredibly difficult to do.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** What's that trigger in that case? Is it the computer? Should I just not be around a computer? What do I do?

**Marshall Goldsmith:** If you want to look up something that takes five minutes, set a timer for five minutes and remind yourself that there's a chance if you don't do this, you'll get lost. I'm not saying you shouldn't look something up. If you need to look something up, you should look it up, but if you want to spend five minutes, then only spend five minutes.

I wrote an article twenty years ago and said, "Within twenty years, media addiction will far surpass drug addiction and alcohol addiction combined as a social problem." We're there. The average kid that's flunking out of school spends fifty-five hours a week on non-academic media. That's a disease. At Dartmouth, a young man drives me back and forth. He flunked out of college, and he's probably as smart as I am. He spent twenty-five *thousand* hours of his life playing the video game *World of Warcraft*. That's an addiction. You've got to start measuring that and saying, "How am I spending my time here?" I always recommend that parents, especially if they have teenagers, measure how many minutes a week their children spend on non-academic media. Those numbers can be frightening. You have to measure that and ask yourself, "What do I want to do here?" I'm not saying you should never go online. I'm not saying you should never play video games. I'm just saying roughly one hundred million people in China are considered addicted to media.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Are there triggers in your own life that you were inspired to identify and to address while you were writing this book?

**Marshall Goldsmith:** Oh, yes. I am constantly surrounded both by positive and negative triggers and try to create an environment where I get help. My big thing this year is overcoming change. We're ashamed to admit we need help. We're embarrassed to admit we need help. We have this ridiculous macho willpower idea that we can do it on your own.

When I coach people or I'm speaking to a classroom, I ask, "How many of you need to be a better listener?" Half the class raises their hand. I'll call on someone and say, "Joe, how many years have you been needing to improve your listening skills? He'll say thirty years. I'll say, "Raise your right hand and repeat after me. 'My name is Joe. I need to be a better listener. I have not fixed this by myself in thirty years. It's highly unlikely I'm going to fix it by myself in the future. I need help and it's okay.' "

I pay a woman, as a trigger, to call me on the phone every day. Every day all she does is listen to me read questions that I wrote, about twenty-nine of them, and provide answers that I wrote — every day. Somebody said, "Don't you know the theory about how to change behavior?" I wrote the theory about how to change behavior. It's why I pay the woman to call me. I know how hard this is. I have twelve and a half million frequent flier miles on one airline. I'm going to be in twenty countries between now and the end of the year. That's no excuse to be a bad parent. You get divorced. You get out of shape. How many excuses do



I have? Excuses don't help. Why do I pay someone to call me on the phone every day? If I had the courage to do it by myself, I would. I don't. If I had the discipline to do it myself, I would. I don't. I pay somebody because my name is Marshall Goldsmith. I need help and it's okay.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** One bad habit that you mention in your book is an all too prevalent phenomenon researchers call "sleep procrastination." We all know that we need more sleep yet put off going to bed because it's more enjoyable to watch an episode of our favorite show than to lie down in a silent bedroom. How can we use the triggers in our home environment to make it easier to go to sleep?

**Marshall Goldsmith:** I discuss something in the book called depletion. As the day wears on, we become ego depleted. We become less and less capable of making good decisions. We get tired. Discipline tends to break down. We need to admit that we need structure and that we need help. We should do something like make a note. At 5:00, make a note that says: "I'm going to bed at 8:00," or whatever time it is for you. The key is that's when you're going to bed. Have someone remind you: "It's 10:00. You promised to go to bed." Put a little note on the computer: "At 10:00, I'm going to bed." Most people won't do this. You know why? They'd be ashamed. It seems childish. Well, if you want to go to bed, you need help.

One-third of the people in the United States don't get enough sleep. They know they are supposed to go to bed. Every day I measure how many hours of sleep I got the night before. I average just under eight hours of sleep per night. Not bad. If you measure your sleep, you're much more likely to get to bed on time. If I'm not careful, I get off the airplane, go to a hotel, and turn on the TV. Some idiotic made for TV movie about some cheerleader's mother killing her daughter's friend in Texas is on and, two hours later, I've watched this movie and I'm not going to get enough sleep. The next day I wake up in a foul mood and say, "Why did I do that?" I gave this example at Dartmouth. A young guy raises his hand and said, "I watched the movie twice!" Why? He said, "I don't know! It was so stupid the first time I had to watch it again!" If he knew he had to measure and take a test at the end of the day on how many hours of sleep he got, he probably wouldn't watch the movie.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** How do you measure how much sleep you get?

**Marshall Goldsmith:** I have an Excel spreadsheet where I track everything.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Do you measure anything else?

**Marshall Goldsmith:** Oh yes. If someone would like all my questions, send me an email, MarshallGoldsmith.com. I'll send you all my questions and an article describing how to do this.

Here's a sample:

"How many times yesterday did you try to prove you were right and it was not worth it?" It's kind of hard for that old professor not to be right all the time.

"How many angry or destructive comments did you make about people yesterday?"

"How many minutes did you walk?"

"How many push-ups did you do?"



“How many sit ups did you do?”

“Did you say or do something nice for your wife or your son or your daughter or your son-in-law or your grandkids?”

“How many minutes did you write?”

My friend Jim Morey does this. It saved his life. One of his questions, and actually one of mine as well, is: “Are you currently up to date on your physical examinations?” The first ninety days he did this, he said no. Every one of those days, he would say, “This is embarrassing. I’m failing a test every day and I wrote the question.” He finally went in for an exam and the doctor said, “You have cancer.” That was many years ago. He’s going to be fine. The doctor also said, “Had you waited seven more months, you’d be dead.” He knew he should have gotten the physical exam; he just didn’t do it. If you hold this mirror in front of your face every day, it gets hard to hide. It really causes us to face the reality of our lives.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Are these the questions the woman who calls you asks every day?

**Marshall Goldsmith:** Yes, twenty-nine of them. Every day, a whole bunch of questions. The key is to write your own questions.

I’m going to share a technique that takes two minutes a day, costs nothing, and will help you get better at almost anything. Half the people who start will quit within two weeks — not because it doesn’t work, but because it *does* work. This is easy to understand, but not necessarily easy to do.

Ready? Open an Excel spreadsheet. On one column, write down your own series of questions that represent what is important in your life. Every question has to be answered with a yes, no, or number. Yes would be a one, no is zero or a number. Across the top row, put the days of the week: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. Every day, you’ll enter an answer for each question. At the end of the week, you get a report card.

Do this every day and you quickly learn that life is really easy to talk about, but hard to live. “I said I wanted to be a good person, so why did I make those nasty comments about people? I said I didn’t want to be a know-it-all, so why did I try to prove I was right over and over again? I said I wanted to work out, so why didn’t I work out? I said I wanted to write a book, so why didn’t I write? I said I wanted to be on a healthy diet, so why did I eat all that food? I said I wanted to get enough sleep, so why didn’t I sleep?” You force yourself to take a hard look in the mirror. It’s humbling to do this every day, and it’s hard. That’s why I pay that woman; I don’t have the courage to do it by myself.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** One of the points you’re hitting on is that, when we make those goals for ourselves, we’re overly optimistic and it’s natural to be overly optimistic. But when you look at the data of how you actually behave, you can’t spin that to yourself.

**Marshall Goldsmith:** Right. Day after day after day, you run out of excuses. For a while, you can say I’m going on a diet, but today is a special day. Super Bowl! Have to have guacamole and pizza. It’s the Super Bowl, my birthday, my mother’s birthday, I had a hard day today, the boss was mean, blah, blah, blah. We always come up with these excuses. You do this every day and pretty soon you realize that you’re just making excuses.



## Practical Tips from Marshall Goldsmith

- Avoid trying to be right all the time. It makes you less likable and undermines your influence as a leader.
- The higher up you go, the more important that you make winning not about yourself, but about others.
- Once you achieve a position of leadership, it's important to shift your focus from demonstrating how smart you are to making a positive difference in the lives of others.
- You are more likely to follow through on a behavior if you write it down. If you want to get to bed at 11:00 tonight, commit to doing so and write down that commitment.
- Keep a spreadsheet of behaviors that are important to you and review that spreadsheet daily to monitor your progress.
- Consider automating the process by having someone else ask you about your progress on a daily or weekly basis, so that you have someone holding you accountable.





## Susan Peirce Thompson on Eating to Achieve Top Mental Performance

Dr. Susan Peirce Thompson is a tenured psychology professor who has served on the faculty of several colleges and universities across the globe. Her Ph.D. is in Brain and Cognitive Sciences, and she specializes in the psychology and neuroscience of weight loss, willpower, and food addiction. She is the founder and CEO of Bright Line Eating Solutions, a company dedicated to helping people achieve healthy eating habits.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Susan, you've built a career studying how food affects the way we think, feel and act. Can you tell us what you've uncovered about how food affects our performance at work?

**Dr. Susan Peirce Thompson:** It has a more profound impact than people realize. What we eat affects our memory, our concentration levels, our ability to engage in effective task switching — which is so important in the modern work place — and our fundamental ability to think clearly. Insulin levels and blood sugar regulation, in particular, are powerfully correlated with clear thinking versus brain fog. The higher your insulin at baseline and the greater your insulin resistance — which is your cell's lack of sensitivity to its own insulin — the more your brain is going to be foggy. Generally speaking, people are eating in a way that raises baseline insulin levels and produces a lot of insulin sensitivity or insensitivity. You hear a lot about insulin resistance, Type II Diabetes and pre-Diabetes. The quickest metric to see if someone is vulnerable to the brain fog caused by insulin deregulation, or regulation, is excess body fat. Anyone who is overweight is probably suffering from some amount of decreased performance due to the foods that they're eating.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Are you suggesting that people who are overweight are going to be less effective employees?

**Dr. Susan Peirce Thompson:** Everything is relative. Someone who is not eating optimally will not be as effective as they would be if they were eating optimally. We all have room to grow.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** When you say insulin levels, what does that ultimately come down to? What are some of the biggest contributors to my insulin level right now?



**Dr. Susan Peirce Thompson:** The foods that you eat, particularly refined carbohydrates. In my life, the main problem foods are sugar and flour, the refined white powders created by taking the inner essence of a plant-based substance and refining it and purifying it down. That's actually how you make heroin and cocaine. You take the inner essence of a plant-based substance and refine and purify it into a fine white powder.

We've taken natural, wholesome food substances and turned them into what Michael Pollen calls "food-like substances." They're artificial food substances passing as food sold in vending machines and convenience stores. The more sugar and Franken-foods you eat, the more your baseline insulin levels will rise.

A lot of people think that blood sugar spikes, then insulin spikes, then blood sugar crashes, which is true. If you eat a cookie or a muffin and a latte, your blood sugar is going to spike and then insulin is going to get released and then your blood sugar is going to crash and that wreaks havoc on your performance on a day to day basis. Most people don't realize that your body becomes resistant to insulin, which causes your baseline levels of insulin to rise. That creates constant brain fog.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** What should we be eating in order to be able to perform at our best?

**Dr. Susan Peirce Thompson:** Whole real food, while limiting carbohydrate-heavy meals. Include nuts, seeds, avocado, hummus, and other types of protein and fat foods to round out the carbohydrates in meals. Whenever you're eating carbohydrate-based foods, make sure they're not sugar and flour-based. Eat carrots and brown rice as opposed to bread and pasta. Make sure that you have a mix of macronutrients in the meal. Don't just eat baby carrots; include hummus. Don't just eat an apple; add some nuts. That kind of thing.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** What are those two things combining to give me?

**Dr. Susan Peirce Thompson:** They're combining to give you steady blood sugar for hours and hours, as opposed to a spike in blood sugar that's going to cause a dump of insulin that's going to fog your brain.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Interesting. Are the foods that contribute to top mental performance the same ones that also elevate our physical performance? If I'm about to run a marathon, is that the same thing as going into work?

**Dr. Susan Peirce Thompson:** Generally speaking, yes, though running a marathon is a little different because we don't ever have to deal with that kind of bodily stress at work. We don't ever need to eat so that, after hours and hours of constant physical exertion we still have glycogen stored in our muscles, so I don't know about the marathon example.

Generally speaking, the foods you want to eat for mental performance are the same foods you want to eat for excellent physical performance, reducing susceptibility to Alzheimer's Disease, and happiness. Those same foods that I've been mentioning boost your happiness levels over time in very key ways. IN general, you want to eat the same foods for every metric of health.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** If we want to avoid dips in our energy level and stay sharp all day long, is it better to limit our eating to mealtimes or is it better to graze throughout the day?

**Dr. Susan Peirce Thompson:** That's a very interesting question and the answer to it is



pretty complex. It depends on where you're at on something called the susceptibility scale. The susceptibility scale is a scale that measures how susceptible you are to the addictive properties of refined foods. Sugar and flour affect the brain ways that are similar to that of heroin and cocaine. Some people are more susceptible to addiction than others. Research shows that about one third of the population is highly susceptible, one third is average, and one third is low on the susceptibility scale in terms of losing weight, getting healthy, and capability of choosing healthy foods.

What I've said so far in this interview is like blah, blah, yawn, yawn. Okay, eat healthy foods, don't eat unhealthy foods. Duh! Everybody knows that. That's not the interesting question.

The interesting question is, why can't people do it? Why, when people are really trying to get healthy, are they still succumbing to junk food cravings? Why are they justifying and rationalizing this behavior by telling themselves that it's a Friday night they're out with their friends, and they feel like they deserve it or whatever? People are sabotaging their healthy eating regimens all the time. Why can't people who really want to lose weight, get healthy, and achieve peak performance eat in a way that will accomplish their goals? It all has to do with the susceptibility scale.

If you're high on the susceptibility scale, you're vulnerable to addictive cravings. The only way to become liberated and really stick to the eating regimen that you want to stick to — the one that will get you the results you want — is to eat three meals a day. When you make a choice about what to eat, you're either relying on your willpower or your habits. The only way to eat healthfully long term when you're high on the susceptibility scale is to automate it. Make it so habitual that it's as easy as brushing your teeth.

Breakfast, lunch, and dinner are linked to temporal and environmental cues that trigger you to eat the right things, if you work hard to set up those habits in advance. When you start to eat six times a day, it all breaks down. Unless you're some kind of super hero of planning and preparation, there's almost no way to make sure you'll have the right things to eat on hand six times a day.

If you're lower on the susceptibility scale, you might be able to pull it off. Eating more than three times a day makes sense for blood sugar regulation, but I work primarily with people who have issues losing all of their excess weight and keeping it off long term, so we follow a very strict three meals a day plan and it works brilliantly. Because of the specific foods we have them eat, they have steady blood sugar all day long. You can actually achieve equivalent results either way. It's a little easier to get there with several small meals, but that's not going to work very well for everybody — especially for people who are susceptible to the addictive properties of food.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** If I'm hearing you right, if you are not highly susceptible to the addictive properties of some of these foods, and if willpower isn't an issue for you in terms of stopping to eat or eating unhealthy all the time, then it might make sense to try and graze throughout the day. For example, having nuts on your desk or foods of that nature, so that you're not experiencing dips in energy.

**Dr. Susan Peirce Thompson:** Yes, that's fair enough. I do want to emphasize that, if you eat the right foods, you can pretty much circumvent dips in your energy anyway. You can achieve steady blood sugar all day long if you're eating really impeccably.



**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** What are some of those “right” foods? There have been stories about workers in Silicon Valley purchasing all of these protein drinks that allow them to not have to leave their desk. On the one hand, it was a very sad story, but on the other hand, it was also kind of fascinating because I often will work well beyond the time I know I should stop because I don’t want to lose the momentum. Can you give us some examples of foods that can help us sustain our energy for a longer period of time than we might be used to?

**Dr. Susan Peirce Thompson:** Sure. Breakfast would be oatmeal with ground flax seeds all over it, a handful of nuts, and a ton of berries. You could cook the oatmeal in soymilk or add some organic soy yogurt if you want to do something like that, but just oatmeal with nuts and ground flax seeds and fruit is a really sustaining breakfast. That should last you four or five hours.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** What’s the active ingredient there that makes that so effective?

**Dr. Susan Peirce Thompson:** There’s nothing processed or refined and you’ve got lots of proteins, carbohydrates, and fat. The berries are just bursting with antioxidants and the flax seed and nuts have omega-3 fatty acids, which really support brain membrane regeneration. You really want to get enough omega-3 fatty acids in your system. Put all that together and you have foods that are burning steadily for one hour, two hours, three hours, four hours, and five hours later; it’s a perfect, steady curve across time as opposed to a spike and then a dip.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** What about lunch?

**Dr. Susan Peirce Thompson:** Just to reveal my bias, I’m plant-based so I’m going to be giving you examples of foods that are plant-based here because I prefer not to eat carcass, but you can do it eating carcass too. You could eat chicken or whatever. It’ll cause cancer, but it’ll give you the same mental boost. For lunch you could do tofu or tempe or hummus or something like that. A whole mess of vegetables, some fruit, and some olive oil dribbled on there, as well as some quinoa or bulger or something like that. That would be great.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I imagine it is probably similar for dinner.

**Dr. Susan Peirce Thompson:** Yes.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Can you give us some examples of foods that many of us might assume are healthy, but are unhealthy foods masquerading as health foods? I’m sure that there are a lot of examples where a lot of people think that they’re eating things that are good for them, but in fact are actually slowing them down.

**Dr. Susan Peirce Thompson:** Yes — half the health food store. Pretty much anything in a package. A great example would be gluten-free foods. Organic, locally packaged, gluten-free raisin bread or something like that. You look at the packaging and see, “It’s gluten free and organic and it’s non-GMO,” three great buzz words. None of that has anything to do with health. The first few ingredients on that bread packaging might be potato starch, rice flour, and date syrup; that’s just sugar and flour. You might as well go eat a Twinkie. Looking at most juices, you might as well go drink a can of Coke. There’s no difference in the effect on your body, on your liver, or on your brain.



**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** That sounds horrifying. How do I know this is good for me or this is not good for me, other than having a dictionary-level understanding of this type of information? You obviously have thought a lot about this, but the average person doesn't have that kind of time. What do you recommend they do?

**Dr. Susan Peirce Thompson:** I recommend that people develop an extreme sensitivity and awareness of carbohydrate foods that have been processed and refined in any way. Fruit has the natural fiber that protects against the addictive responses we've been talking about. When you refine or deviate away from that, like drying the fruit as a raisin, no. Juicing the fruit so you've got fruit juice, no. Any time you take a carbohydrate substance and refine or purify it or strip its sugar out of it or take its gluten or its substance, no. Don't eat that.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** One mistake we often make when it comes to avoiding foods that we know are bad for us is relying too much on willpower. We assume we'll be able to resist that chocolate cheesecake at the end of the meal and yet, when the time comes, we can't help ourselves. Can you talk about the limits of willpower?

**Dr. Susan Peirce Thompson:** If you're relying on willpower to eat right, you're going to fail. Every single choice won't be bad, but on aggregate, the choices will be bad enough that you'll be fat, sick, and depressed; that was certainly my story. I'm a food addict, I was obese in my twenties, and I learned a different method of eating and lost all my excess weight. Now I dedicate my life to helping other people do the same thing. I still do not rely on willpower to make my food choices because, if I am depleted, it doesn't work.

The thing about willpower is it depletes incredibly rapidly — especially at work. The tasks we do at work were cruelly designed to deplete our willpower. Making decisions is one of the most willpower-depleting activities, and what's checking email? It's looking one at a time and asking, "Who is this? What are they saying? Do I care? What am I going to do with this? Do I file this? Do I put a label on it? Am I going to reply now? Am I going to reply later?" You have not just one decision, but eight in one email. You've got thirty more to go and your willpower is shot. Also, the anterior singular cortex — the part of your brain that deals with willpower control — is especially sensitive to blood glucose fluctuations; as soon as your blood glucose drops, your willpower is shot. You finish your work tasks and take a break and there's a candy drawer or vending machine down the hall, or a coffee room with creamer and sugar, and there's no way to make a good choice in that moment. If you rely on willpower, you're sunk. One of my favorite sayings is, "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail."

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** What's the alternative? You can't stop looking at email. What do you do?

**Dr. Susan Peirce Thompson:** It depends on how much it matters to you. The solution is not necessarily that easy. I work with people who are incredibly motivated to lose weight, people who have tried their whole life and can't. Sometimes getting skinny is enough motivation to get someone over the threshold. It might be the case that someone is motivated enough to succeed in their career that they just decide, "I'm going to get this food thing fixed and solid and squared away because I refuse to be derailed by a foggy brain."

If you are really that motivated, you plan your food in advance. It might sound tricky, but it's not. Just keep a little journal by the fridge and, the night before, write down what you're



going to eat the next day and make a habit of packing it up. And use the convenience of the grocery store. It's brilliant how many convenient healthy foods they've packaged for us. In my grocery store, they've got two-ounce packets of hummus that you just put in your bag with organic baby carrots that are already prepared for you. The only way to succeed is to make eating right your easiest option.

If you have to make a choice after willpower depleting work activities, that's not going to go well. The only way to really succeed is to choose in advance. I really believe in bright lines as opposed to moderation. A lot of people are not succeeding on the moderation plan. In the same way that I used to be a smoker and now I'm a non-smoker, I used to be someone who eats sugar and flour and now I'm a person who doesn't eat sugar and flour. That's a bright line for me, and if you want to succeed with eating better and maximizing your performance at work, I recommend having clear, bright lines about what you eat and what you don't eat, when you eat and when you don't eat. When your willpower is depleted, it's easy to lose your sense of moderation. Setting bright lines is a much clearer bar for behavior regulation.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I like your point about making healthy food the easiest path. A related strategy is looking around and eliminating all of those foods that are tempting you.

I used to work in an office where I had a candy jar on my desk and it was a means of putting people at ease when they came for a meeting. It worked from that perspective, but I also think it encouraged a lot of people to eat unhealthy food, and it encouraged me to reach for a Jolly Rancher every now and then. You can make healthy foods the easiest option for you by, for example, having Amazon or whoever ship you the right foods so that they're at your desk and you don't have to go down the hall to find your next snack. It's just sitting there and it's an option for you so you're much more likely to select the right things to eat.

**Dr. Susan Peirce Thompson:** Totally. Cornell University has found that we make one hundred and nineteen food-related decisions every day; that's appalling. Our ancestors didn't have to face that kind of variety or those kinds of choice points. Some of us are especially sensitive to the cues that predict food rewards based on our emotions and the time of day. Physical presence is another cue, like a candy dish on your desk, or a commercial with chocolate swirling around, or driving past a drive thru. There are so many things that pull us in the direction of eating those unhealthy alternatives.

It takes some time to set up, and it takes some forethought, like so many things with work. Once it's set up, though, it becomes almost automatic. You've got to set up the system in advance so that your success is the most likely outcome. You've got to set up your morning routine in advance. You've got to set up your to-do list in advance. It's the same with food. So many people are paying short shrift to the way they eat and thinking that they're getting away with it. The reality is that their brains are not. At the end of the day, people who put some focus on setting up their food planning in advance are reaping the benefits.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Part of the problem is that food is a social opportunity; it's an opportunity to form a relationship with someone. If you're at a client meeting and your client offers you some cookies or they brought in donuts, and you don't eat that unhealthy food, you risk insulting the other person. Do you have any tips on how, if we are committed to eating a healthy diet, we deal with those situations where we feel pressure to eat food that might not be ideal?



**Dr. Susan Peirce Thompson:** That's such a great question. A lot of people's challenge with adopting a really healthy eating regimen boils down to exactly that point. I adopt the allergy mentality. Think about how I would feel if those were peanut butter cookies and I was allergic to peanuts. I might feel bad that I had to say, "No, thank you," but really it wouldn't be that hard. I'd be like, "Well, if I eat those, we're going to need an epi-pen and an ambulance so let's not." Being really clear about it with a few apologies works really well. I learned that from Miss Manners. You just say, "Oh my gosh! Those are beautiful. I love them! I'm so sure they're delicious. I don't eat sugar, but I am so grateful that you offered these to me," and you keep going a few more sentences and they're like, "Oh, that's okay. It's fine."

In our society, food has become a poor proxy for connection. People think that they're connecting with other people because they're eating with them, but real connections are built on eye contact and conversation and warmth and smiles and compliments, lovingly noticed and well paid. Sitting down and stuffing your face with someone is a very poor proxy for that. I encourage the people I work with to focus on the people at an event. Go with the goal of meeting five people at your workplace that you've never met before, remembering their names, and leaving knowing their names and three things about them. Go with that service orientation in mind, the idea that you are going to become better connected at the office. You leave feeling more connected and it won't matter that you didn't eat the pizza with everybody.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Interesting. There was a study recently, I think from Roy Baumeister, who is an expert on willpower. Some would say he might be *the* expert when it comes to willpower. He found that drinking sugar water, or really any substance that has sugar in it, could actually elevate our willpower. I'm curious about your view on this study because it almost feels like it's the opposite of what we've been saying until now, but perhaps it is not.

So again, what he has found is that if you're depleted and your willpower is low, drinking something that has some sugar in it can elevate your willpower on subsequent tasks. So for something you're about to do later on, you'll have more willpower as a function of having consumed sugar.

**Dr. Susan Peirce Thompson:** What I make of that study is exactly the same thing that Roy Baumeister makes of that study, which is that if you want to boost your willpower for a short period of time, absolutely drink some sugar water. He also says that it's the worst way to improve willpower an hour later, the next day, the next week, or the next month, because what you're setting yourself up for blood sugar spikes and crashes, and poor insulin and blood sugar regulation long term. What he says in those articles is, "Don't do this, that's not the strategy you want. Don't do this if what you're looking for is solid willpower long term." The only way it makes sense is if the only thing that matters in your entire workplace career is what you do in the next fifteen minutes, you need to have enough willpower to perform well for those fifteen minutes, and then it doesn't matter at all if you're a total idiot for the rest of the day or the rest of your life.

I don't know if people realize that the tasks that deplete willpower or rely on willpower extend beyond decision-making. We're also talking about our performing well at any kind of sustained task, whether it's inputting things into an Excel spreadsheet, giving a presentation without saying "um" or "ah" a lot, or regulating our emotional responses so we're dealing effectively with office politics or people — situations in the office space where you have to control your own emotions in order to respond appropriately to people. When we say,



“willpower,” we’re really talking about the sum total of all the tasks that matter for effective performance at work. Drinking sugar water is an incredibly poor idea if you’re concerned with long term, sustained performance. It’s going to do exactly the wrong thing overall, but it will give you a boost for ten or fifteen minutes.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Let’s play a quick game – call it a lightning round. I’m going to name some foods and you tell me if they’re good or bad for us. Okay?

**Dr. Susan Peirce Thompson:** Alright.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Red Bull.

**Dr. Susan Peirce Thompson:** No.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Don’t drink Red Bull?

**Dr. Susan Peirce Thompson:** Don’t drink Redbull. Are you kidding me?

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** What about Gatorade?

**Dr. Susan Peirce Thompson:** No.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** What about coffee?

**Dr. Susan Peirce Thompson:** Coffee is subtle. I give one or two cups of coffee a day with no sugar or sweetener of any kind — artificial or otherwise — a free pass. There’s a lot of good research, though, that caffeine messes with blood sugar regulation and, if someone is eating very healthfully, they’re going to find that caffeine makes them shake and gives them profound blood sugar crashes; so they’re going to want to get off the coffee, too. I don’t make people do it right away, but they naturally come around to it after four to six months of eating well.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Do you drink coffee?

**Dr. Susan Peirce Thompson:** I do not. I don’t even drink decaf. I’m such a junkie when it comes to caffeine, that even when I drink decaf I’ll go into Starbucks and order a quadruple decaf Americano and the barista looks at me like I’m crazy. No, I don’t drink coffee.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** What about granola bars?

**Dr. Susan Peirce Thompson:** No. Sugar and flour wrapped in a package.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Protein bars?

**Dr. Susan Peirce Thompson:** First of all, they’re full of sweeteners, and artificial sweeteners have the same blood sugar dis-regulation properties as natural or regular sugar. All those processed foods have really bastardized our food supply. No protein bars. They’re better than granola bars, but no.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** What about those drinks like Boost or Ensure?

**Dr. Susan Peirce Thompson:** No. You said you were going to give me a list of foods and I was supposed to say if they were good or bad. I propose that you have not given me a food yet.



**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Let's turn the tables a little bit. Tell me about four or five foods that people don't get enough of that they should really try to incorporate into their diets. Don't tell me flax seeds because I'm not going to eat flax seeds. So tell me something I can actually go to the market...

**Dr. Susan Peirce Thompson:** What are you talking about? Flax seeds are delicious! I'll play with you, Ron, but I want to tell you that I balk at the question because this is a reductionist approach to health and wellness, which is really like headline grabby "Super five foods, yada, yada, yada."

Eat whole, plant-based foods and you'll be so much healthier — a variety of them: cabbage, lettuce, tomatoes, carrots, tofu, quinoa... I can go on and on and on.

There are no magical foods. I'm a big fan of whole oats and oatmeal. People probably are not getting enough oatmeal in the morning. Berries too. I've mentioned them all already. I'm going to sound like I'm just repetitive. Hummus, quinoa—quinoa is amazing because it's so grounding. It's got all this protein. If people can't fathom giving up pasta, Explore Asian has these amazing pastas that are made out of beans. The only ingredients are black beans or soybeans, and it's just like pasta. There are about twenty grams of protein and twelve grams of fiber in one serving. The stuff is amazing.

If you need to eat bread, go get Ezekiel bread.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** What kind of bread?

**Dr. Susan Peirce Thompson:** Ezekiel.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Who is Ezekiel?

**Dr. Susan Peirce Thompson:** Ezekiel is a company that makes bread, tortillas, and muffin products that have no flour in them; they're made out of whole cracked grains. They're usually in the frozen section of the health food store or the health food section of your grocery store.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** All of these foods sound like things I might eat if I had the time to go and prepare them. I recognize that you're saying if you really want to eat healthy, if you're committed to this, you're going to have to set aside the time to go to the health food store or to the grocery store, pick the right things, plan it in advance, bring it with you. All of that takes a lot of time that people, particularly people who work in cities and travel long commutes, may not have. What can they do if preparing foods and bringing them to the office is not an option?

**Dr. Susan Peirce Thompson:** I really sympathize with the spirit behind that question. I'm forty-one years old, have three children under the age of eight, am a full time tenured professor, and have a massive start up business that's doing really well and is more than a full time job, so I completely sympathize with anyone who is feeling pressed for time. With that said, whatever anyone is eating now takes time to procure and eat. Food takes time and it doesn't feel time-consuming because it's become habitual. If anyone looks at the foods they eat over a given week or a month, there's a lot of repetition. There are a lot of habits that have been ingrained through months and years of making certain choices, and all of that now takes zero effort, zero willpower, zero energy, and zero focus because it's just built into the wiring of their brain.



Anyone who really wants to get happy and thin and feel free — which is what I really promote, just live a full and productive life, be maximally focused and engaged and brilliant at work — eating well is not like an ancillary, “well maybe,” kind of thing. You’ve got to eat well to sustain a life of excellence. You’ve just got to figure it out. If you spend three months building up the habits of good eating, it will soon take zero effort and willpower. There are enough healthy convenience foods on the market now that you can do it with almost no detriment to your life. It’s just going to feel labor intensive because you’re going to have to break those old habits and establish these new habits.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So it’s almost like driving a car. The first time you get into the car, it’s terrifying, it takes a lot of time in terms of mental energy to learn how to do it correctly and not kill yourself or not get into any accidents, but then it becomes habitual and something you don’t even think about. You just get in the car and you go and you are actually planning the rest of your day as you’re driving. Eating well can become like driving a car in the sense that it doesn’t require a lot of you once you establish the right habits.

**Dr. Susan Peirce Thompson:** That’s right. If anyone needs help with this, get help. Have someone teach you how to do it. There are people out there who specialize in this; I’m one of them. People think that it’s harder and more expensive than it actually is. In my program, I have a document called Bright Line Eating on a Budget. It shows how you can do my program for less than eating off the dollar menu. You can eat well for about four dollars a day. I don’t buy into people’s excuses of “I don’t have the time, I don’t have the money.” Bananas are pretty cheap.

**Ron Friedman Ph.D.:** Susan Peirce Thompson, thank you very much. This has been fantastic. Is there anything else I didn’t ask that I should have?

**Susan Peirce Thompson:** Great question! I think you’re great. Ron, I think you covered it. It’s really been a pleasure spending this time with you. Thank you so much for inviting me to be on the summit and it’s truly, truly an honor.



## Practical Tips from Susan Peirce Thompson

- Avoid processed foods.
- Try not to eat carbohydrates on their own, even if they are fruits or vegetables. Aim to eat balanced snacks and meals that have a comparable ratio of protein and carbohydrates.
- If you're not susceptible to overeating, grazing throughout the day is a far better strategy for maintaining your energy than relying on large meals at lunchtime or dinner.
- Just because food is organic, locally grown, and/or gluten-free, doesn't mean it's healthy. Instead of relying on buzzwords, get in the habit of reading ingredients; or better yet, avoid eating foods that come in a package. If cravings or weight are an issue, steer clear of sugar or flour.
- Decide in advance what foods you are and aren't going to eat, instead of choosing when you are hungry and your willpower is depleted.
- Avoid "foraging" for food at work. Plan your meals in advance and when possible, bring them from home.
- Make healthful food options more visible at the office so that you're tempted to eat them and are less hungry when unhealthy options are available.
- Have a prepared response handy for when a client or colleague offers you food that you know is bad for you. Thank the person, compliment them on the gesture, state the category of food you don't eat [for example, sugar or fried foods], and then thank them again.



## Tracy Brower on How to Create Abundance in Your Work and Life

Tracy Brower, Ph.D., MM, MCR is an expert in organizational effectiveness and the sociology of work — how people impact their work-life, and how their work-life affects them. She has worked with hundreds of organizations over her career as a senior advisor to a Who's Who list of companies and the executives who run them.

Dr. Brower is the Global Vice President of Workplace Vitality for Mars Drinks and the author of *Bring Work to Life by Bringing Life to Work: A Guide for Leaders and Organizations*. She holds a Ph.D. in sociology, a Master's of Management, as well as a Master's of Corporate Real Estate.

Brower's career includes experience in a wide range of industries, non-profits, higher education institutions, and healthcare organizations. Her expertise spans HR, OD, real estate/facilities, workplace, change management, organizational culture, TPS, and organizational effectiveness. Brower has written for *Area Development*, *The Drucker Institute Blog*, *The Leader*, *HR Executive*, *Inside HR*, and more. She has been quoted in *The Wall Street Journal*, *Green Source*, *StoryCorps*, *Fortune.com*, *Forbes.com*, and others.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Tracy, in your new book, you suggest that instead of aiming to keep our work lives separate from our home lives, we're actually far better off blending the two worlds. How does integrating our professional and personal lives benefit our performance?

**Tracy Brower:** The first thing that's important is to define integration. I'm defining integration in opposition to balance. Integration is about understanding that you don't have to make trade-offs and you can have it all, really thinking about the idea of abundance and fulfillment, and understanding that work is a part of life and life is a part of work. It's also important to remember that we still set a boundary between work and life, and that we really need to make our own choices about that.

I talk to many people about work-life stories through my blog. Some people prefer a



“container orientation», separating work and life. Other people prefer to blend the two. Neither is wrong — both can be right, depending on your own preferences and approach. Integration is about the inseparability of work and life and the idea that we want to bring work into life and life into work to achieve wholeness.

I saw a great adage recently that everyone needs to spend at least twenty minutes outside every day, unless you don't have time — in which case you need an hour. I thought that was great. It's important to turn off and get away. We are at our best when we're able to do that, so setting a boundary is a really important thing that still falls within the idea of work-life integration.

We're in a bit of a learning curve as a society in terms of how to make sure that we're managing our technology versus the other way around. Being able to turn off, focus on family, focus on community, and focus on things outside of work is really critical. The key is that we all do that differently. Some people set a strict boundary having to do with the time of day. After five-thirty p.m., for example, they put technology away. Other people say, “Boy, I'd like to stop maybe a little bit earlier and go volunteer at the hospital one day a week and then turn back on a little bit later.”

We have to make our own choices and find the balance and blend that works for us. Work and life are part of a larger whole. Work is a part of a fulfilling, purposeful life, so setting a boundary is a really important and productive and constructive thing, but we need the flexibility and opportunity to do that differently depending on who we are and what will work best for us.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** That really takes it to the managerial level of providing people with the opportunity to figure out the balance that works for them.

On a personal level, how do you know if you're a really good work-life integrator, or simply a workaholic?

**Tracy Brower:** That's such a good question and an important question. One idea is the notion of capacity. Our own capacity is malleable and changes over time based on what else we're facing. We can't really judge whether someone else is a workaholic; it probably needs to be something they judge for themselves. I've always thought about workaholicism as a question of whether you're running away from something or running to something. A lot of times workaholicism is about running away. There's something that's not working, so I'm immersing myself in work as an escape from something else in an unhealthy way.

That's really different from a situation where you're passionate and energized about what you do and therefore like to do it a lot. The key is work-life integration. Work-life abundance isn't just about us; it's about our family and our community. Feedback is an important part of that as well. If my family comes to me and says, “Oh my gosh, we never see you, you're always immersed in work,” that's a big red flag. If we feel good about what we're doing and those around us — our family, our friends, our community — feel like we're able to contribute, that's a really great cue about whether we're in a healthy sort of situation or not from a work-life standpoint.

Performance is also a cue. If we're performing really well in all areas, that gives us a real sense that we're able to keep everything in alignment, as long as we are able to spend time in the things that mean the most to us. That alignment in priorities and purpose and time



are really important when assessing whether we're doing too much.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** That's really interesting. I like the distinction between whether you're moving towards work versus running away from something else.

You point out in your book that there's a very interesting relationship between how high up we are on the corporate ladder and how much flexibility we receive at work, and it's not necessarily the relationship people naturally assume. Tell us about that.

**Tracy Brower:** As we move higher in the corporate hierarchy, we have a greater locus of responsibility. This typically means we have more projects, responsibility for more people, and often more travel. Those are things that can cause us to need to be in a certain place more than working flexibly at home.

As we climb that corporate hierarchy we also tend to be more involved in work that is more ambiguous and strategic, more involved in decision-making — things that are less tangible. Those things tend to get done better face to face versus remotely — unless we've developed really strong relationships. They can work well either way, but those things can cause us to have less control over our schedule.

Sometimes we have an over-inflated sense of how important it is that we be in the office. I've always heard and read that really great leaders don't need to be present as much because they're delegating and empowering others. As we climb the hierarchy, there are legitimate reasons for us to be in the office more and to have less flexibility, but there may also be room to push back on ourselves.

The other thing that is fascinating about this is that people look to leaders for cues about the corporate culture, whether leaders think about that every day or not. The choices that leaders make are really important in sending a message to the rest of the organization.

There's a CEO who is a grandfather, and he loves to go see his grandson play soccer once a week. He didn't want people to know he was leaving for the soccer game until his assistant said, "You should let people know where you are," so he started being more open about it. It sent a strong message to the culture. He was committed, he was getting his work done, he was engaged, but he took time to see his grandson play soccer once a week. The transparency about where he was and what his priorities were was really important to the culture. So, while our ability to be more flexible may shift over time, we have the opportunity to make some planned choices that we can be very transparent about in helping to shape the culture.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** What often happens, as you're describing it, is that when we enter a company we assume that when we get to those higher echelons we'll have a lot more flexibility. But in fact, it's kind of funny because after a certain point, you reach the mid-level and that's probably the peak of your flexibility. After a while it actually tends to go down again.

In many ways, these are skills that we need to be teaching people as they are ascending up the corporate ladder, skills about how to achieve flexibility. As you argue, it's important in many cases to have flexibility in the way that you work, in the sense that it will improve your performance to have those options of when and where to work. Is that right?



**Tracy Brower:** Exactly. Flexibility ends up driving and improving performance. One of the things that I'm absolutely committed to, which research tends to support, is that when we do the right thing for people, we get better organizational results. What's good for people is good for organizations. It's not a trade-off; it's not a choice about, "Do I do the right thing for people or do I do the right thing for the organization?"

The way that works is when companies allow and encourage flexibility — and encourage alternative working — they're sending a message to people about the extent to which they trust them to make really good choices and decisions. Our human condition is really about reciprocity. We can look at that in instinctual levels of humanity. When people give to us, we can be motivated to give back. When organizations provide flexibility, it tends to foster this idea of reciprocity. People want to work hard, they want to do their best, and they want to do their best work. They especially want to work hard when they have these options and choices.

Flexibility positively impacts performance. It allows us to work when it's best for us — when it works into our lives and our schedules and when it works in terms of our focus. Some people may be most focused early in the morning and they're in a slump in the afternoon. If they can flex their work in order to allow for that, it works well. There may be someone who wants to take a class every Tuesday afternoon, for example, and then they're going to turn back on in the evening.

The choices and the control that we give people, and the flexibility they have, allows them to focus on work at the times that work best for them. When we can focus on work in the times that work best for us so we can do a better job, we have better outcomes and perform better as individuals and organizations. It really works out for the individuals, the organization, and the team.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** For those employees that are rising up that corporate ladder, do you have any recommendations about ways in which they can more effectively integrate work with their personal life?

**Tracy Brower:** That's a great question and super important. First of all, integration is about creating abundance and fulfillment. It's about knowing your priorities. For some, that means writing them down. For other people, that means knowing them deeply. What's most important for you? Think about where you're spending your time. Are your hours of the day really aligned with your priorities? If they're not, change it, and realize how much control you have over some of those choices and decisions.

Another element is to build relationships. Humans are fundamentally social beings and work is a social outlet, and there are lots of other social outlets. We release a neurotransmitter, oxytocin, when we feel a great connection with others. We release another neurotransmitter, serotonin, when we feel valued by a group and when we have a feeling of pride and recognition. The reason those are important is that we tend to want to repeat situations that have us releasing feel good chemicals and avoid situations that don't. Building relationships that are fulfilling and create a sense of abundance is an important element of creating that integration, since work is a really great outlet for it.

The other thing I would suggest is to leverage technology. Technology, when we manage it instead of it managing us, can be a great enabler of integration. I can go to my daughter's violin recital and be able to see what's happening at work, if that's a choice I've made. I'm



able to anticipate work that I might need to turn back on or handle the next day or shoot a quick email to take care of some things, but I can stay focused in the moment. Keeping the doors of communication open is also really important and integration is also about realizing that we have different needs over the seasons of our life. Creative abundance is to attend to those kinds of considerations.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I'm interested in the phrase "creating abundance." I can see that as being an element of a leadership decision or something that managers can do, but how do you create that perspective in your life if you're constantly pressured to achieve more by your manager and you feel like you don't have time at home? It's a great thing once you have it, but what do you do if you're not in that place?

**Tracy Brower:** In order to drive toward an idea of integration or choice or abundance, we first need to have a great foundation. The first part is just building a great relationship with our manager—that is about performing brilliantly. The research that I did for the book suggested that there was a lot more openness from leaders when they were working with someone performing really well. Performance is a prerequisite for work life choice, alternatives, flexibility, and all of that. Perform brilliantly; then you can take steps towards abundance.

Start small and be specific. When you're asking your leader, "I'd like to have more flexibility or choice," you want to be specific about that. Just saying you want more flexibility may feel a little scary to a leader because it is vague. We can start small, saying things like, "I'd like to take off the last Friday afternoon of every month" or "I'd like to take a class every Wednesday and come into work at 10:00am instead of at 8:00am" or "I'd like to work from home if my child is sick instead of also having to call in sick myself." Be really specific and start small.

Think about how that benefits the business. We frequently talk about, "What's in it for me?" In this case, we also want to be clear about what's in it for the business. How is the business going to benefit by you having more flexibility? That is usually about being able to work and focus when it works for you and how it works for you, so you can fit it into the crevices, cracks, and points in your life. That's a big one. Another one is the idea of connecting to the team and to the customer, making sure that the leader knows that the team is still going to be served, and making sure the customer will still be served.

Set up communication protocols—sometimes that looks like a time period or parameters — "Let's try this for three months and then check in and communicate and get feedback." Communication protocols are day to day; if I'm working in my home office I'll use IM or we can stay connected through email. Those seem like no brainers, but leaders like to hear that we're staying connected. Those work well in terms of starting the journey and agreeing that we're going to check in together and make sure it's working.

Finally, just stay agile, learn what's working and what's not, and adjust and course correct as necessary. Those are the kinds of things that leaders will usually respond to when they hear a proposal.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Those are really great tips. First, understanding that your performance is a prerequisite before you go in there and start making demands. Next is to focus on starting small and being specific and not necessarily coming in and saying, "I'd like more flexibility," which can be intimidating to the leader. Instead, ask to try working from



home one day a week or something along those lines. And then, be agile and open to experiments by talking about all the ways you're going to stay connected with the team and the customers.

**Tracy Brower:** Yes, exactly.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Let's look at it from the other side. Let's say I'm a manager and I start having more of an appreciation, hopefully by watching this, about all the benefits of flexibility. What should I do first to introduce more flexibility, without necessarily changing things completely for my team?

**Tracy Brower:** First, be a leader who focuses on results and objectives. Leaders who struggle most with flexibility are the leaders who are worried about managing to the whites of people's eyes and if they're in their seats at certain times. Being a leader who can manage to those results is a big deal. Are people getting done what they need to get done? Are you giving clear expectations and objectives and then asking people to pursue accomplish those objectives in the way that works best for them? The first priority is to be focused on performance and outcomes more than presenteeism.

Next, ask questions and listen for answers. I really believe that there are multiple right ways to bring work to life and integrate. Different team members may have different needs. Ask questions, listen, and check in. Sometimes leaders can provide different kinds of solutions for different team members; the nature of the work or the nature of the team or the size of the team dictate that. The more you can customize team member by team member, the better. Other team leaders may need one answer for the team because it's just really unwieldy to manage otherwise — then a team conversation is a really good approach. That is where teams can come together and talk about their common goals and their needs and come to a consensus.

I saw one team that adapted core hours. They agreed they were always going to be in the office from Tuesdays at ten to Thursdays at three. Everyone was going to be in the office in those core hours and outside of those hours people could flex whenever they wanted to. Another team I was just working with decided that they were all going to work from home on Thursdays. It was the entire marketing team and they knew that if they had their heads down and had contemplative time more frequently, they would be more productive. So as a team, they decided to do that.

Teams can also establish technological support, like getting laptops so that they can be away from the office or getting access to Skype so that they can see each other during the day. Really great leadership responses involve listening to individuals and to the team, then coming up with solutions that will work.

A great team leader response should be flexible. Look at how it is going and make shifts and adjustments as necessary.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** That last point is so critical. In many cases we get locked into assuming that we have to make the right decisions or not try it at all. That can be paralyzing for a leader. Having the perspective that we're going to try these different approaches for maybe a three month period, then talk to the people on the team to see if it's working and, if not, make adjustments — that can be really helpful. That attitude of trying to get better rather than trying to get it perfect can be liberating.



**Tracy Brower:** Well said. Trying to get better versus trying to get it perfect, yes. A lot of times we define work-life integration as flexibility or alternative work. That's a really important way to define it, but we can define this idea of abundance and fulfillment and integration through other things as well. Leaders who provide recognition, provide development opportunities, understand what people's passions are and align them with projects in that area, or provide more choice or control for people about what they're working on—those are all ways to provide for abundance and fulfillment and potentially providing for alternate working.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** In your book, you talk about ways in which we can leverage our physical environment to make ourselves more productive in the office. I'm curious about whether there are some tips you can offer for those of us who work from home, either occasionally or full time. How do we create a better home office?

**Tracy Brower:** That's a really important one. Some of the research that we've done has suggested that we tend to do better when there is more work in progress around us. Working well in a home office is about having your own space. A lot of people work at the kitchen island or table, which can be a challenge when you're cleaning up every night to eat dinner. Having your own space where you can leave your work out is very helpful. Our memories improve when we have a spatial recognition of where we had a certain conversation, thought or accomplishment.

It's also important to get some daylight or have a view while you're working. Sometimes that's not possible. Some people are in a lower level or a small apartment with an interior wall. For those people, even incandescent light is helpful.

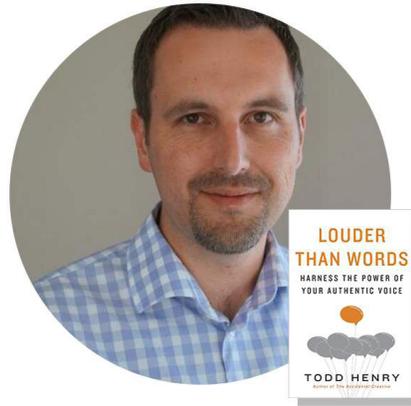
Finally, make it your own. Surround yourself with your own artifacts — books that mean a lot to you or that fun gift that someone gave you. Play soft music in the background that isn't distracting or burn a candle. There's a really great app called Coffitivity that plays coffee shop sounds. You can choose morning, afternoon, or evening coffee shops sounds. Sometimes people use that because they like the buzz of a coffee shop even if they're in their home office. And of course, have access to really good coffee.



## Practical Tips from Tracy Brower

- Work-life integration is not something that's given to you. It's something you create for yourself by proactively taking steps to prioritize (and guard) your time.
- Hoping that you'll have more flexibility when you get promoted typically doesn't work. At most companies, the higher up you're promoted, the more demands there are on your time. Flexibility is highest for middle managers — not top executives.
- Achieving work-life integration doesn't necessarily require working less. The important thing is ensuring that the way you spend your time is consistent with your priorities.
- Before you can ask for more flexibility at work, you need to establish a strong, trusting relationship with your manager.
- When making a request that increases your flexibility, start small and be specific.
- Frame your request in terms of how it benefits the business, not how it benefits you personally.
- Suggest a communication protocol that reassures your manager that you will be reachable.
- When working from home, if possible, designate a specific space for work-only activities. This enables you to leave work out in full view and leverage spatial recognition of where you left certain documents, the way you would at the office.





## Todd Henry on How to Be Brilliant at a Moment's Notice

Todd Henry teaches leaders and organizations how to establish practices that lead to everyday brilliance.

He is the author of three books (*The Accidental Creative*, *Die Empty*, and *Louder Than Words*) that have been translated into more than a dozen languages, and he speaks and consults across dozens of industries on creativity, leadership, and passion for work. His book *Die Empty* was named by Amazon.com as one of the best books of 2013.

His latest book, *Louder Than Words*, is about how to develop an authentic voice that resonates and creates impact. Bestselling author Tom Rath called it “...one of the best guides to living a meaningful life I have ever read.”

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Todd, I am a big fan of *The Accidental Creative*, both the podcast and the book. One of the points that you make in the book is that, in order to produce consistently great work, we need to succeed at three separate domains in our life. What are they?

**Todd Henry:** This is the intricate balance that we have to strike. I believe that the most productive creative professionals, those who have to turn their thoughts into value every day, are a combination of three things. They're prolific, meaning they have to produce a lot of work. They're also brilliant; they're doing good work and producing work that meets client or marketplace demand. Finally, they have to be healthy. Healthy doesn't mean balanced — it doesn't mean that we have tons of space in our life and are taking a vacation every month. What it means is sustainable, that we're producing in a way that we can sustain over the course of time. With all the pressures and dynamics of the create-on-demand workplace, it's really difficult to produce in a sustainable way unless you build practices into your life and infrastructure that support your creative process. They must support your collaborative process and enable you to better deal with the uncertainty of the way that work is going. Most of us have to make it up as we go.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** As you point out, we tend to be very good at two out of the three of those domains. We're not particularly good at all three simultaneously. What do you rec-



ommend we do to be successful at all three domains at the same time?

**Todd Henry:** We have to build infrastructure and practices into our lives, things that can feel very inefficient in the moment because we have work to do. I've got projects to work on and conversations to have. It may feel inefficient to do things such as blocking off time to define your work more effectively and making sure that you have clear objectives — not just objectives, but clear problems that you're trying to solve.

A lot of times our projects and tasks look like concepts on our task lists. If we clearly define those problems, we're setting ourselves up for success. It feels very inefficient in the moment, but taking time for things like establishing time for study, absorbing stimuli, and filling your mind with inspiring things can be very effective in the long run. Stephen Sample from USC calls it communing with great minds. Those stimuli become the raw materials for your creative process and get combined into your ideas.

Those are just a few things that maybe feel a little bit inefficient in the moment but are very effective for building our infrastructure. Be careful not to sacrifice long-term effectiveness for short-term efficiency if you want to be prolific, brilliant, and healthy.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** One interesting recommendation you discuss in your book involves tending to your activities the way a vine keeper tends to his grapes. Can you tell us about that?

**Todd Henry:** On a vineyard, one of the primary roles of the vine keeper is to regularly prune areas of perfectly good fruit. They have to be disciplined about pruning that growth. If they don't, eventually the vine will shoot for the median. There are not enough resources to support that much fruit on the vine. So they have to be careful about pruning the vine so that the best fruit, the more productive parts of the vine, are getting the resources that they need.

In the same way, as creative professionals, we all struggle with new fruit on our vine. We struggle with new ideas, new projects, and new things we want to pursue. We're terrible at saying no. If we're squeezing all of the white space out of our lives by filling it with activity, if we're not pruning and saying no to things on occasion, then we're not going to have the space that we need to innovate or think. We're not going to have those moments of serendipity or those insights that are just hanging there. We have to manage our energy and create space in our lives. This allows us to bring the best of who we are to what we do.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** That's a terrific point. I've heard it described among psychologists as having cognitive surplus. You need to create that space in your life, and that's often what happens when we go into the shower. It's one of those few moments when we're not tied to our devices, so we have that extra space to find connections between ideas. If we're not allowing that to happen in our lives, it's just never going to work.

Can you give us an example of something you were doing in your life that was successful, but you felt like you had to stop doing it in order to leave room for more ideas to flourish?

**Todd Henry:** I can give many examples of things where you just have to say, "No" to in order to be able to say, "Yes". If you're saying yes to everything, you're really saying yes to nothing. I'll give you one from the last year when I was leading larger teams. When I write a book, I really have to dedicate large chunks of time to the writing process. So I make no



commitments in the morning when I'm writing a book.

People might say that's overkill because you only need an hour to write five hundred to a thousand words a day. It's not just about the clickety-clack on the keyboard, though. It's about all the other distractions of being present in the moment; it's about making sure I'm bringing the best of my synthesis to what I'm writing. Sometimes it takes an hour to an hour and a half to gear up to writing the really good stuff. The first hour is spent on the cutting room floor because you're just kind of warming up.

In our press to be efficient, sometimes we want to squeeze everything into as small a space as possible and just crank out our best work in five-minute increments. It doesn't happen that way. We need to allot large amounts of time, which means we're going to have to say "no" to things. We're going to have to prune, we're going to have to carve out space if we want to be effective. I say, "No" to everything when I'm working on a book. I say, "No" to interviews, even client engagements in some instances.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Along the lines of making sure that we're doing important work, a quote that appears in *The Accidental Creative* that really resonated with me is: "Fake work is more dangerous than no work at all." What is fake work and how do we ensure that it's not hijacking our resources?

**Todd Henry:** We can easily convince ourselves that we're making good progress on something just by checking tasks off of a list. Sometimes that's fake work. It's work that gives us that surge of productivity, like replying to a bunch of emails or returning a bunch of phone calls. Those things can be important, but we can often hide behind those quick surge tasks and pretend like we're making progress when we're just swatting flies and more flies are going to take their place tomorrow. We're not really sitting down to think about our problems or generate ideas to take new ground. Instead, we're just protecting the ground we've already taken. I define that as fake work.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** As the days and the weeks drag on, the more fatigued we get, the more seductive easily accomplished goals become because we lose sight of importance and we focus in on how easy it will be for to get this task off our list.

One of the things that we often lose track of is the value of relationships. An interesting suggestion you make for elevating our performance involves rethinking the value of relationships. At one point, you recommend pursuing certain relationships as a means of improve our creativity. Tell us about that.

**Todd Henry:** We tend to think that creative innovation is a solo sport. We have these myths of the lone creator in a cabin in South Georgia inventing the next iPad. We only remember the Thomas Edisons, the Steve Jobs, the Henry Fords, but we fail to realize that these people had networks of people around them. They had people helping them push into those innovations, helping them discover those great products that they deliver to the world. Innovation is a team sport; it's the collective grasp for the next. It's groups of people stumbling awkwardly into the unknown together and figuring it out; but our tendency is to isolate ourselves. We close ourselves off to other people and think that we need to work on our own.

We need to be intentional about developing relationships that inspire us, that stimulate us, and that force us to see the world in new ways that fill our well. A lot of times we have rela-



tionships of obligation — meaning your Aunt Mildred wants to have tea — or convenience — meaning “I work around these people so I’ll hang out with them.” — in our lives. We’re not building relationships into our life that fire us up or stimulate us.

We need to be pushing out, identifying people in our lives that inspire us and saying, “Hey, let’s get together, let’s have coffee, let’s talk about the work we’re doing, let’s ask some deep and meaningful probing questions about the work, let’s fuel each other with the stuff we’re seeing, noticing, and reading.” We need other people in our lives if we want to be prolific, brilliant, and healthy over the long run, which is my objective and, I hope, the objective of the people watching this.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Another very interesting strategy that you provide in *The Accidental Creative* involves clustering similar activities. Could you tell us how clustering works and how you use it in the work that you do on a day-to-day basis?

**Todd Henry:** Sure. Again, it’s going to be different for me than it is for the person watching, depending on your job and the responsibilities you have. Clustering is putting similar kinds of tasks together so that you’re not constantly paying a task-switching penalty every time you go from answering an email to solving an important problem that will determine the next twenty years of your business. Those require very different cognitive and emotional resources. Many people have days where they answer a couple emails, run off to a meeting, come back, think for ten minutes about a problem they’re trying to solve, return a phone call, answer a couple emails, and then run off for another meeting. They don’t have blocks of time dedicated to doing that very important and defining work that’s really going to create the disproportionate value.

I’ll give an example. I mostly write books and work with clients. I have themes for the halves of my day. One half of my day is just administrative stuff. It would be really easy for me to sit down on a day when I’m supposed to be creating content, writing, or be working on a client project or something and say, “I really don’t feel like gearing up to do that right now; I’m just I’m going to do this administrative stuff. I’m going to pay some bills or reply to a couple of emails or requests.”

Knowing I have a block of time that allows me to push that off means that I’m going to do the work that I’m supposed to be doing right now. I have blocks of time set aside for creating content, blocks of time set aside for thinking about the marketing and the future of the business, and blocks of time set aside for doing various other tasks that are necessary to do what I do. That’s how I use it, clustering similar kinds of tasks, highly conceptual versus highly concrete, and I’m not constantly paying a task switching penalty when I go from those concrete tasks to the conceptual tasks and vice versa.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I love that differentiation of the concrete versus the conceptual. I imagine that people who are watching might be saying, “That sounds fantastic, but I’ve got to be responsive to my manager or I’ve got to be responsive to clients.” And I recognize that as entrepreneurs we have a lot more flexibility than some people who are working for others.

Can you think of some ways in which people can still get 80% of that and apply it to the work that they do when they’re in a highly responsive profession?

**Todd Henry:** If people are client facing and functioning in an organization, it’s really diffi-



cult because you're often at the client's whim. I completely get that. People may have little latitude over when they schedule meetings and, especially if you are new to an organization, you have a lot of responsibility, so it's hard to establish rhythms. They might come in an hour or an hour and a half earlier one or two days a week so that they have a block of predictable time to do that work. They might stay a little bit later. They might use their lunch break differently and try to block off some time to have that dedicated, focused time that they need. They might defer email to a certain time of the day. They can say, "Between ten and ten-thirty every day I'm going to crank through all of my urgent emails because I know I have that time predictively available every day instead of trying to do one or two randomly," which is what a lot of us try to do in between, so that you're able to cluster your work.

I work with one organization that established what they called "no-fly zone time" between 11:00am and 1:00pm every day. If you had something that could wait until after 1:00pm, you were under organizational mandate to wait so that everyone had that predictable 11:00am to 1:00pm timeframe to work on highly conceptual work and not be interrupted halfway through. I know it doesn't work for everyone, but it is important that you find that time. If we try, we can probably find that time.

Whenever you set a meeting — instead of making it the default, Outlook-style sixty minute meeting — make your default meeting forty-five or even thirty minutes. If you need more time, you can always extend it; otherwise, you can reclaim fifteen to thirty minutes at the end of every hour so that you have that space and you're not going to be in back to back meetings. You can refresh yourself and have a buffer to engage in some work during that time.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I really like that idea. In many cases, when you have that sixty minute block set up for a meeting and it ends up taking only thirty-five or forty minutes, you feel like you've done something wrong. It trains us to waste a lot of time.

Speaking of using our time more effectively, one of the strategies you suggest is taking an hour out of every week and setting it aside for deep thinking about the big picture and asking "What am I really trying to achieve with my next week?"

There's a lot of value to that idea—if we want creative ideas to emerge, we need to be intentional about making the space in our lives for that to happen. At the same time, I'd imagine devoting an entire hour to sitting by themselves brainstorming ideas could feel difficult or intimidating to some people. What should they do to ensure that that hour is well spent?

**Todd Henry:** We often fall prey to efficiency at the expense of effectiveness and end up drifting from day to day. We begin to be carried along by the work instead of driving the work. That one hour checkpoint is about ensuring that we have things on our task list and in our life that are going to make us effective over the long term. There are a couple ways we can approach it.

The first is just "idea time," pure and simple — having an hour of "idea time" to generate ideas for your most important work. We know that ideas are important. We know we need breakthroughs. We know we need to solve big problems in our organization. If you ask the average person, they don't take that time. I have worked across dozens of industries with thousands of people over the years and it's very rare for me to encounter someone who says, "Yeah, I had time on my calendar last week for generating ideas." Every single one of



them would say it's important to come up with ideas and have breakthroughs. We expect it to happen in the cracks and crevices, but we don't sit and intentionally think about the problems. It sounds remarkably simple, it might even sound obvious, but it's not what we know — it's what we do that moves the needle.

I always challenge people to put an hour on their calendar to think about their problems, to generate ideas, to think deeply, to choose one problem and dedicate an hour this week to thinking about it. Think about the breakthrough that you need. Again, it sounds obvious, but we don't do it. Instead, we go to meetings where we banter for ten minutes about what's going on in everybody's life and all the other stuff going on, then we spend maybe ten or fifteen minutes thinking about the problem collectively, and we leave more confused than when we came in because we haven't really made any progress. All we've done is assign next action tasks to everybody; we don't ever really spend time thinking about the problem. So that's one way that we need to dedicate time — allocate time to coming up with ideas.

The second way is establishing a weekly checkpoint where we look at things like our focus. Do we have clearly defined problems? Do we understand what's going to be important for us next week? Are we trying to resolve concepts or are we actually solving problems? Regarding our relationships: With whom do we need to connect? Who has not been on our calendar in a long time that we need to close the loop with? Where are we spending our energy in the next week? Where do we need to establish some clearly defined boundaries? What do we need to say, "No" to next week, so that we can have the energy we need? What are we going to do next week in order to fill our well, in order to fire our engines? Where is "idea time" going to happen in the next week? Are we doing things to develop our skills and ourselves? Where are we setting aside time to learn new things to develop skills so that we're better equipped to deal with the problems in the future? It is also important to have that time, not just to crank out work, but also to sit and think about how we're intentionally structuring our lives and building that infrastructure so we can be prolific, brilliant, and healthy.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** In *Die Empty*, your second book, you point out that, in order to produce great work, we need to "avoid the temptations of comfort." Now, I have to tell you, comfort sounds great. It sounds like making a good living, being home by 5:00pm with your kids, maybe going to a movie on the weekend. Why should I avoid comfort?

**Todd Henry:** Comfort is not bad as a by-product. People often say to me, "You hate comfort." I actually have a fortune cookie on my desk that says, "Avoid comfort," which I thought was kind of funny. I don't hate comfort; I believe that the love of comfort is the enemy of greatness. You can get to a certain point in your life and career where you begin to crave comfort more than doing good work. When that happens, you begin to settle in.

The word mediocrity comes from two words: *medius*, meaning middle, and *ocris*, meaning rugged mountain. So to be mediocre means to stop halfway up a rugged mountain and say, "I'm close enough." It doesn't mean I'm not skilled; it doesn't mean I never had it. It means that at some point I willingly chose to stop developing myself, to stop pushing into those uncomfortable places. People who build brilliant bodies of work are those who choose to do the right thing even when it's uncomfortable.

You might experience comfort as a by-product. I'm not sitting on spiky chairs all the time to avoid comfort; that would be silly. But we need to push ourselves to do uncomfortable



things and continue moving up that rugged mountain if we want to build a body of work we can be proud of. I have no problem with comfort itself; the craving of comfort is where get into the danger zone.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** You also discuss mediocrity and how it comes about. It is interesting because, as you point out in your book, we start off really idealistic, wanting to produce amazing work, and then somehow we start to get complacent. It typically happens in our thirties and forties. By the time we're fifty, security becomes the main focus and concern. If you look at what people are looking for in a job when they're twenty or thirty, they're looking for opportunities for growing their skills. They're looking to develop their competence. When you get to the age of about fifty, your primary goal becomes security. Could you talk a little bit about how that happens, how you've seen it happen in other people, and what we can do to avoid it?

**Todd Henry:** There's definitely a trend line if you look at the vast array of people at those stages of life. I don't think it's always the case, though. I've met many people in their fifties going through a renaissance period where they're reinventing themselves and creating tons of value. I do think you're right that, at the age of forty, we start to figure out that there are probably certain things that are going to be taken off the table for us. If your goal was always, "I'm going to be a billionaire," and you're not on that path by your forties, it's probably not going to happen.

We start to come to terms with what's in the cards for us. People deal with that in different ways. Some go through what they call a midlife crisis and start doing crazy things like buying sports cars. Some start to grasp for security; they start to put their hand on the parachute and rip cord because they know at some point they're going to jump and they want to make sure there's a parachute. That's a perfectly natural human tendency. I save, I invest, I like security as much as the next person; I'm not advocating that security is silly, but you have to ask yourself: "What am I building?"

We all start our career asking, "Can I make this work? Am I going to be able to sustain myself doing this?" And then at some point, once we realize it's going to work, we start asking: "Can I thrive? Can I actually thrive in this career that I've created for myself?" The last question we ask is, "Will this matter? Will my work ultimately matter?" A lot of people get to a point where they realize that they've invested a lot of time and money into building somebody else's dream or building a career, but have compromised themselves in little ways. They've compromised their value in order to gain some security.

The question isn't whether security is or is not valuable or whether you should or shouldn't have it. The question is: "What are you willing to trade in order to obtain a little bit of security?" That's the line we have to be careful not to cross as we get older. Are we selling ourselves out in order to gain a little bit of security? That's where regret becomes part of the picture. I meet many people who deeply regret decisions they've made in their career because they seemed like the most secure, safe, comfortable decisions to make, but they compromised themselves and their values.

I was asking my friend Ricardo Crespo, "How do you make decisions? Why have you done what you've done?" He said, "You know, I wake up every morning and I look at myself in the mirror and I've realized you can't lie to the person in the mirror. You can have everybody else fooled, but you can't lie to that person. I have always had the ethic that the mo-



ment I can't go to my bosses and say, "No" and walk out the door, I've already failed my family." That's a really interesting way to look at security. Security isn't about having the creature comforts, it's about asking, "Do I have the freedom to make decisions to pursue my calling?" To me, that's the greatest kind of security, knowing that I have freedom to pursue what it is that's being called out of me, my productive passion.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** If you think about how we develop new skills and how we grow, it's in those moments when we try something that we're not particularly confident in, but then use that feedback in order to get better at it in the future. If you're not having those experiences, then you're not learning new things, you're not growing. If you're not growing, there's just no way to be satisfied.

**Todd Henry:** That's right. Some of the times that I've been the most happy, the most joyous in my life, are the times that I've been the most uncomfortable and out there on the edge. We tend to think that stasis is when we're the most comfortable as a business or whatever, but that tension release is where growth comes from. That's where satisfaction comes from, and that's what we're wired for as humans.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** How much of that do you think is simply the relief of no longer experiencing tension?

**Todd Henry:** It could be a significant part of it. It could be that everything worked out okay. But I think the struggle to "overcome" is a significant part of the satisfaction that we find in life. Even if we fail, we took a risk that we know we needed to take. Even when that risk doesn't bear fruit in the end, we can at least look back and say we did the right thing.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Your new book, *Louder than Words*, comes out later this summer. Can you tell us a little bit about it?

**Todd Henry:** Sure, yeah. I like to think of *The Accidental Creative*, *Die Empty*, and *Louder than Words* as my creative trilogy. *The Accidental Creative* is about building practices and infrastructure that enable you to deal with the pressure. *Die Empty* was about asking: "Are you doing your best work or are you getting distracted? Are you getting stuck?" This final book is really about asking: "How do you then take what's inside of you and put it out in the world in a way that's going to resonate with other people?" There's this myth that "If you just continue to produce good work, eventually people are going to find it and you'll be successful."

But if you look at what happens in the marketplace, that's not the case. There's a lot of great work out there that just never gets discovered. A lot of times, it's because the person creating the work hasn't spent the time and made the effort to figure out what they care about or how their audience was receiving what their work. A big part of your voice isn't just what you say; it's how it's received. What you hear from me is as important as what I say. So in *Louder than Words*, I looked at some of the factors that contribute to especially resonant voices, voices that that really seem to create impact over time.

What I figured out is that all of these resonant voices have three elements involved: There's identity, which is a sense of: "Who am I? What do I care about? What are the pillars?" They are what define me as a person and what defines my work. When we talk about voice, that's often all we talk about. We say, "Find your voice, figure out what you care about." That's only one small piece of the puzzle, so I don't like the phrase "find your voice" because it implies a one-time thing. You have to develop your voice over time and in context.



The second part is “vision.” You have to have a vision for your work and you have to understand your intended audience and how to shape your work so that it resonates deeply with that audience.

Finally, you have to master the skills necessary to bring that work into the world. If you have a sense of identity, and vision, but you’re not skilled at what you do — if you haven’t built a platform that allows you to do that — you’re not going to be credible, period. You need the skills. So identity, vision, and mastery—they all flow together. I call it the voice engine in the book, but they all work together for people developing their voice over the course of time. That is what I’ve discovered is the key to making your work resonate deeply with your intended audience.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Interesting. I haven’t read the book, but I look forward to reading it and it sounds really timely because we’re moving into an economy now where there really isn’t very much security. If you’re going to be successful, you really need to differentiate yourself. Regardless of how successful your company is today, it could be bought out tomorrow. You have no idea where you’re going to be two, three, five years from now. Identifying some ways that you can stand out and really taking that entrepreneurial spirit and incorporating it into the work that you do seems like something that everyone should be doing.

**Todd Henry:** I agree. When we talk about personal branding, we tend to think about the outward shell. “How am I presenting myself to the world?” That’s not the same thing as developing an authentic, compelling voice. All of your efforts to position yourself will eventually fail if they’re not coming from a place of authenticity. The first step is to get in there and figure out where your battle lines are. What are the things you really care about? What really makes you unique and defines you? What is the value of the change you want to create in the marketplace?

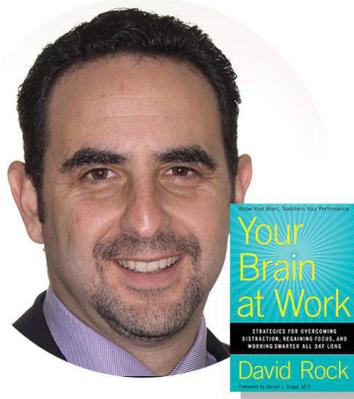
That really has to come first; it has to be rooted there and then you can move onto: “How do I take this to the marketplace in the way that’s going to shape and define a group of people? What’s going to make me unique? What’s really going to help me stand out in the crowded marketplace?” It all has to begin with that place of authenticity and you can’t fabricate that. The most resonant voices come from that rooted place of authenticity.



## Practical Tips from Todd Henry

- To be creative in a sustainable fashion, you need to deliberately carve out time for consuming new stimuli. Consider establishing time for study and put it on your calendar.
- Performing at a high level requires that you avoid taking on too much. Protect the white space in your life — the time you have that is not taken up by effortful activities. It is in that white space that the best ideas often appear.
- Identify people who inspire you and make it a habit of getting together. Be intentional about developing relationships with people who stimulate you and force you to see the world in new ways.
- Try clustering similar activities together (like answering email or returning phone calls, one after another) so that you're not mentally switching back and forth from task to task.
- Consider deferring email to specific times of day and experiment with turning email off for short chunks of time.
- Make your default meeting time thirty or forty-five minutes, instead of a full hour.
- Set aside time for a “weekly checkpoint” — a set hour each week during which you reflect on what you've achieved in the past seven days, and begin to map out the week ahead.
- Your most pleasurable experiences as a professional are achieved in the moments when you are stretching yourself. Seeking comfort for its own sake rarely results in satisfaction.





## David Rock on How to Listen Like a Leader

Dr. David Rock coined the term ‘Neuroleadership’ and is the Director of the NeuroLeadership Institute, a global initiative bringing neuroscientists and leadership experts together to build a new science for leadership development. With operations in twenty-four countries, the Institute also helps large organizations operationalize brain research in order to develop better leaders and managers.

David co-edits the *NeuroLeadership Journal* and heads up an annual global summit. He has written many of the central academic and discussion papers that have defined the Neuroleadership field. He is the author of the business best seller *Your Brain at Work* (Harper Business, 2009), as well as *Quiet Leadership* (Harper Collins, 2006) and the textbook *Coaching with the Brain in Mind* (Wiley & Sons, 2009). He blogs for the *Harvard Business Review*, *Fortune Magazine*, *Psychology Today*, and the *Huffington Post*, and is quoted widely in the media about leadership, organizational effectiveness, and the brain.

Academically, David is on the faculty and advisory board of CIMBA, an international business school based in Europe, and a guest lecturer at many universities including Oxford University’s Said Business School. He is on the board of the BlueSchool, an initiative in New York City building a new approach to education. He received his professional doctorate in the Neuroscience of Leadership from Middlesex University in 2010.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Before we start, David, let me ask you about the setting. You seem to be in a very relaxed place today. Tell us about where you are and what you’re doing.

**David Rock:** I’m actually on vacation out on Fire Island. I have a ritual of half time August. With the amount going on I can’t take a whole week or two off without it being incredibly stressful before and after, but I can have a month where I work at a dramatically lower pace, maybe two or three days a week taking calls and four or five days a week being with the family and being healthy, etc. So I’m having half time August — a month of very long weekends. It’s really sustaining.



**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** That's interesting because a lot of us try to keep work mode and vacation mode separate, but you find that blending the two is actually helpful.

**David Rock:** I definitely have explicit days off where I don't do any work because it can creep in. I find that a four day weekend is actually very refreshing. If you completely switch off and do one of those back to back, three or four times, you think a different quality of thoughts. Over August, I'm doing a different level of reflection, a different quality of thinking. I make really different decisions and notice different patterns and work on different things than the rest of the year. I can think bigger thoughts because I've got more space.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** On the topic of getting people to think better thoughts: in your book, *Quiet Leadership*, you provide a series of tips for both when we're leading a team and when we're collaborating with others. Let's start with effective leadership first. You make the case that a good leader "lets others do all the thinking." What do you mean by that?

**David Rock:** Leaders still need to do some of the thinking. Leaders need to develop strategy and decide what good performance looks like and a number of things. When they're interacting with their team and they're having conversations, it's incredibly helpful to actually develop other people's thinking versus just saying, "Look, here is what I need you to do...X, Y, and Z." It's a completely different biological phenomenon to say to someone, "Call these three customers. Tell them this exact thing," versus saying, "What do you think we should do next with these three customers?" and having a dialog. The latter helps people grow and generate much better ideas.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So what happens biologically that's different?

**David Rock:** Nobody has done this study yet, but imagine two people in a scanner that's measuring the oxygen flow in different regions. Imagine a leader and an employee in a scanner and they're trying to work out what to do with a customer. If the leader is telling, then the leader has thought through the problem, come up with the solution, and knows what needs to happen. The employee doesn't have the space to actually think through the problem. They're just being told to do it and have to act and follow instructions that they haven't necessarily thought through or understood.

When we just follow actions without knowing why, we're significantly less clear. We make more mistakes, we don't know what to do when we hit a roadblock, and we're not sure of the intent. We're just not as effective or committed as if we actually understand why we're doing something. That's one factor. The employee hasn't had the chance to actually understand the why.

Ideas are like children. There are none so wonderful as your own. It's the manager's idea that's making the manager look good. It's raising the manager's status. If the employee feels like it's their idea, it actually raises their status. Status is a huge motivator for driving our performance across the board; we're all driven to maximize our own status.

We don't necessarily want to help other people's ideas look good. It makes their status go up, so we have this automatic argument that's usually very unconscious when someone tells us what to do. We just naturally want to argue and improve the idea. It's a healthy thing in a lot of contexts, but gets in the way of getting things done. The manager has a good idea, tells the employee what to do, and the employee, just because it wasn't their



idea, wants to argue and disprove it. It's this knee jerk reaction that happens around status and it kills time.

The manager thinks through the problem, makes a set of connections, and in that moment it's like completing a line on Sudoku. They've got this nice burst of dopamine and adrenaline and excitement that increases commitment and engagement. The employee, on the other hand, hasn't had any of that. They haven't had the opportunity to go, "Oh, I've got it," and have this little "aha" phenomenon occur in their brain that would actually motivate and engage them to go forward. There's an enormous difference on many levels between "Do this" and "What do you think we should do?" or even, "What do you think between these two options? "If you don't think the employee has got the right idea, asking what they think about the two options will help.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** We just talked about how you're on vacation. You're having all of these great ideas that are coming to you. When you get back to the office, how are you going to apply some of the insights you've just given me about how important it is to involve your team members in decision making? Are you going to go in and say, "I had these three ideas that I think are really terrific; Let's talk about implementing them.?" I'm guessing that you're not going to say that, you're not going to be quite as direct. What are you going to say?

**David Rock:** Well, it depends. A lot of the staff I have also went on vacation, so I'll have to wait to ask that question. It's not tactical. I don't say, "We should do this, this week." You get an aftershock of stuff that you forgot to handle when you first go on break, and then those go away and you think much bigger thoughts, about strategy over the next five years or things you hadn't thought about: overall plans or some things to write about.

If I'm going back to the office with a big burning platform, I'm going to say to people, "I've got a great idea" or "I think it might be a good idea, but I could be wrong and I want to throw it around with you guys and look at it from all angles and see what comes up." I won't tell them "Hey, we have to do this." I'll say, "Let's brainstorm together." That leaves people space to feel like they've got some ownership and status in the ideas. They've also got some autonomy in the process. They're choosing to lead into this idea, and status and autonomy are really important drivers of behavior. I'd go back and say, "Let's take it apart and see if it makes sense to do or not." Sometimes it doesn't. It seemed like a good idea to me, but there are things these guys know that tell me we should wait six months.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Can you give us two or three key statements that any leader should have in their conversational repertoire that can help others clarify their thinking?

**David Rock:** There's definitely a few statements or questions. "What's at the heart of why you say that? What's really driving you to say that? What's your ultimate goal here?" Those are really helpful.

We deal with a lot of noise and forget to ask things like: "What's your real motivation here? What's your intention?" We're always driven by intentions. The intention might be to raise revenue. It might be to outsmart the competition or it might be to look good in front of their peers or who knows what, or just to argue for the sake of arguing. What's really driving your statement here?

Another is when you're debriefing someone. We're always taught to do a post mortem.



What worked? What didn't work? When you get to the stuff that didn't work, you basically have an argument. You're trying to convince the person that they could have done better. They're trying to convince you that it totally was not their fault and they're protecting their status. We protect our status very, very thoroughly. A drop in status can make us die younger; a rise in status can make us live longer. We have very good reason to protect our status.

Rather than just talking about what went well and what didn't, you should ask questions like, "What ideas do you already have for doing this better next time? You're a smart person. I bet you're already thinking about innovations for the next time we do this. What are some of those?" People either have or dig deep for something right then. Instead of saying, "Oh no, I did fine. It wasn't my fault," they'll dig deep for things they might be able to do better. It's a really different approach.

Asking, "What ideas do you already have for doing this better next time?" reduces a lot of the noise and increases the signal on what's really relevant.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So, not assuming that we understand the intention, taking the time to clarify, and also giving people the benefit of the doubt for having good ideas.

**David Rock:** Yeah.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Along the same lines, you talk about how a good leader listens for potential. How do I implement that on a practical basis? How do I listen for potential?

**David Rock:** That's a really good question. We're quick to notice the gaps and mistakes that people make. The reason is biological; we're driven to seek out and focus on potential dangers and threats. We're driven to see variance versus similarity. Put someone in the scanner and show them a happy face and their brain lights up a little bit. Show them an angry face and it lights up way more. There's a lot more activity going on across more regions.

The negative really jumps out, It's important to consciously think about how people are growing and developing and to notice what people are passionate about. Try to find things people are naturally interested in, good at, and improving at. If you can find those things and structure around them, everyone is happier. Listening for potential is finding where someone is going or trying to go and developing that. Growing talent is one of the things that managers are worst at. It can be a challenge.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Is there something that you keep in the back of your mind as you're engaging with your team members? It's one thing to have that annual review or even to think about it once a month, for example: "How am I going to get Tracy to continue to feel like she's growing?" How do you do that on a conversational basis? Is there something that you do to remind yourself where that person is going?

**David Rock:** It's funny. I think of potential as a skill everyone uses from time to time; we all have that muscle. When you teach people, they get it pretty quickly. They go, "Oh, I know how to do this. I did this with my kids" or "I did this with a friend." I believed in this person and I wanted them to win and that's what it's about. Believing in someone and wanting them to win.

The question I ask myself is, "Do I believe this person? Do I want them to win?" If the answer is "No," then I need a different type of conversation. If I don't believe in this person or I don't want them to win, I need to sort that out because it's going to come out uncon-



sciously in my language and I'm going to have a problem. Believe in people and want them to win and you'll see the conversation starts to flow better.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Interesting. In another one of your tips on becoming a better listener, you talk about this idea that we need to avoid getting lost in the details. In other words, think about problems at a high level when people are coming to you with a problem that they're facing at work, and avoid focusing too narrowly on the details.

I wonder, what is the benefit of doing that? What's the benefit of not getting into the details and how do we maintain our thinking on a high level?

**David Rock:** Our ability to process information is actually very limited. We can only hold a certain amount of information and process it at one time. You can't multiply four digits in your head unless you're relaxed and there are not many steps. On paper, it's very easy. You try to do it in your head and it's very hard. To actually think through things, you've got to simplify them. If our mind is filled with details, we don't notice patterns.

If we want to notice patterns, like if a project is making or losing money, we can't fill our brains with the details of a hundred clients. We have to pull back from the details and just look at a page of numbers. In order to maximize this limited resource, we often have to minimize the detail and focus on the patterns about those details to find insight. That's the simplest way to describe it.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Can you remain a good listener if you're ignoring part of the story?

**David Rock:** You're not ignoring the details; you're focusing on the details you need.

Employees often start with the details and assume that we need to know everything; we usually don't. What we usually need to know is, "Is it on track? If not, how off track is it? Are you confident in what you need to do next? Are we clear on if this is the right strategy? Can we make this work?"

In some ways, getting out of the details helps you to see if these things are true or not. It's not avoiding the details; it's just that the manager can't get into the details if they're going to answer questions like the ones that I just focused on.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** You offer some counter-intuitive advice about delivering feedback. A lot of managers are trained to use the "feedback sandwich," say something nice, give the negative feedback, and then say something nice again. You say that doesn't work. Can you tell us why that doesn't work and what should we be doing instead?

**David Rock:** It works for very low level things that people don't take personally, which is almost nothing. We take almost everything very personally, especially feedback from a superior. People take feedback very personally. It's a strong reaction that gets in the way of the conversation. Ask a question about the person's own perspective rather than tell them something. About 75% of the time, you don't even need to give feedback.

Ask people for their thoughts about their own performance and they'll probably be more right than you. About, three-fourths of the time you can just ask, "What are some things that you're trying to improve here? Are you working on getting better here? What are some of the things that you're mulling over?" People will tell you. It's usually very fast and much less stressful. Of course, if it's a technical task and they're doing something wrong, then tell



them. If they need a password, tell them. That feedback sandwich just wastes everyone's time and energy.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I think you're absolutely right — raising it as a question opens it up as a dialog as opposed to an accusatory criticism. People are a lot more willing to be accepting of their own criticism than of other people's criticism.

There is some pretty powerful research showing that competence predicts your own evaluation of your own competence. If you're not very high on competence, chances are you're going to overestimate how competent you are. So what do you do in those cases where you go to someone on your team, you ask for their own evaluation of how they're doing, and it's completely off track?

**David Rock:** Convincing people that they're wrong is a very murky path. Everyone is always looking for tips on how to convince someone that they're broken, and it doesn't work so well.

Instead of going down that path, I would ask, "How do I help this person change roles or how do I help this person out of the business or how do I help this person develop new areas that they will have skills in?" Developing something new, growing something new rather than trying to attack would be the way through.



## Practical Tips from David Rock

- When leading others, the more autonomy you can provide, the more likely you are to draw out people's best effort.
- The best leaders empower others to solve problems on their own instead of relying on a manager for answers.
- A clarifying question you can use to foster more productive conversations at work is: "What's really driving you to say that?"
- When helping others make progress on a problem, resist getting lost in the details. Maintain your focus on the big picture.
- Instead of conducting a post-mortem with your team after an unsuccessful project, focus on what could be done better next time. Ask, "What ideas do you already have for doing this better next time?"
- When working with others, avoid using a "feedback sandwich" technique (offering a compliment, followed by a criticism, and then ending with a compliment). Most people will only remember the negative.
- Instead, ask team members to share their thoughts about their performance. Often, they will identify the same areas for improvement you have noticed.





## Scott Barry Kaufman on What Creative Geniuses Do Differently

Scott Barry Kaufman is scientific director of the Imagination Institute in the Positive Psychology Center at the University of Pennsylvania. He conducts research on the measurement and development of imagination, creativity, and play, and teaches the popular undergraduate course *Introduction to Positive Psychology*. Kaufman is author of *Ungifted: Intelligence Redefined* and co-author of the upcoming book *Wired to Create: Unraveling the Mysteries of the Creative Mind* (with Carolyn Gregorian). He is also host of *The Psychology Podcast*, co-founder of *The Creativity Post*, and he writes the blog *Beautiful Minds* for *Scientific American*. Kaufman completed his doctorate in cognitive psychology from Yale University in 2009 and received his master's degree in experimental psychology from Cambridge University in 2005, where he was a Gates Cambridge Scholar.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Scott, you have written a lot about this idea that daydreaming can be good for us. I find that really interesting because I we often find ourselves thinking about what we did last night, or about last night's episode of *Orange Is The New Black*. And we have this view that if we're not paying close attention to the work that we're doing, it's kind of a failure of concentration or some kind of limited capacity that we need to deal with. You argue something completely different, that daydreaming can be beneficial. How so?

**Scott Barry Kaufman:** I'm not sure that it's completely different. It's important to distinguish between the kind of work that brings you outside of yourself, where you're paying attention to the outside world and you're doing it for external reasons, versus the kind of work that is intrinsically motivating, where you bring all of your intrinsic energy and inner resources to the task. When I talk about daydreaming, I'm really talking about getting in touch with that inner intrinsic energy, inner monologue, inner fantasies, and inner memories of your past and the reasons you are the person that you are.

All these things come from a particular brain network that neuroscientists have discovered in recent years. They call it the default mode network, but that's a very unsexy name; I named it the imagination brain network. I'm talking about getting in touch with that imag-



ination brain network and still be working. There is a false dichotomy between daydreaming and work. You could be daydreaming and still working; it just might not be the kind of work that brings you away from yourself. I'm talking about trying to help people get more in touch with the kind of work that gets you more in touch with yourself.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** How can I use this idea that daydreaming can be beneficial in my everyday work? Should I set aside time for daydreaming, should I embrace it when it happens? What do you recommend?

**Scott Barry Kaufman:** I think so. That's a great question that isn't being asked as much as it should be in business. If you can ask that question, it shows that you're open to restructuring your environment and things of that nature in order to get the best out of your workers and yourself.

You want to make sure that you make time and room for solitude. That can take a lot of forms, like taking a daily stroll to reconfigure your brain and get off the path that you have been working on the past hour or two. It could involve a daydreaming room that locks out the external noise. I've done some research on showering. We did a multinational study and found that people reported more creative inspiration in their showers than they did at work. That's really telling about how we think and find creativity.

It's important to insulate yourself as much as possible from external distractions. People can be really distracting, especially to introverts who have a very specific work style. I'm happy to chat about that later because I'm also interested looking at different personality characteristics and how some people have a need for solitude. Regardless, the general disposition for both extroverts and introverts is figuring out ways to have sensory stimulation absent from the outside world, visualizing, and doing mindfulness practices that allow you to get in touch with yourself and understand your body, your feelings, and your thoughts. It helps when you rejoin the external context and try to make a connection. I fundamentally believe that creativity lies in that space between the inner and outer worlds.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** That's an interesting statement. The space between the inner and outer worlds — what does that mean for us and how do we use that information?

**Scott Barry Kaufman:** Pardon me if I start sounding too poetic and not scientific. My work is grounded in humanistic psychology and positive psychology. For an example of inner and outer: You're enraptured by something and you don't notice any distractions — either inner or outer. You don't notice thoughts telling you, "Oh, that's a stupid idea," or people telling you that you have a stupid idea. You don't hear any of that — you're completely absorbed.

If you get a Ph.D. in something, you build a big knowledge base about that. Creativity is when you connect that to the goals or tasks in the outside world in a way that's unexpected, novel, or truly useful. The hallmark of creativity isn't just usefulness; it's also novelty. In order to get some sort of unusual or novel connection going, you have to leave your mind open to any kind of connection.

You can increase the chance that there will be useful connection if you bring your knowledge base, your personal memories, and your personal experiences to bear on the task, as opposed to trying to solve the test out of duty, some sort of external reward, or how others want you to solve the problem. Highly creative people are characterized by this amazing



ability to go beyond “what is,” and have the openness to do it.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I don’t know if you’re a fan, but Seinfeld has a show called *Come-dians in Cars Getting Coffee*. He has this really uncanny ability to find humor in just about anything, and I’m convinced that part of it has to do with his level of comfort with himself. He’s already been a massive success. He’s very financially well off.

A lot of us don’t have that comfort in our life. We don’t have a million dollars in the bank, and we don’t have assistants to help us with every piece of our lives. How do we get that level of confidence or comfort to develop that openness when we’re constantly bombarded with emails and requests from clients and pressures in all aspects of our lives?

**Scott Barry Kaufman:** The people who are successful really know how to manage their time well. They know what distractions to limit and avoid. There are people who only check email twice a day at certain times. The truth is, the more that you get out and up the ladder, the more people want things from you. I have a great quote from my friend James, who’s a positive psychologist. He says something to the extent of: “All success buys you is more emails.”

If you’re a rock star, you can get more sex, but that doesn’t happen for a positive psychologist. It just buys more people saying, “Hey, I love your work; will you do for me for free?” That can be really distracting, and it takes you away from yourself and the time that you have for solitude. Creative people need to carve out that solitude to ensure they have more confidence. You need to give yourself permission to have that kind of confidence. Give permission to yourself that it’s okay to take time to make these unexpected connections, to be open to new experiences. Openness to experiences has been shown over and over again to be the single best predictor of lifelong creative achievement.

We’re really talking about intellectual curiosity — being open to the full range of emotions that you’re experiencing. There’s some great research showing that positive and negative emotions are equally important, as is being open to lots of different ideas. With these external distractions that take you out of your imagination brain network, it is difficult. You need to create a bubble around the imagination brain network to increase the chances that you have better ideas.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So what you’re saying here is that we really need to get mindful about carving out that time in an intentional fashion because if we are not giving ourselves those opportunities to disconnect, we really can’t be creative.

**Scott Barry Kaufman:** Right.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** One of the things you also talk about in *Wired to Create* is this idea that we need to expose ourselves to new experiences on a regular basis. Are there specific types of experiences that we should look to have more of if we want to put ourselves in that creative mindset?

**Scott Barry Kaufman:** I have some friends who swear by LSD, which is not a politically correct answer. You can get into other states of consciousness by natural means, and I want to make it clear that you don’t have to do LSD in order to get to altered states of consciousness. Flow is an altered state of consciousness. When you look at the neuroscience of what’s going on in the brain of someone with flow, they’re not in the normal state of consciousness.



Your normal state of consciousness is every day behavior: focusing on the outside world and these thoughts and ruminations that you're aware of. The flow state is an interesting state where you have hyper-awareness or metacognition. You have this free flowing state where your ideas are traveling in all different directions.

In order to let these ideas unfold, you have to be comfortable with your own mind. Some people seem to be comfortable in their own body, but really creative people are comfortable in their own mind. They are not scared of going to dark places in their head, exploring and being open to the full range of emotional experiences. In *Wired to Create*, I talk about a great study that Baron Frank Baron did in the 50s and 60s of some of the most highly creative minds of all time, and he found that they were not scared of themselves. That's an interesting finding about these highly creative people. I don't know if that helps answer that question at all.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Many people working in an average job start their commute at 8:00am, they get to work, they go out to have lunch or they eat at their desk. At 5:00pm, they're commuting back home, then they get home and it is around 6:30pm or later. There's really no opportunity to have new experiences. It can feel like every day is the same except that we're emailing different people.

How do we incorporate new experiences into that average weekday?

**Scott Barry Kaufman:** You have to make an effort to do things the opposite of how you normally do them. You need to force yourself to do it. If we want to lose weight, we force ourselves to go to the gym. How often do we force ourselves to butter toast the opposite way from what we normally do? Walk backwards on the way to work? Go to work and start with the last thing you're planning on working on that day, as opposed to the first thing? How often do you intentionally do that?

They've done this really interesting research where they put people in a virtual reality machine and changed the laws of gravity. When the people approached something, things appeared larger or smaller. They mixed up gravity in all sorts of interesting ways and they found that after doing that, the participants had much more creative ideas that were much more flexible. They had much more creative adaptability in their ideas. These kinds of little tweaks make a big difference. They also had a condition where they gave instructions on buttering toast or eating cereal. You usually put milk in last so they put the milk in first and then added the cereal. I know these sound a little bit corny, but it's interesting how much this stuff can activate a playful state of consciousness that is conducive to creativity.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So start doing things different—maybe I'm not walking backwards to work, but I could take a different route or take a different train or whatever the case may be...

**Scott Barry Kaufman:** Right.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** What's interesting about that suggestion is that it actually forces me to pay more attention to my environment than I normally would. Wouldn't that make me less creative since I'm paying less attention to my internal thoughts?

**Scott Barry Kaufman:** Paying attention is another thing that's very important for creativity. All these things may seem at odds with each other, and we try in *Wired to Create* to show the paradoxical mind of the creative person. You can change things up and have lots



of different thoughts, but you can still be incredibly mindful and observant of what you're doing. Creative people open themselves up to lots of experiences, but they are also amazing observers of human nature and of themselves. I don't think these things are mutually exclusive.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So maybe what happens when we change things up is that it forces us to pay more attention, and that's actually beneficial to creativity because we start seeing old things in a new way.

**Scott Barry Kaufman:** I like that, Ron. I really like that. Yeah, I agree.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** In your upcoming book, you talk about how negative experiences can actually be beneficial to creativity. When something bad happens at work, we try to shift our attention to something positive as quickly as possible, but you point out that we can actually develop some real, useful insights when bad things happen. When something negative happens at work — let's say I get chewed out by a client — what should I do to turn that into fuel for creativity?

**Scott Barry Kaufman:** You really can turn any obstacle into an advantage. You can assign that meaning in any way that you choose. You're completely in control; it doesn't matter what anyone says.

If a boss yells at you, you could actually view that as a really good experience. You can say, "Oh, this is a new experience for me to learn how to deal with cranky people." You could use that as a skill and sharpen those muscles of how to respond. You could say, "I'm going to learn how to properly respond to criticism or properly respond to these negative things." That's just one example, but dealing with difficult people or dealing with obstacles is never going to go away, no matter what environment you put yourself in. Humans are humans and there are still cranky bosses anywhere you go, so learning how to change that interpretation is so important.

There's an emerging field in positive psychology called post-traumatic growth, which shows that we can use some of these traumatic events. For people who lost family members or loved ones in car accidents or any wide range of traumatic events that shatters their current worldview, that is not necessarily a bad thing. Obviously, losing someone in a car accident is a bad thing, but I'm saying that if that happens, shattering that worldview can increase your creative growth.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So if my boss says to me, "You're just not doing well here and we really expect more of you. We're kind of disappointed with how things are going. We're going to put you on notice for three months and we want to see some improvement otherwise we're going to have to find a new way of moving ahead," how can I re-interpret that in a positive way? That seems pretty painful, so what can I do to make that more positive or use it as fuel for growth? How do you go back to your desk, pick up the pieces, and then use that to make yourself more creative?

**Scott Barry Kaufman:** That's a terrific question. There's so much research in positive psychology showing that optimism is so predictive of so many good things in life. Not blind optimism — the kind of optimism where you are secure in your knowledge base. In these kinds of situations, you can realistically assess, "How truthful is this person?" We need to take all the ego out of it because obviously we want to initially react, such as by saying,



“Shut up!”

You initially want to react because your ego is hurt. “This person’s a jerk that doesn’t know what they’re talking about.” But sometimes there is a grain of truth in what people are telling us and, if we’re open to this kind of self-reflection, there’s a motivating way of getting over this that actually makes you grow. In a lot of ways, the ego gets in the way of our personal growth; we need to be aware of that.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** In some ways, it can be important feedback. In a lot of organizations, you don’t get any feedback for six months or twelve months until your performance review. By the time you get that, it feels like it’s coming out of left field. I’ve noticed that giving someone negative feedback is actually more beneficial than giving them only positive feedback. Otherwise, they can’t grow or learn from their experiences.

In the example I gave, maybe I need to find a new job. Maybe this isn’t a good job for me. It’s better for me to know that than to put my head down and be in a position that’s not helping me grow.

**Scott Barry Kaufman:** Absolutely. I’m glad you said that, because I made the suggestion that you should be open and aware and assess how much of it is the truth. If it really isn’t the truth, there is a point where you’re allowed to have the self-value to say, “This makes me realize this person doesn’t see my worth,” and you can move on from there. I was just saying to initially be open to the feedback and realistically assess it without your ego involved. Without your ego involved, you may objectively come to the conclusion that this person is totally out of touch with what you’re contributing to the workplace. In that case, there’s no shame at all in letting that person know you are moving on.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I was just talking to Todd Henry this morning and he made a great point. He said that if you’re in a position where you can no longer say, “No” to your boss, then you’ve really let your family down. You’re no longer in a job that helps you grow and you’re not doing what’s best for either you or your family. You really need to evaluate that, if you’re in that mindset.

**Scott Barry Kaufman:** I really like that. I’m going to have to watch these other interviews.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** One other technique you talk about is increasing mindfulness and how being mindful can make us happier, more creative, and more willing to consider the factors that are going on around us. What can we do that doesn’t involve taking a course in mindfulness? What can we do right now to make ourselves more mindful?

**Scott Barry Kaufman:** There are mindfulness techniques that you could use to harness it, like a muscle. You can put in the effort and train so that you could, on demand, get rid of all those inner daydreams. Creative people are really good at that flexibility; they have a lot of tools in their toolkit. One of their tools may be their ability to ignore the outside world and really daydream, but they also have the ability to laser-focus on what’s right in front of them and really appreciate it. That is equally as important for productivity and creativity, as well as meaning in life and well-being.

To really harness those mindfulness muscles, I would recommend some kind of practice, whether it’s mindfulness exercises in the morning or even right when you get to work. Sit down, close your eyes, and try returning to the breath. Try, every time your mind wanders,





to return to the breath. There are all these techniques that help you to be mindful of your surroundings when you awaken from that situation.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** What do you do to encourage yourself to be mindful? Are you using some of these techniques?

**Scott Barry Kaufman:** Yes. I like swimming or repetitive activities where I'm not listening to music, not talking to anyone else, and I'm engaged in what you're doing — anything where I have to be engaged in what I'm doing.

If you want to jumpstart that flow state of consciousness, it helps to get focused on an activity. It could be a mindless activity until you really get into that state where you're being mindful of something. Maybe play a game of Mahjong or something. I just love swimming to get into the mindful state.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I think swimming is a great example because it's one of those exercises that really focus you on your breath and you're getting physical exercise as well. After the fifteen or twenty minute mark of swimming, you'll notice all these great ideas emerging after you've taken a break. It's a very trying physical exercise and it gets you thinking in a completely different way. It relaxes you and forces you to focus on your breath.

**Scott Barry Kaufman:** Absolutely. I wonder how you could do that while you're at work.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** It's really funny because a lot of organizations put such a premium on people either consuming or producing. There is no room for that middle ground of just thinking because it's not viewed as productive. Your work points out that, if you want to be creative and you want to be productive at the highest levels, you will need to carve out some of that time to make creativity happen.

**Scott Barry Kaufman:** That's absolutely correct. And there's so many more things that managers can do to aid that along.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Part of it is modeling the right behaviors. As a manager, if you're bringing your cell phone or you're checking your email during a meeting, people around you feel as if they can do that, and that they should be doing that. They don't want to risk not looking vital, so it creates this invisible pressure and it eliminates the opportunity for being mindful in the meeting.

**Scott Barry Kaufman:** Yes. A mindful boss is a much better boss.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Agreed. How has studying all of these creative minds changed the way that you schedule your day?

**Scott Barry Kaufman:** Boy, I have constraints and this is a personal question. I have the kind of job where I have so many competing things. I wrote a scientific paper today. I kind of choose how I structure my workday, but there are so many things I could potentially choose from. Do I try to bring more top creative people to Philadelphia to study them in our ongoing study? The best thing for me is to not get overwhelmed. To make concrete decisions about today's theme the night before because I'll be happy if I'm just working on that theme all day. Much of my battle is ignoring all of that and being decisive.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So your recommendation here is to come up with your one theme



for the day the night before?

**Scott Barry Kaufman:** Be decisive about it.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Be decisive and then execute it. Does it make a difference if you decide in the morning or the evening? Is there a benefit that comes with sleeping on it?

**Scott Barry Kaufman:** It's good to decide the night before. It's really good and then your mind is primed for it. This will also increase the chances you get into flow state. If your mind expects that when you wake up, that's the only thing that your consciousness will be absorbed with. You'll increase the chances that you'll be able to get into flow state once you get to work.



## Practical Tips from Scott Barry Kaufman

- To be creative, you need to make time for solitude. If you're working on a project that requires creativity, carve out time on your calendar for being alone.
- Reframe mind wandering as a creative exercise. Placing yourself in that mode of thinking can foster creative insights. Try putting this insight to use by scheduling a walk and allowing your mind to wander.
- Highly creative people tend to be more comfortable in their own skin. Elevating your own comfort level at work — whether it's by adjusting the way you dress or finding a more comfortable chair — can help you come up with more creative solutions.
- Creative geniuses tend to be welcoming of new experiences. By incorporating new experiences into your life, you too can develop new perspectives on your work.
- Shaking up your routine can lead you to see things differently. You can apply that insight by taking a different route to work, or listening to a new genre of music on your commute.
- Developing your “mindfulness muscle” by doing mindfulness exercise that focus your attention on your breath, can help you establish laser-like focus at a moment's notice.
- Determine each day's priorities the night before. That allows you to wake up primed for the activity and makes it easier to get absorbed while doing it.





## Brigid Schulte on Balancing Work, Life and Play

Brigid Schulte writes about work-life issues and poverty, seeking to understand what it takes to live The Good Life across race, class and gender. Brigid is also a regular contributor to the *She The People* blog and has written for *Style*, *Outlook*, the *Washington Post* magazine, and other outlets.

Brigid grew up in Oregon, got her start in newspapers at the Casper Star-Tribune in Wyoming, and over the years has covered national politics, (ninety-six hours of straight stumping with Bob Dole, anyone?) the Pentagon (so scared before the planned invasion of Haiti that she stayed up all night, every night watching the Disney channel in the Port-au-Prince Holiday Inn) public health, education, the environment and just about everything in between as an enterprise and narrative writer.

After a time-use researcher told her she had thirty hours of leisure time a week, she wound up writing a book in search of it: *Overwhelmed: Work, Love and Play When No One Has the Time*.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** In *Overwhelmed*, you write that many of us cling to a stereotype about what it means to be an ideal worker, and that, in many cases, trying to emulate that ideal actually makes us less productive. Tell us about that.

**Brigid Schulte:** It was something that I struggled with because I'm a huge believer in our American, "hard-work" culture. We tend to think if we work hard that's really good, and if we work harder, that's even better. More is better in the United States; bigger is better.

I was trying to be that quintessential, ideal worker. I was pulling all-nighters in college or staying up late to do even more projects. A lot of people think that's just procrastination and waiting till the last minute, but there's also a lot of feeling like that's how you're going to be the best worker.

There's data that shows that we reward those people who get in early, stay late, never take



lunch, never go on vacation, etc. We think that they are the most dedicated, the most committed, and the best workers, so we tend to work toward that ideal. A lot of bosses are like that; they got where they are by putting in these incredible hours and sending emails at 11:00pm or 3:00am. You feel like they're always on. There's research that shows that's not sustainable and that very few people are actually able to work that way — and that when we do work to the point of burnout or fatigue, we're actually making more mistakes. We don't leave ourselves any room for ideas or insight or innovation. That's fine if you're a factory worker, but few of us are. As we move into jobs that require more creativity and thinking and ideas, that always being on and working ends up working against us.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So what are some of those practices that successful workers—the ones that research bears out are most productive, creative, and engaged—what are some of the things that they're doing differently?

**Brigid Schulte:** The really important thing to recognize is that the ideal worker in a lot of people's minds is the guy from the 1950s with no family responsibilities and no life outside of work. A lot of workplaces expect men and women to work like that; it's a huge part of why we're all so overwhelmed. You can't work like that and still have a life, a family or any kind of purpose outside of your work. A lot of us are expected to work that way and it's really a collision course for feeling like you're time starved and don't have enough for your family.

We're discovering that, just as we sleep in ninety-minute sleep cycles, we have ninety-minute attentiveness cycles that we can use. This came from a study of musicians in Berlin that looked at how virtuosos actually work. They had a massive practice session in the morning of no more than ninety minutes. It wasn't something they had to think about, and they didn't have to make a decision to do it. That's important because making too many decisions leads to decision fatigue. We really can only make so many decisions in a day.

Our willpower is also a finite resource, so if you start with your hardest and biggest thing early in the morning when your willpower is at its freshest, you get the most done — but for no more than ninety minutes. They found these people worked and then took a break in a cyclical way. When you work in an ideal workplace, you can set up your day for much more success and productivity, and at the end of the day you won't feel like you're chasing and putting out fires and answering emails. The day before think about what you are going to feel best about at the end of the day, then get that done in a concentrated burst first thing in the morning and then take a break, go get a cup of coffee, really let your mind wander. Science shows that's when you get some new ideas coming in.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** A lot of us, on a logical level, can really appreciate the idea that we need to take breaks. Yet we still have that stereotype in the back of our minds about the ideal worker. Why do you think that stereotype is so pervasive despite our own experience to the contrary?

**Brigid Schulte:** A lot of it is habit. I fall back into those bad habits all the time. Part of it is that the bosses, the people who got to the top, got there by working this way. We tend to think, "I want to be the boss and go up the corporate ladder, and so I'm going to try to work that same way." We all think that people work that way, but really interesting studies of flexibility or even telecommuting have found that the higher up the ladder you go, the more flexibility you have and the more tele-working you do.



We have the notion that the boss is sitting there at the office at all hours, but that's more notional than actual reality a lot of the time. Sometimes the CEOs are on the golf course in the middle of the day. The rest of us drones are slaving away. It's important to figure out where hard work ends and burnout begins. That's really where we've got to be looking.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** One of the things I really liked about your book is this idea that our experience of time has been altered by technology. I wonder if you could tell us a little bit about that. How is our experience of time different now that we have access to email and smartphones?

**Brigid Schulte:** From the dawn of time, our perceptions of time have changed radically. A lot of that is due to technology. We feel very rushed and very busy because there's so much information coming at us, exponentially more than we had even ten or twenty years ago. That leads to this sense of pressure that you're always behind, you've got to catch up, and there's so much more out there than you can ever take in. In the past you had one newspaper you would read in the morning, maybe three news shows in the evening, and you felt like you knew everything. Now it's a Twenty-four hour news cycle with TV, cable, websites, blogs, and instant messages you can access all the time. That's a lot of information.

I have made a conscious effort to unplug. It's such a good exercise, but very hard to do. Once you do it, you realize how much of that flood is unnecessary. It doesn't tell you much that is necessary for living a good life. A lot of what keeps us spinning and feeling out of control is that overload of information and technology. We all have amazing computers that we carry around; you see people carrying their phones all the time. The technology works on our brain structures just as addiction does, so every time that "ding" goes off or you get a notification, it shoots dopamine. Your brain biochemically wants more and more of that reward chemical, so you've got to keep going back and checking and checking and checking. Neuroscience is finding that it puts us in this vigilance mindset like we're collie dogs, always on the lookout for the wolf, or for humans, that next hit from technology. When you're always looking for the next thing, it can leave you feeling very breathless.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Is it fair to say then that the pressure that having that constant information speeds up our experience of time?

**Brigid Schulte:** Yes.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** When we feel more pressured, do we feel like time is going by more quickly?

**Brigid Schulte:** Yes. If you get into the flow and you're doing something you really enjoy, you lose track of time, but in a good way. Other times you can just feel so inundated and you look up and feel like you haven't done anything today and the day's gone and you wonder, "Where did it go?"

Our perception and experience of time are what our reality is. Time doesn't change, so when people talk about time management or being more efficient, it's important to understand that you can't manage time; you manage your priorities and expectations. Our expectations often get us in trouble because we think we should be able to do too much. Workers can become very unrealistic about what they think they should be able to do. When they can't do it, it sets them up for feeling like a failure.



**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Do you recommend that we lower our expectations? If so, how do you manage to achieve that?

**Brigid Schulte:** I don't like talking about lowering our expectations. It's a very American thing; we want to be the best and we want to be hardworking, and I'm all for that. I'm not for us all becoming slackers; although strategic slacking is very important because it allows mind wandering, which is where you're going to get your best insights. Your best insights come in the shower for a reason—your brain is wired for that to happen.

What's really important is not so much lowering our expectations as being real about them. Instead of thinking you're going to get seventy things done today, focus on the one thing that's really important, the thing that you're going to feel really great if you do. My running partner and I have a tradition; at the end of our run, we turn to each other and say, what's your one thing? Sometimes it's really hard; I'll say, "My one thing is this, but I know I've got to do this and this too." Sometimes it's not so much about lowering your expectations as getting really clear about what's most important.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** That's a great tip. Anecdotally, it seems that a lot of people feel like the amount of free time they have available is shrinking. Do we actually have less free time than we did in the past, or is that a psychological illusion?

**Brigid Schulte:** To be perfectly honest, when it comes to having more or less leisure time than in the past, I don't think that's a fair way of saying it. John Robinson rationalized that work hours were going down, so leisure hours must be going up. This is looking at it very empirically, as if everybody has the very same experience. In coming up with those numbers, he completely disregards the fact that time looks different for office workers versus and knowledge workers.

I'm a writer for *The Washington Post*; our work hours have been going up since the 1980s. Work hours for blue-collar jobs have been going down. If you take an average of these two trends, you have this overall fall in work hours. For people in white-collar jobs, there's less leisure time and more work time than ever before. The United States ranks among the most extreme work hours of any advanced economy. At the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum, you have people cobbling together several jobs, just to get their hours up and make ends meet. If they're unemployed, that leisure time isn't great leisure; they tend to be depressed and watch TV and sleep. I don't think that we have the surfeit of leisure time. I think that the situation is much more complicated.

That said, I think we could make more time for leisure. The reason that it's difficult goes back to our idea of the ideal worker, the one that is always working. Always being on is what we most value in the United States; we lost the value of leisure. We have lost the value of taking time for recovery and rest. We say sleep is for wimps, we're finding that our brains need sleep or we won't remember anything. If you want to consolidate your memories, you need deep sleep. We could choose to make leisure a priority and still keep work a priority. Whether it's thirty hours or forty hours, it doesn't really matter.

What does matter when you talk with leisure researchers is recapturing leisure's value. That's very difficult for women, in particular. There have been studies that show women feel like they don't deserve to have time off, they have to earn it. The only way to earn it is to go through this huge long to-do list of work and housework and kid's stuff. Women have also been very conditioned to put others first. People have to understand that, cultural-



ly, it's been difficult for women for many centuries, so valuing leisure time needs to be a conscious decision. You have to decide that you deserve it. This is getting more difficult for men as well in this ideal worker, workaholic culture. To feel like you have true leisure requires two things: that you've chosen the activity and that you control the time. It doesn't really matter what it is or how long it is, but if you have those two elements then it's going to feel really good and refresh your soul, which is what the Greeks said leisure was.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** One of the things that prevent us from taking that free time is also this glorification of busyness. You talk about that in your book. How did that happen? How did being busy all the time suddenly become something desirable?

**Brigid Schulte:** Isn't it a crazy thing? I never even thought about it before. I just completely bought into it and I even think of the way I used to talk to people when they'd ask how I was doing. I would say, "I'm so busy." Everybody was saying that and I never really thought that it could be any different. I just thought that was part of being a working mother and feeling insane most of the time was the price I had to pay. I began the research on the book and John Robinson, who kept insisting we're not as busy as we think are and that it's a big illusion, and I really wanted to kind of dig at that and explore my own blindness because I just thought it was a good thing. I used to call it virtuous busyness. I was doing seventy million things on my To Do list, three of them at once, and I thought that was a good thing. It seems to be what we celebrate and it had become so automatic; so I thought all right, I'll really dig into it.

I found a researcher — very few people at the time were really looking into it — and she lived in Fargo, North Dakota. At first I was completely incredulous. I thought maybe this was just something that people in crazy urban areas feel. This researcher has actually studied holiday letters—Christmas cards, Christmas letters — and she had an archive of them. I went through them with her one afternoon and you can just see this great speed up, really, from the 60s onward. She puts an "A" on some of the letters and explained that the "A" is for authentic. She looked at how real the letters were, as in really understanding that life is short, that we're here for a short while, and that what matters is our human connection and finding meaning. There were very few authentic letters; the rest of were just catalogs of stuff that people were doing. The more she looked at it, the more she realized that we are not just telling people about our lives, we're bragging about how busy we are and that's the way we show status and how we fit in. This is very much a modern phenomenon. Something started to shift again in the 1980s; that's when things really started picking up. Business started picking up, the long work hours started picking up, the economy started changing so there could be globalization, and there was a new fear. I do think fear is what causes a lot of the overwork, particularly after going through some economic recessions.

People don't want to be seen as expendable, so they will do whatever it takes to hold on to that job; employers take advantage of that. They are also kind of hoodwinked with this idea that working all the time makes you a more dedicated employee.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** If you had to pinpoint one or two things — do you think it really is economic? Because I agree with you on the idea that fear is driving a lot of these behaviors, coupled with the addictive qualities of working. It's immediately rewarding, whereas investing in your family, you sometimes don't see the return on that for years.

**Brigid Schulte:** Right. You know, it's a very thankless job. My kids are now teenagers and



they don't want to have anything to do with me, which can be really hard on your ego. That's another interesting point that you make, that a lot of times people put in the long hours because it's easier to be at work than it is to be at home.

There have been really interesting studies, such as cortisol stress hormone studies, that show that both men and women are more stressed out at home than they are at work and that women are actually happier at work than they are at home. Home can be a very stressful place because our division of labor is still out of whack and, for women in particular, home is just another workplace. You're expected to be in charge of everything, which is physically and mentally exhausting. Then we have — particularly for middle and upper middle class parents — these expectations that to be a parent is a full contact sport. I just heard that some friends are sending their kids to Brazil for soccer camp this summer. The stakes are so high that home can be a very stressful place. That fuels the sense of getting to work as an escape, and the sense of busyness. If you don't have your kids in ten different sports, they're somehow missing out and you're a bad parent. That is the furthest thing from the truth, but we've all bought into this kind of alternate reality that's making us crazy.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I can't tell you how many times over the past few years I've heard people discuss their weekend and it almost feels like they're going to work to relax because the weekend has taken such a toll. This is, in part, because we don't focus on one thing at a time when we are at home. We have what you call "time confetti." Tell us what that means.

**Brigid Schulte:** That term came during the middle of a really busy, crazy day. We were doing a hundred different things. It was my son's birthday. We had confetti, and I was sweeping it all up and that image just hit me. That's what my day feels like, little bits and scraps of time, and what does it ever amount to? I just remember feeling very anxious about that because I read the bumper stickers that say, this is your one and only life, you're here for a limited time only, etc. In those bigger existential questions, we know that intellectually, and yet day to day it's very hard to remember that as you're rushing from this to that.

That's the other thing about leisure time. There have been really interesting studies that show that, with the increase in technology, we experience our leisure time in fits and bursts of about ten or fifteen minutes. That is not a lot of time to do much of anything. There is a constant sense of having to be on the move and switching from one thing to the next. It's not good for any of us.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** In particular, you write about how it affects married couples with kids. And it affects women a little bit differently than men in terms of their experience of time, in that men get a little bit more uninterrupted time than women do.

**Brigid Schulte:** That has been true. It's really important to look at how technology is turning everybody's time into "time confetti." Until fairly recently, time studies showed that men had longer periods of leisure such as an afternoon golf game, whereas women have always had much more interrupted time, much more little bursts of leisure. Lots of times their leisure was very industrious, quilting or planning or gardening. In America we tend to think that leisure has to be productive, even our exercise. Golf is not so much leisure as networking for males.

I ran into an Australian researcher that was trying to get me to understand leisure. I went for a run and came back and was all excited and told her I went for a run and she just kind



of wrinkled her nose and said, “Ugh, purpose in leisure, how American.” We have such a hard time doing nothing.

It’s true that men and women experience time differently; a lot of that goes back to our traditional gender roles. I think that’s changing now, particularly for younger men and millennials when you look at the polls and see that, not only do men and women want to be ambitious at work, they want to be very involved and full partners at home. That’s not a new idea. My husband is part of the baby boom generation and when we got married we had this idea that we would be equal partners. And then boy, we had our first kid and devolved into these traditional gender roles without even really understanding or realizing it. We went through a phase of gender changes.

The International Labor Organization said the story of the twenty first century is changing men’s roles, how men are becoming more involved in caregiving. We’re in a fascinating time in human history. It’s been very confusing and we have to give ourselves credit for that. You can’t change on a dime. Maybe my husband intellectually thought it was a good idea to be equal partners but didn’t know how to do it. You didn’t have any role models. Now we have a couple of generations down where there have been a few role models or the role models are like “I don’t want that, I don’t want what they did and I’m going to do it differently.” And they really are not just talking the talk, but they’re walking the walk, which is very interesting.

Things are changing. Ten years ago, in a family sitting around the table, the father would feel really proud that he was even there, that he left work on time to be home for family dinner, and at the same time the mother could be sitting there feeling horrendously guilty that she didn’t spend enough time with her kids. You could have a similar situation and everybody’s feeling differently about it. Sociological data and literature always have lags and are a little bit behind where we actually are, but I think we’re in the middle of an exciting change.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Let’s say you’re listening to this and recognize that in your household you don’t have an equal distribution of labor. What can you do? You’ve gone through this — what can you do to diplomatically restore the balance with your partner?

**Brigid Schulte:** I went through that, yes. It was tough because neither one of us realized just how far we’d fallen from our ideal, and I for twenty years we never got beyond fighting about it. I would be accusatory and claim that I did everything and he didn’t appreciate it, and he would get very defensive. Women are still doing two to three times the housework and two to three times the childcare even when they’re working full time. I would say most people don’t have an equal division of labor at home. Some people do that purposely. They have these neo-traditional marriages where one person will take the full time breadwinner role, and one will be part time or flex time at work and take charge of the family stuff. Different families are going to come up with different structures that work for them.

I think a lot of families don’t have much of a choice because we have these ideal worker expectations that make it really difficult for guys to pull back. They tend to get stigmatized at work if they want to be flexible or make it clear that they’re going to leave at 5:00pm for child care pick up. People may think you’re a slacker. We hit a really low point, which I wrote about in the book. It was a particular Thanksgiving and we were having eighteen people over. I was doing everything. I grocery shopped, I picked up tablecloths, I totally



had Martha Stewart going on in my head, the kitchen looked like a bomb had gone off, and I was making these fancy recipes. I didn't know what I was doing and it was a lot of work. My husband came and I thought he was going to put the turkey in the oven. It was 2:00pm at this point and these people were coming over soon. He got a six-pack of beer out of the fridge and said, "I'm going to go help my friend smoke a turkey," and he walked out the door. And that was really the lowest point in our relationship because I thought, "How did it get this bad?" It was obvious how unfair it was at that point. That was the sparking point for us to really figure out, "What can we do differently?"

We started working with the Third Path Institute, which was the only place I found that coached couples on how to be more fair in sharing time and resources and duties more fairly. We started going on long walks and really talking. We got out of that dynamic of fighting and accusing each other and tried to figure out how we got to that point. More importantly, we started thinking about what we wanted for the future.

Once we came up with a shared vision, then it was more like, "All right, how do we get there?" We started really small. As dumb as it sounds, we started with making the bed because I always used to make the bed. We came up with a really simple rule: Last one out makes the bed. Then we tried to find common standards because that can also be really difficult. I didn't want to keep nagging, because then you feel like you're a mother. We wanted to automate it so I didn't have to keep asking and we didn't have to keep renegotiating all the time. I would send him pictures if the bed wasn't made correctly, in a nice way. As dumb as that sounds, we had to have that common standard and each be accountable for it. The next thing we started was the dishes in the morning. I used to do everything in the morning and now I empty the dishwasher and he loads it. If he doesn't load it, I don't do it for him. I don't rescue him. There are these hilarious time studies that show women spend anywhere from three to five hours a week redoing chores that their partner or spouse did that they thought they did badly.

The important thing is really talking through what your vision is and experimenting around how to get there and do it as a team. That made a huge difference and keeps each of us accountable. Find those common standards and tweak them as you go. Life changes, so the plan is always going to have to change too.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Assuming that this has been pretty successful for you...looking back, would you have made as much progress had you not had a third party involvement? Do you think that was a critical factor that really helped?

**Brigid Schulte:** I've often wondered how much writing a book had to do with how willing my husband was to change. Honestly, with the Third Path Institute, we had one phone call with them and I wrote about it in the book. I think my husband at that point thought, "Oh, I think we just need to spend time with each other but otherwise we're fine." He hung up the phone and I burst into tears. To me that showed just how far we were from understanding what the other one was experiencing. I don't think he had any idea.

I would always do the summer camp planning. Anyone who's ever tried to figure out what to do with a five and seven year old for ten weeks in the summer knows what that's like. I would love to have ten weeks off, but I get two. Most parents are in that position; it's a lot of work because most camps only go from nine to two. Who works nine to two? You have to find before camp care and then you have to figure out transportation and then you have



to figure out what the kids will do in the afternoon. And all the while you're feeling really crummy because you feel like somebody should be home and you're a really bad parent. Finding child care, finding a babysitter, it's a lot of physical work but it also takes a lot of time. It's a lot of mental and psychological work, too, and I was doing all of that. Now we share the load and it's so much better. There's no reason for me to have to take the kids to the dentist all the time; we share.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** The reason I bring up the third party is because I remember in your description of how that process went, you also talked about how you started off by writing what you both saw in one another and how that led you to want to have this long term relationship. That little exercise can be so valuable because it puts everyone in the mindset of thinking about the love in the relationship rather than focusing on the list of complaints. And I just wonder, how easily can you do that when it's just you and your partner having this conversation? It was something that stood out for me.

**Brigid Schulte:** Well, I did find the one time with the Third Path Institute really helpful. It helped me see my own blind spots, for one. But you make a good point about starting with your strengths, what brought you together, what keeps you together, and being clear about that, then reminding each other and finding the space for that. We get so busy that we don't even remember why we're together. It's almost like "couple time" has fallen off the face of the earth. We make time for our work and our kids if we're parents, but couples time and time for yourself have really fallen to the bottom of the barrel for a lot of people.

One of the things that my husband and I started doing was "cocktail minute." We don't always have cocktails and it's sometimes more than a minute, but who has time for cocktail hour any more? But making a point of finding time for just the two of us to reconnect and ask, "How was your day," to sit together on our front porch and watch the rain or whatever is important. Even taking five minutes or two minutes, just taking that time to reconnect and really start from your strengths can make a huge difference.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** That's a great tip. Building on that bite-sized tip, you have this incredibly comprehensive list at the end of your book summarizing everything that you've talked about in terms of action items. Things that people can apply to their lives to prevent feeling overwhelmed, manage their time more effectively, and just have better lives. I wonder if you can share some of your favorites. Are there two or three that really stood out for you?

**Brigid Schulte:** Just two or three? That's tough!

One of my absolute favorites is working in pulses and taking breaks. I have become a huge believer in taking breaks because I used to get stuck. You get stuck in an idea and you can't figure out where to go next, and I used to try to power through that. I would see it as a sign of weakness in me or think there was something wrong with me. I thought, "I just have to keep working harder." Now I step away and take a walk; sometimes the idea will come to me. Sometimes it won't come right away, but I've done it enough now that I trust that it will and I trust my brain. I trust the neuroscience and that's made a huge difference in not only my work and my experience, but also my productivity.

My ideas have increased majorly and it feels better. It's a lot more fun, and work doesn't feel quite so punishing because generally knowledge workers have great jobs. It's really fun. My job is to learn stuff, tell people what I've learned, and hear their story — but



I would always lose sight of that because I felt so overworked and tired and resentful. It helps me reconnect with what's best about my job and the work that I do.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** To clarify, how long are the pulses and how long are the breaks?

**Brigid Schulte:** It depends. I don't do this regularly, but I wish I did. I'll set a timer and try to work in thirty, forty-five, or ninety-minute pulses, and then I take my breaks. We all face deadlines or feel under the gun, but we do have enough time to walk to the kitchen and get a glass of water or look out the window. The breaks don't need to be all that long. You just have to find a way to find your own rhythm that matches the organization that you're working with.

I try to limit my social media and email; that is a real challenge. Some days I do better than others, but the days I do best, I don't start my day with email. I start with my one thing for ninety minutes and I'll try to get a big bite of something done and, when I check my emails, I'll set my timer for twenty to thirty minutes and just power through. When it's done I move on to something else. I'm trying not to constantly check, but that is a challenge and I have to say I fail almost every day, but I keep trying.

At home, what's made a huge difference is talking through things, starting from strength, and keeping that vision — what you both want out of your lives — in mind. Always remind yourselves why you are together and what's good about it and that the chores are just drudgery. It's not like anybody wants to sweep, right? So how do you make it fair in a way that is feels fair and that you feel like a partner? That's also something that's a work in progress. But create the space to have those conversations. It is not that long, but it's feeling like you're in it together that makes it the huge deal.

And for the kids, recognize that they need a lot of unstructured time and not being over scheduled. Some activities are good, but we need to find the sweet spot and even sometimes let them fail. Let them figure it out and not be so busy. They don't need a lot of downtime, maybe just two minutes of breathing. Ease up on the over-scheduling of the kids and let them figure out who they are and what they like. That's the other really important thing that neuroscience is indicating: that when you're in a positive mood and looking at your fully authentic self, achievement comes from that.

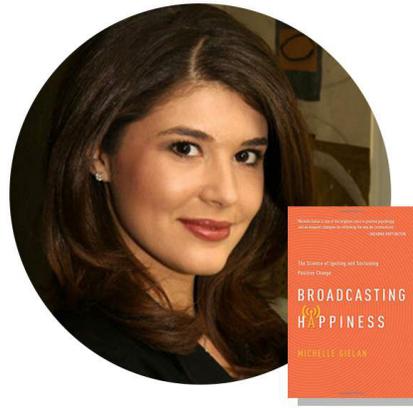
A lot of times in work and parenting we think we have to push for achievement and then maybe we'll be happy and wouldn't that be nice? And yet, it's really about finding that time to be clear on what makes you tick and what's really, authentically you and building from that strength by making time for that.



## Practical Tips from Brigid Schulte

- Rethink downtime. In a knowledge economy, making time for sleep, relaxation, and leisure is a necessity for performing at a high level.
- Instead of working for eight hours straight, try working in concentrated bursts of no more than ninety minutes. Take short breaks in between each ninety-minute chunk.
- Do the hardest thing on your To Do list at the beginning of the day, when your willpower is strongest.
- To slow down your experience of time, try unplugging from email and resist going online. Information overload makes time feel like it's racing faster.
- Each morning, ask yourself: "What's the one thing that is most important for me to get done today?"
- Constant disruptions and task switching contribute to feeling overwhelmed. Focusing on one activity at a time in uninterrupted blocks leads to greater focus and reduces stress levels.
- If possible, don't check email in the morning until the end of your first ninety-minute chunk.
- Simply being out of the office doesn't mean you're recovering. To benefit from time away from work, you need two things: feeling like you have chosen the activity and that you control how your time is spent.





## Michelle Gielan on Inspiring Positivity in Others

Michelle Gielan, founder of the Institute for Applied Positive Research, is an expert on the science of positive communication and how to use it to fuel success. She works with Fortune 500 companies and schools to raise employee engagement, productivity and happiness at work.

Michelle is the author of *Broadcasting Happiness: The Science of Igniting and Sustaining Positive Change*, and is a Partner at GoodThink, a positive psychology consulting firm, and she holds a Master of Applied Positive Psychology from the University of Pennsylvania.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Michelle, you spent a lot of time being a very successful CBS reporter and then you decided you were going to change careers and become a positive psychology researcher. Why did you decide to make that switch?

**Michelle Gielan:** I got tired of telling negative news stories and, more importantly, I wanted to know how we could tell these stories more effectively. How can we tell them in a way that can empower people and spread important information and potentially start positive change in the world? I went to the University of Pennsylvania. My friends thought I was insane for leaving the job I worked so hard for, but it was the best move. I studied positive psychology with Dr. Martin Seligman, who is a founder of the field.

When I was there, I had this epiphany, that we're all broadcasters. We're all constantly broadcasting information to other people; it's not some special power that's reserved for professional athletes or celebrities or newscasters. What we choose to broadcast transforms the way that other people see the world. In the research we're seeing now that it actually transforms business and the educational outcomes that we know how to track, such as levels of energy, stress, and intelligence. We've seen it in the numbers in really convincing case studies. I'm thankful I was able to make the switch because now I'm able to empower other people to transform the way they tell their stories.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** That observation is exactly right; as employees and colleagues and teammates, we really don't have a choice about whether or not we're going to communicate



a message to others. The only choice we have is how we display the actions and the words we want to communicate. We're sending a message regardless. We have to make a decision about whether we want that message to be positive or perhaps not quite as positive, which is the default for a lot of people.

**Michelle Gielan:** A lot of the time, these messages are being communicated verbally, non-verbally, consciously, or unconsciously, and we forget the immense power that we have over other people with the words we choose.

If we say — verbally or non-verbally — “I’m stressed. Oh, I’m so tired,” what we’re really saying is, “You’re not important to me.” As we’re walking out the door, checking our emails, we say a quick, “Bye, love you.” These words communicate messages, for instance, to our family and to our businesses. How often are we saying, “You’re so important to me. We are going to accomplish this together,” or “I’m so grateful to be here”? Those small tweaks can have big ripple effects on how people see us, how they interact with us, and how they see their own potential. Changing our words can create the upward spiral.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** One of the first research studies you conducted looked at the impact of consuming news on people’s mood. What did you find?

**Michelle Gielan:** I’ve been fascinated with the impact of news on our brain because everyone talks about how negative it is or they tell me that they’ve stopped watching news. At the talks I give at companies all over the country, that’s one of the questions I ask. How many of you have at least slowed down watching news? At least 50% of the room raises their hand, which tells me that people are intuiting something that now we’re seeing in the research, which is that negative messages can have a negative effect on our levels of energy, our stress levels, and the way we see the world. In our study, what we found is that within minutes, your mood can be transformed.

We tested a very specific kind of news, which was very negative news in a montage. Then we had people watch a three-minute video of what I call transformative news. That is activating, engaging, solution-focused content. Exposure to one or the other caused a remarkable transformation not only on their mood, but their feelings and how happy their day was, how stressed or not stressed they were. So what you choose to watch in the morning can have a huge impact on the rest of your day.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** That’s really interesting. We live in a world surrounded by news. Not only does that contribute to stress levels because the stories that a lot of news providers focus on are negative, but the sheer quantity of information is overloading our brains.

Given that a lot of these programs have that negative impact on us, and that we need to be informed so that we can continue to relate to our clients when they bring up the news, what should we do?

**Michelle Gielan:** I would definitely say it depends on how you look at the news. Starting and ending our day with a dose of negative news is not the best thing we can do for ourselves. We should transform the way we consume news. Just like we are careful with the food we put into our mouths, we should find news organizations that can give us solution-focused reporting. We want to talk about the issues. We’re not ignoring the negative; we just need to talk about them in an empowered way that gives us ideas and solutions that we could use to solve the problem. We don’t want to constantly receive messages that our



behavior doesn't matter. If we can find those news outlets, then we can be selective and go back to those good sources. We're giving ourselves a healthy dose of news that informs us, empowers us, and leaves a positive affect on our day.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Without putting you on the spot, can you give us examples of news programs that you see doing this well?

**Michelle Gielan:** Yes. The news organization that I used to call home, CBS News, does a fantastic job with *60 Minutes*. They present a problem and they spend a longer amount of time on it. They give the full twenty minutes for the report and then talk about solutions that people have used to overcome those challenges. They show inspiring stories. They talk about people who have been successful in their environment. They're doing a phenomenal job and it's a very highly rated show, so people recognize that.

*Huffington Post* does a really nice job with certain sections of their publication, like the gratitude section. They're doing a new initiative called, "What's Working." They have been extremely successful at putting out more positive content that empowers people. As a matter of fact, we're doing some research now with Arianna Huffington to look at the impact of news. She's making a call for people to focus on what's working both in their own lives and in the reporting. I'm so excited to see more of the studies that we're doing, and the results.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** In your book, you talk about content that gets shared most often — some of those positive stories. If you read a negative story about a tragedy somewhere, you're less likely to forward that to a friend than a story about something that has worked. And if you are an advertiser, you want to advertise in a program that has more positive content because that positive content will then translate into the way people view your product or brand. Do I have that right?

**Michelle Gielan:** That is right. Advertisers traditionally go for the parts of the program that have the most eyeballs, the highest ratings. In a news program, that is usually the top of the program; that's also the most negative part of the program. Advertisers are starting to want quality over quantity because they prefer sales to the number of impressions. Choosing the placement of the program where it's most positive would actually be more beneficial in increasing advertising effectiveness and likelihood to purchase the product.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Your book also focuses a great deal on the benefits of being optimistic at work. Could you tell us about some of those concrete benefits that we get for ourselves when we are optimistic in facing the challenges that we're about to embark upon at work?

**Michelle Gielan:** If you look at the greatest predictors of success, optimism is number one. If you can foster an optimistic mindset, that's a good thing for you in work and in your relationships. Optimists believe that their behavior matters. They expect good things to happen and they're much more likely to take the positive action to create those outcomes.

Optimistic salespeople outsell their pessimistic counterparts by 37% to 56%. We've seen research across the board that fostering a higher sense of optimism can increase all kinds of business outcomes including productivity, profitability, and beyond.

The best part is that we've seen without a doubt that you can foster higher levels of optimism in your brain and retrain your brain to be more optimistic no matter your stage of life.



**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** You've done some of these interventions. How do you get people to feel more optimistic?

**Michelle Gielan:** There's a number of interventions. In our initial work, we looked at ways we can transform our own brain with positive habits like counting your three gratitudes — writing down three new or unique things that you are grateful for each day for twenty-one days — and journaling for two minutes each day about the most meaningful moment over the past twenty-four hours.

My research colleague and husband, Shawn Achor, has a wonderful book called *The Happiness Advantage*, in which he details some of the positive habits. I know you've spoken to him as well. We originally looked at the research from that perspective. With my book, we're trying to find out how to engage others to do some of these positive habits at the same time so you get a multiplier effect. We're not individual organisms by ourselves all the time. We're social organisms.

One of the interventions that I like the best is something that I call the power lead. With news programs, if it bleeds it leads. We're taking the opposite approach. You want to start a conversation or communication, any interaction with someone else, on a positive note. With conversations, start off with something positive, like a small fact or story. If someone asks you, "Hi, how are you?" how do you respond? If you say, "I'm stressed," "I'm tired," or even "I'm fine" or "I'm good," which is just neutral, it is a missed opportunity for positivity. Instead you could say, "I'm doing really great today" or "I had breakfast with my son and he was so funny this morning." It's something so simple, but it gives people a window into you and your world, and it sets the stage and tone of the conversation to be positive. We can still get to all the fires we need to put out or the deeper discussions we need to have, but putting our brain in a positive place from the start transforms how the conversation unfolds.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I found that part about power leads really interesting, but what if you don't feel particularly positive? People need to realize that even if you're being completely blunt and you're saying, "I'm really busy and I'm really swamped," that puts people in a mindset of wanting to reflect back that attitude on some level, so your whole conversation puts you down this negative path. If you just take a few seconds to override your instinctive response to say something neutral or even slightly negative, you are far more likely to have a conversation that's focused on positivity and getting things done, and it can actually benefit you more than just in terms of mood, but in terms of the overall atmosphere at your office.

**Michelle Gielan:** Yes, because every time you say something positive and they match that, you're deepening your relationship. That ends up providing this bank account of social capital between the two of you that you can dip into when times are tough. It also just makes for a better day. I want to know the best parts of my colleagues' days or lives or about their kids, and I used to complain when I was working the overnights at CBS. I'd say, "I'm so tired," until I got sick and tired of hearing myself. So then I just talked about a cup of coffee. "Oh, it was good, it was a cup of coffee," I said, and that's when a friend of mine said, "I'm so glad to see you in a good mood because I've been dying to tell you my good news." She was pregnant. She got to tell me that as opposed to offering the, "I'm so sorry you're tired. Let's talk about that," so she could appear compassionate. It just transforms how people respond to you and then what unfolds after that.



**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Let's talk a little bit about this whole optimism thing. A lot of people listening to this might think, "I knew being optimistic was going to lead to a more satisfying life, but in terms of doing well at work, I need to be on top of my game. I need to be slightly stressed out or maybe more vigilant. Those are the things that are going to prevent me from making mistakes and help me stay good at my job." What would you say in response to someone who believes that being slightly pessimistic is beneficial for their productivity and their performance?

**Michelle Gielan:** If someone is touting the benefits of pessimism, they're not entirely understanding the definitions and how that might actually inhibit our ability to see the available resources. Optimism is the belief that your behavior matters and seeing negative events as temporary and local versus pessimism, which is permanent and pervasive. Let's use two groups of unemployed people and an example. Both groups mourn the severity of the situation, but the optimists are more likely to quickly update their resume, jump on LinkedIn, and connect with old colleagues to find a new job. The pessimist will take longer to get around to doing that, although they will ultimately do it because it's a necessity. Optimists and pessimists both see reality for what it is. They just have a completely different take on what they can do about it.

Pessimism is beneficial in a couple of areas. If you need to see all the problems that could befall you —like an attorney writing a contract — pessimism can be good thing. If you're a safety inspector, pessimism could be useful. For the vast majority of our jobs where we need to see resources, wins, connections, everything that we can tap into to be successful, optimism is a must.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Does that mean if you run into an optimistic attorney you should find someone else to work with?

**Michelle Gielan:** Yeah, you might want to find another one. No!

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** You offer some very interesting tips around getting others around us to be more optimistic and be in a better mood by the questions that we ask. So it's not just about starting your conversation with a power lead, but you can ask some specific questions over the course of the conversation that can help them view their life in a more positive way. What are some of those questions?

**Michelle Gielan:** Overall, what they're called are leading questions. It's just like when you're in the courtroom and you want to lead the witness. We're not leading them to specific answers and we're definitely not leading them to false conclusions or false information. We're trying to lead them to positive territory.

If you're in the midst of conversation and you'd like to change trajectory to something that's going to be better and helpful and help prepare people for satisfaction — for instance, sitting with a colleague that is complaining about the boss — you can say things like: "What's one thing you like about this boss? I hear where you're coming from, but how else can we see this situation?" By getting them into that more positive mindset, you're preparing them to see reality in a more helpful way.

When I used to get home from school, instead of my mom asking me, "How was your day at school?" — anyone who has kids knows the answer will be, "It was fine" and they don't really offer up anything —she would say, "What was the best part about your day at school?"



and that would get my brain to consciously scan my day for the best moment. In turn, that was actually training my brain for higher levels of optimism.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** We're often drawn to commiserating with others about the negative things about work. I like this idea of asking people about something positive that happened in their day, or the best thing that happened in their week.

Do you think that might come across as being false?

**Michelle Gielan:** It's all about being authentic. We don't want to be false. If we're constantly focusing on the positive and just sort of being a kind of Pollyanna, it seems false. Our brains are threat-focused in general. It's great for survival. We're always scanning the environment for something that can take us out. At work, you want know the problems and how to fix something, just in case.

What we're seeing now is that life is much safer than it used to be. We have a new part of our brain called the pre-frontal cortex, and if we can give it the resources it needs by keeping the more primitive parts of our brain quiet, we're actually priming the brain to be higher performing and do better on cognitive tests. That means we can consciously move our brain away from threats, away from the negative, away from the problems, and help it see all the good things going on in life, the meaning embedded in the work that we do, the things we're grateful for. We're re-balancing, just like the news. We don't always want to talk about the negative. We also don't want to just be talking about kitties and water-skiing squirrels. We want an activated, solution-focused response for our life in a way that feels like growth and forward progress.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So it might come across as false if you don't mean it, but if you're actually genuinely interested in what's going well in your colleague's life, they're going to appreciate that and associate you in a positive way. Ultimately it's going to benefit your relationship in the long term.

**Michelle Gielan:** Yes, absolutely.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** You have an interesting chapter on dealing with someone who is constantly griping about their job or complaining about their colleagues. I think we've all had that experience of working with a toxic colleague. Can you share some of those tips on what we should do when we're around someone who consistently lowers our mood?

**Michelle Gielan:** The first thing to note is that we are more powerful than we give ourselves credit for. We've all had that experience with at least one person, but maybe more. They're highly negative. We give everything we've got to transform the way they see the world and tell them how else we can see the situation, but it just doesn't seem to budge their mindset. There is this societal belief that we can't change other people. The research, though, says that we can. We absolutely can. We might not see the results right away, but with the vast majority of people, we are able to influence them.

For those toxic people that we just can't seem to get to the place we'd like, I have a three-step program that I call a "strategic retreat." Strategic retreats have won wars. If someone is being negative, it's best to retreat, regroup, and then re-enter. You take a strategic retreat from the person if the situation is not right. If they're fired up, if you're in the wrong setting, if there are people around that are bolstering them and they're not helping you com-



municate effectively with them, then take a retreat from them and stop the , because all of this is about improving communication. Then regroup.

Negative people will drag you into negativity unless you are able to make your brain more optimistic and more positive. You can do things like we talked about earlier — your gratitude list or journaling about a meaningful moment over the past twenty-four hours. I love sending a positive email. Send a two-minute email praising or thanking someone new and different each day for twenty-one days. We've seen in research that this tells your brain that you have really robust social support and these deep connections with other people. When your brain sees all that good, positive stuff, it minimizes the power of that negative person.

When you're ready, put together a two-minute drill to re-enter the conversation with the other person. What do you need from them? If it's a colleague at work, can you just get in, get your information, and get out? All this has to be authentic so you just say, "Hey, great to see you! Can you tell me the numbers for this report that I'm writing right now?" Then get out of their office. Don't increase exposure where it's not necessary. The ultimate goal is to try to come up with a good track record of positive engagements with them and then start to feel like maybe the tide is turning and you can extend the number or the length of those moments. Until then, just limit exposure overall and make it all positive when at all possible.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** We can learn a lot from that in terms of identifying the impact that our colleagues are having on us. When you're around someone who is energizing and empowering, you want to maximize those relationships and have as many interactions with them over the course of the day as would make sense. But when someone is negative, you can take steps not just to exit the conversation or retreat temporarily, but also to make it a habit of limiting your communication with them to email, versus scheduling meetings that are not just lowering your mood, but also having an impact that extends far beyond that interaction.

**Michelle Gielan:** Instead of going into a closed door meeting with them, maybe you could interact with them in the break room to get what you need conduct your business. That way there are other people around that buffer their negativity and they're not going to feel the license to say whatever they want.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** You also offer some really interesting suggestions about delivering bad news. No matter how happy or optimistic you are, you're going to encounter periods of time when things are just not going right and you have to communicate that to your team. How do you do it in a way that continues to sustain their optimism?

**Michelle Gielan:** Overall, it's about being human with them, realizing that, when you take on a leadership role, they see we have this negative mood and act almost like a robot. We need to deliver in the most serious way. Let's say we lose business, we're going to achieve a win later on and we forget the human element. Negative news is disheartening for people, it creates fear, and it can make an uncertain environment at the company. So how can we deliver it in a way that gets us past those moments together and then fuels growth on the back side?

I talk about the four Cs: (Social) Capital, (Giving) Context, (Expressing) Compassion, and (Staying) Committed. Social Capital is something that you can do long before the bad news



strikes. Creating social capital happens in those moments where you're connecting with other people on a meaningful level. The power lead helps with conversations that create social capital. That fills this bank account that you can draw down later when bad news strikes; when you're delivering bad news, people don't have to think to themselves, "Is this person serious?" or "Are they in our corner?" or "Are they really here for our best interest?" They know you, they believe in you, and so they see you as a partner through this negative situation.

Then give context. Explain exactly what's going on and be up front with them. Tell them as much information as you can without focusing too much on the negative side of it. Emphasize the empowering side.

Expressing compassion is just telling them that you're there with them. It's not using feeling words. Say, "I understand that this can be disheartening right now. I understand you might be going through a sense of fear, but I just want you to know that we're in this together."

Staying committed is about creating an action plan — steps that you will take together to improve the situation. This is a great time to involve other people. You might have some ideas, but by giving everyone a chance to talk about ways that you could collectively move forward, you give them a sense of connection to you.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** You're absolutely right that, at a lot of workplaces, people start going into legalese when delivering bad news. They feel like they need to be really professional and they lose the human side of the interaction. That just makes the bad news more frightening because this person is not even talking to me in my language any more. They miss that opportunity to build a stronger relationship, which is a big part of what you're saying, that bad news, when you deliver it authentically, is actually an opportunity for building closeness into a relationship.

Can you give us a concrete example? Let's say, for example, you and I and a few other people have been pouring our hearts into a campaign or proposal, and it turns out our competitor has won it. How should I deliver that news? Let's say I'm the team lead. How should I deliver that news to my team in a way that doesn't make them feel really depressed about the fact that we've just invested all this time into a proposal that hasn't worked out?

**Michelle Gielan:** First, I'm assuming you have already invested in creating social capital and have a good relationship with them; now it's time to draw down on that. Give them context. Say, "This is the information that I've learned so far. We did not win this proposal. As far as I understand it was in small part due to the product offering that we have; it wasn't exactly what they were looking for and it had less to do with our relationship with them or the financials. That's the information I have right now. I understand that this doesn't feel good. We have been working hard on this proposal and we want other people to enjoy our products, we want to enjoy the benefits of winning their business, so I understand how this can be really hard to be listening to right now."

Say anything else that you think would resonate with them at that moment, but then turn the conversation around to staying committed. "So, how can we all together move forward? What do you guys think is the best we can do?" Maybe ask if someone has an idea about having a deeper conversation with a client or the client that did not come through and understanding exactly what it was that led to that decision. Perhaps suggest talking to a cou-



ple of existing clients and finding out why they love the company and what they see as the benefits so that you can more effectively communicate that message to potential clients for new accounts. Then brainstorm ideas that will help everyone focus on something to do in that moment and they're not just left feeling disheartened about this news.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Tying this back to what you said earlier about some of the characteristics of people who are optimistic, they tend to view negative setbacks as temporary and controllable and so when we present that bad news, we want to also highlight the parts of it that are temporary and controllable, because it helps people sustain their optimism.

**Michelle Gielan:** Exactly. If you leave the meeting with a handful of things that people can do, showing them the places where they have control over the situation helps them feel better about the bad news because the brain is not solely focused on the bad news, but also on the action steps that they can take.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Do you think, generally speaking, when bad news happens we should focus on the action items that we can then take, or should we give ourselves some time to process the bad news?

**Michelle Gielan:** It depends on the situation. Processing time is very important, but processing time can very quickly turn into rumination time and rumination is a waste of energy. A concrete amount of processing time to find the solutions and the action steps is great. By letting it bleed into other periods of our life, we make it a habit that is not helping us.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** What do you do when you find yourself—well, maybe not you personally, but people generally—when they find themselves ruminating. What should they do to break that habit?

**Michelle Gielan:** When I was in my twenties I moved to London and was very excited about a job that I took there. I was totally fine for about six months; then I slipped into depression. It was largely because of the social isolation. I just didn't have a lot of friends. I worked from home. Things were not working and I caught myself ruminating about things that make sense in retrospect, but were not productive. I employed a strategy that I talk about in the book — I exercised. It worked amazingly well to pull me out of it, but I also fact-checked. I fact-checked the stories, the ruminating, the thoughts that I had that I was ruminating about, to make sure that I was seeing the best story possible. I would write down a stressful thought. I would write down the facts of my environment and why they supported that story. Why did I feel stressed out about work? Why did I feel xyz? Then I would write down a new set of facts that illuminated a new story.

It's not about proving yourself wrong; it's about seeing another possible story, one that's more productive and could help move you forward. When I speak at companies I talk about the thought, "I'm never going to finish this project in time." It's just a stressful thought. Of course, I don't say it's because my colleagues are swamped, but because I have my son's recital later this week and I just don't have time for all of this. I'm tired. Well, that's a very good list, but what other facts can we see, more fueling facts? I've been at this company for four years and, to be fair, I've never needed a deadline extension. Three of my colleagues have offered to help me on this project. I did a similar proposal last week and I handed it in, people loved it, I've got the template on my computer and if I add up the hours between now and my son's recital, I have twenty more work hours I can devote to this project. So our brains have calmed down in those moments and those resources and wins help move us



forward.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So you write down your facts and then maybe follow up with yourself by asking a few questions getting at whether or not this is accurate or not. A lot of the things that we think are facts are actually interpretations that are not helping us.

**Michelle Gielan:** Exactly, exactly.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Before we leave this topic of delivering bad news, I want to ask you a pretty tricky question. This is an experience that a lot of managers have, where they need to deliver the bad news that someone in the company has been let go. They need to tell their team, and some of the suggestions that you offer around negative news are not options. When someone has been let go, for legal reasons, managers are taught not to say very much. It makes other employees feel like the situation isn't controllable. They think, "If this person was just let go and I don't know why that is, then maybe the same thing could happen to me tomorrow." That's not good for morale.

I wonder how you would navigate that situation given that you want to provide people with a lot of context, but you're also limited in how much you can say.

**Michelle Gielan:** People want to know what happened and if this is going to happen to them. Part of the context can be, "As you can imagine, I am not at liberty to talk about some of the things," although you don't want to say it in a snarky tone because we've seen that in the movies. If you wholeheartedly talk to them from a good place and say, "I would love to provide you with all the information you need so that you understand exactly what happened and also don't fear that this will happen to you, but I obviously can't discuss everything. What I can tell you about this is..." And if this is the case, you can say, "This was an isolated incident. This is something that will ultimately overall benefit our team and I encourage you to reach out to that person because everything was left on good terms." Of course, that can be said if this is all true, but the most important thing is to allay the fears of people in the company by reassuring them that this is not going to happen to them. Tell them the messages that they need to hear that provide that confidence and then, in an authentic way, help move them to a new topic. Help move them to the next thing to get their brain focused on that's a positive, something positive.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So shifting the focus from talking about that person who has been let go to comforting the people who are there, saying to them this is isolated, this isn't about you, and focusing on how the team is going to move forward so that the conversation doesn't stay centered around this person who has just left.

**Michelle Gielan:** Right. Think about it like a news cycle. People are talking about that thing until they are talking about the new thing, so how do you move the cycle on to the next topic? When existing employees hear that the managers have treated the person who has left well and, whatever happened behind closed doors, whatever discussions were there, the way that their memory lives on at the company and the way you're discussing the situation, when they do it with respect and dignity, those employees are shown to work even harder after an event like this. When there's been a series of layoffs, when the company treats the people who are laid off well, the remaining employees will work harder if they know it was done with respect and dignity. As a leader, your employees are looking to you for cues on what's going on and how to feel about it. This is a perfect moment for you to be delivering the messages that they need so they feel secure.



**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** That's such a great point. In a lot of companies there is a lot of lip service paid to the idea that we care about our employees and we care about their families; but when someone gets let go, people become very defensive and it's presented in language that is not very human. Often managers are told to end the conversations as quickly as possible and then employees get cut off from their computer, they get escorted out of the building, and that just does not send the right message for the employees who remain. It suggests you tell people one thing but when it comes time for action, you treat them differently. It could actually be an opportunity for demonstrating to those remaining people that what you say is actually what you mean. Knowing that they're cared for can be motivating to people.

**Michelle Gielan:** Yeah because, barring that person who got let go doing something absolutely horrible, it's usually just that the performance was low, they weren't a good fit, they were being talked to. There's something there. But it doesn't mean that we should just blast them out of the building. They had friends at work; they had made some good contributions. You should honor that. It's about being human and good to other people.



## Practical Tips from Michelle Gielan

- Resist automatically checking the news whenever you have a free moment.
- Be intentional about the news you're consuming — avoid news sites that elevate your stress levels and make life feel uncontrollable.
- To feel more grateful: Write down three new or unique things that you are grateful for, each day for a period of twenty-one days.
- Make an effort to generate positive emotions at the start of your interactions with others. Doing so focuses others on the positive, elevating the emotional tone of your discussion.
- To make those around you feel more positive, try asking “leading questions” that focus their attention on the things that are going well in their lives.
- Minimize your time with colleagues who consistently lower your mood. Make a deliberate effort to keep your interactions brief with those who bring you down.
- When you sense that a discussion is headed into negative territory that you do not consider beneficial, use a “strategic retreat” approach and cut the interaction short.
- Use others as a buffer when dealing with toxic colleagues. When possible, meet in groups rather than in one-on-one settings.
- To reset your mood after a negative interaction: Send a two-minute email praising or thanking someone.



## Peter Bregman on Improving Your Performance in Eighteen Minutes a Day

Peter Bregman is the CEO of Bregman Partners, Inc., a company that strengthens leadership in people and in organizations.

His most recent book is *Four Seconds: All the Time You Need to Stop Counter-Productive Habits and Get the Results You Want*, a *New York Post* “Top Pick for Your Career” in 2015. His previous book was the *Wall Street Journal* bestseller *18 Minutes: Find Your Focus, Master Distraction, and Get the Right Things Done*, winner of the Gold Medal from the Axiom Business Book awards, named the Best Business Book of the Year on NPR, and selected by *Publisher’s Weekly* and the *New York Post* as a Top Ten Business Book. He is also the author of *Point B: A Short Guide to Leading a Big Change* and contributor to five other books. Featured on PBS, ABC and CNN, Peter’s articles and commentary appear frequently in *Harvard Business Review*, *Bloomberg BusinessWeek*, *Fast Company*, *Psychology Today*, *Forbes*, *The Financial Times*, CNN, NPR, and FOX Business News.

Peter began his career teaching leadership on wilderness and mountaineering expeditions and then moved into the consulting field with the Hay Group and Accenture, before starting Bregman Partners in 1998. Peter has advised CEOs and senior leaders in many of the world’s premier organizations, including Allianz, American Express, Brunswick Group, Goldman Sachs, Morgan Stanley, Deutsche Bank, JPMorgan Chase, FEI, GE Capital, Merck, Clear Channel, Nike, UNICEF, and many others.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Peter, in *18 Minutes* you identify specific actions we can take to maintain our focus and stay on track throughout the workday. What are some of your recommendations?

**Peter Bregman:** We have never lived in a time in which it was so easy to get distracted by the things we think are important; for example, our email inbox. We need to master the impulse of distraction. We need to become very clear about what’s important to us, we need



to be relentless at guarding the boundaries of what we want to do don't want to do, and we need to be very aware of the moment we get off track and bring ourselves back on track.

The way we should manage time is very similar in concept to meditation. In meditation, you're focusing on the breath. When your mind wanders, you bring yourself back to the breath. The idea is to stay in one pointed focus. That is very much the way we need to manage our lives in this age of distraction.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** That's a great metaphor. A lot of people think about meditation as focused attention, rather than simply thinking of it as a relaxation technique.

One of the things people often do in meditation is listen to a bell or have a repetitive mantra. You talk about some of the ways that we can apply that thinking to the work that we do, in terms of the hourly ring on our watch, for example. Using that minute at the start of the hour every day to bring ourselves back on track. Tell us about that.

**Peter Bregman:** I'll take a step back and explain the *18 Minutes* process. The *18 Minutes* process encompasses five minutes in the morning, a minute each hour that you just alluded to, and then five minutes in the evening. The five minutes in the morning are really critical; in those five minutes, you're deciding how to make the best use of your day. I am a big proponent of calendars and I don't like using a To Do list as a working document. A tremendous amount of research shows that, if you decide when and where you're going to do something, you'll do it. Otherwise, it's just on your list. Even if it's important and challenging, you won't end up doing it. I like calendaring out the day, so that I can be strategic and intentional about what I am and am not going to do. That is what I do in the first five minutes of the day.

I like to use the metaphor of a buffet, because I love to eat. I like to go to a buffet and load up on food. I don't want to miss out on anything great. If it was a potluck, I don't want to insult the people who worked so hard on their food. I end up coming back to my table with six, seven, eight plates of food. My wife will look at me and she'll say, "Sweetie, are you okay?" I'll eat it all and leave the table overfilled, undernourished, and having made a lot of poor choices. What I want to eat in the moment is different than what I want to have eaten by the end of the meal. In the face of unlimited options, I tend to make poor choices, especially when it comes to a buffet. It's the same for time. We have this buffet of things that we could possibly do in a day or in a year. In the face of unlimited options, we make poor choices because what we want to do in the moment is often different than what we want to have done by the end of the day.

So I start my days with five minutes of sitting down and thinking strategically and intentionally of how I want my day to end and what I want to have accomplished by the end of my day. In those five minutes, I take the things from my unlimited buffet To Do list and transfer them on to the calendar.

Then I set my watch for one minute each hour. When the watch beeps I take a deep breath and I ask myself two questions: "Am I doing what I most want to be doing right now?" and, "Am I being who I most want to be right now?" Those two questions bring me back to my focus. If I started out working on a proposal and my watch beeps and I'm watching a video of a kitten on YouTube, then I take a deep breath and I say, "Am I doing what I most need to be doing right now?" —in this case, the answer is, "No." and then I ask, "Am I being who I want to be?" I'm not sure that I want to be the person watching cat videos when I'm sup-



posed to be working, so the answer is probably also, “No.” I need to focus on work.

At the end of the day, I have five minutes where I wrap up my day and think about what I accomplished, what I did, and what I didn’t do. Then I think about people I need to thank or reach out to. Last night, I came home from an orchestrated dinner. I spent three minutes on email at the end of the day thanking the people and copying the board of the organization. To take a little bit of time at the end of the day to think back on what impacted you and to appreciate the people who impacted you, I consider that time management. That is managing the way you’re spending your day, your time, and how you’re going through it in a way that’s rewarding. It was at least as rewarding for me to write that email as it was for the person to receive it.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** You have that beep on the hour that reminds you to think back on what your day’s priorities were and whether or not you’re achieving them. I’d imagine that for some people, that beep every hour might be a distraction, but that hasn’t been your experience.

**Peter Bregman:** It’s an intentional or strategic distraction; it’s a distraction that stops me from working on whatever I’m doing and asks the question, am I spending my time wisely right now?

We live in a time when a million beeps an hour distract us from work, such as when a text comes. We find it very hard not to respond to texts so we look at the text that asks us a question about our calendar, so we check that. Then we check our email and, forty-five minutes later, we’ve gotten nowhere on the proposal. In some ways, that’s intentional; proposals are really hard to write, so I’m looking for a way to get myself out of it and to not do the real work. Distract yourself for one minute every hour and, if nothing else, take a deep breath and then go back to your work. It is important to ask yourself whether you’re spending your time in the way that’s most productive for you and adding the most value in your life and then go back to it.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So not all distractions are necessarily bad. Some distractions are actually beneficial and if we can harness the distractions in a way that put us back on track, it’s actually a good thing to be doing.

Let’s turn to the topic of To Do lists. You said you don’t like To Do lists; you prefer to use a calendar. Why?

**Peter Bregman:** I use my To Do list in a very particular way. The To Do list is an intake document. I divide my To Do list into six boxes, like a Tic Tac Toe board—I call it my six-box To Do list.

The first five boxes I identify towards the beginning of the year. I identify what are the most important things I want to spend my time focusing on. I identify those things and I write them at the top of each box. When I’m adding to this list, I decide which box each item fits into. Do I fit it in the *Leadership Intensive* box, which is a leadership program I write, or do I fit it in the *Four Seconds* marketing? These are the most important things to focus on this year. If it doesn’t fit in any box, I put it in the sixth box. That box is where errands like buying running sneakers go.

When I first started keeping a To Do list, 98% of what I was doing fit into that sixth box. Is it



more compelling to write the first chapter of a book I haven't started yet or to buy running sneakers? It's a lot easier to buy shoes because I could do it in about twenty minutes. I can make a decision that's either right or wrong, I can check it off the box, and then I can get it in the mail as a reward. So my behavior is rewarded for accomplishing these tasks that ultimately aren't particularly useful. They have to get done, but they shouldn't be taking up the majority of my time.

I force myself to put every action into a box that I have defined ahead of time. This keeps me focused on the things that are most important. I don't use a To Do list to check things off minute by minute. I become strategic and intentional about what I want to do each day. The calendar represents thoughtfulness about what I want to accomplish. The To Do list represents everything I want to get done, even things I want to get done by the end of the year. The list itself is overwhelming and I tend to make poor choices if I'm operating off of that list, so I separate the action of doing the work from the decision of what work I want to do, and that turns out to be incredibly useful in focusing on the right things.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** To sum up, the idea here is not simply to write things down but actually take them through this process where you're analyzing them through the lens of priority. And if they don't make it, perhaps they get weeded out.

You also talk about this idea that we should have not just daily goals, but also annual goals. Are five buckets the annual goals?

**Peter Bregman:** Yeah, and I'm going to quibble with you about a word, Ron, for a second, which is the word "goals". I write about this a lot in my book *Four Seconds*. I have a chapter on why one shouldn't set goals. This is where I depart from a lot of thinkers around motivation, achievement, or productivity. Goals can mislead us into achieving the wrong thing. We have to become suspect of chasing the goal because, after its achievement, the goal often doesn't make the difference we wanted it to make in our lives.

I talk about areas of focus. I might have in my mind a sense of what I want to accomplish; for example, I want to get the book out by August third. But an area of focus says, "I want to write a certain amount every day." I'm writing to achieve this book, but it may not be done August third. If it's done August third, I can get it out, but it may actually be pretty crappy because I haven't spent the time that I needed to get it done right. We all have deadlines; we all have accountabilities and responsibilities to other people. We have to live with those deadlines, but we impose these goals on ourselves and they often mislead us.

Ken O'Brian, a New York Jets quarterback, was throwing too many interceptions, so the coaches created a goal for him to throw fewer interceptions. And as we often do with goals, they created monetary incentives to support that goal. He threw fewer interceptions, at the cost of his performance. He just threw fewer passes. He achieved the goal and made the money, but his performance ultimately declined.

Think about the number of entrepreneurs who set out a bunch of goals. The reason they started their company was to give themselves freedom — to have freedom of choice, to have the lifestyle that they want, and to do work that they really love. Then they set these goals, such as revenue of five hundred thousand dollars. Then they hit their goal every year, but they're divorced three years later because their relationship with their wife or husband has deteriorated and they do not love the work any more. They're meeting their goals, but they're not meeting the reason they set those goals in the first place.



I'm a big proponent of focusing on that reason underneath the goals. It's okay to set a goal, but I would take a post-it, put it on your screen, and write, "Here's why I started this company: I want better relationships with my family and freedom in my life." I have this goal of what I'm trying to achieve, but what's on that little post-it on the screen is ultimately the thing that's most important to me and the reason I'm doing this.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So we can get hyper-focused on our goal and lose track of why we're doing things.

**Peter Bregman:** Exactly. We should decide at the beginning of the year what our areas of focus will be — things we want to get traction on, things we want to move forward on, what we want to do and spend our time on. We don't want to focus on an outcome that kills the dream.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I really like this idea of putting everything you do through this sifter of, "Is it fitting my priorities?" Once you put it on the calendar, what are the logistics? Let's say, you put on the calendar, "4-5 pm: Write your next blog," and it doesn't get done because that meeting ended up going a little too long. How do you then make sure that the task doesn't get lost because that date has passed? Do you have a physical time once a week when you go back and look at your calendar and evaluate all the things that fell through?

**Peter Bregman:** Yes, I do. At the end of the day, I look back at my calendar and ask myself what worked, what didn't work, and where did I fall off? Lastly, was it for good reason? Was I watching YouTube videos of kittens, or did that meeting extend itself? Maybe the question I would ask is, "Why didn't I excuse myself at the end of the meeting?" Maybe I didn't actually need to stay there but it was uncomfortable to leave. Now I need to ask myself how to manage my own discomfort, which is ultimately why we get in our own way. How do I manage my emotional discomfort so that I can move forward on the things that are important to me as opposed to getting stuck?

To answer your question, I will look back at the end of the day and, if there's something I haven't got done, I'll put it back on that six-box To Do list. So the next morning when I start to plan out my day, I'll look at it and ask where it fits in.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** How do you manage the discomfort of leaving a meeting when you're expected to be there? What do you say to yourself to make yourself comfortable?

**Peter Bregman:** I'll direct you to a couple different places and then I'll answer the question, which is one I talk about a lot in *Four Seconds*. The subtitle of that book is *How to Stop Counterproductive Habits and Get the Results You Want*. The reason we have counterproductive habits is often emotionally driven. Emotions are the reason we do most things, whether we want to or not.

The book that I'm working on right now has the working title *Barefoot Leadership* and subtitle *Why Emotional Courage is the Key to Powerful Leadership and How to Build Yours*. It is about this idea of emotional courage and the idea that there's a huge gap in leaders. I've never seen a leader fail for lack of knowledge. Leaders fail because they don't effectively close the gap between what they know and what they do. This is why I've created a leadership training program called the Bregman Leadership Intensive, and it's a four-day intensive program to teach emotional courage and to work with people on their emotional courage, to get through their stickiest issues.



People often face that precise challenge: “I’m in a meeting, I don’t want to be in a meeting, how do I get out of it?” Or, “I have to negotiate something, but I don’t really feel like I want to negotiate or have a difficult conversation.” I’ve seen CEOs deeply damage their businesses because they’re not willing to raise a difficult issue with other senior leaders in the organization. It’s emotional. It’s not that they don’t know what they need. It’s not that they aren’t aware that Europe hasn’t the highest performance and it has been declining for the last three quarters, but they do not bring it up because the head of Europe is a very senior guy who’s been in the company even longer than they have. They don’t have the courage to say, “Look, you’re not accountable for what’s happening in your business.” *18 Minutes* is about how to structure your day and make the best use of the hours. *Four Seconds* is really about what we do in those hours to be really effective.

If you are willing to feel everything, then you can do anything. The reason I don’t take a risk is because I don’t want to feel failure. It’s not that I don’t want to fail; it is that I don’t like how it feels to fail. If you’re willing to tolerate that feeling of failure — and this is what we work on a lot on in the intensive — you can sit there, you can feel it, and you realize that you can tolerate it and it doesn’t destroy you. Now you’re willing to take any risk because you know that failure won’t kill you. Emotional courage is at the root of all amazing performance and leadership.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** My experience on this has been that it’s a lot easier for a CEO or an entrepreneur to walk out of meeting. But for people who are working within an organization and know that this time is not being used well for, it’s more than just simply the discomfort of wanting to get out of the meeting. It is sending an implicit message to everyone in the room that you’ve got more important things to do than to spend the next hour with them. Sometimes it is more than just a matter of emotional discomfort, it’s more of a practical question of: “Am I going to lose my job if I send a signal that I’ve got more important things to do?”

**Peter Bregman:** If you deliver results to the organization, then they will speak for themselves. We get paralyzed in organizations by doing what we think is expected of us. Often, if you’re not delivering the results, that’s what you’re going to hear about at the performance review, not that you walked out of a meeting.

We have to take responsibility in our organizations to move the organizations forward. There are some organizations where we’ve taken the six-box To Do list and instituted it organizationally. Anyone at any level can look at someone’s six-box To Do list and see the five most important things that person is working on right now. One of the points of leverage in a situation like this is that you can show your six-box To Do list to the manager. In your example, someone can say they would like to be at this meeting, but that it is going to distract them from the things that we said are most important. One can start a smart and useful conversation with management that says, “Where should I be spending my time? What’s the best use of it?”

Another tactic is to be really efficient at moving the meetings forward and keeping them focused. Almost any meeting could be cut in half if we manage the meeting more effectively. Ultimately, that perspective can get organizations in trouble. It’s the perspective that says, “I can’t leave this meeting because I’m ‘supposed to be here.’” This ends up leading to missing objectives and then blaming other people in the organization for not achieving them.



**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So in some ways, if you're in that mindset of, "I'm going to send the wrong signal if I leave this room," then it's almost like a sign that you're thinking the wrong way about your job.

**Peter Bregman:** Exactly, I'm not here to please bosses. We're here to achieve results and when we achieve our results, our bosses will be pleased.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Well done. You've talked about not just having a To Do list, but also having a Not To Do list. What's the value of having a Not To Do list?

**Peter Bregman:** A Not To Do list is a recognition that our success is as much based on what we choose to do as what we choose not to do. I was at dinner with a friend of mine from Israel who keeps kosher. I hadn't seen him for about ten years and he came to New York. We were looking at the menus and I said, "Do you still eat kosher?" He said, "Yeah, I eat kosher," and I said, "great." So he ordered shrimp and I said, "I thought you ate kosher?" and he said, "I do, but I also eat non-kosher."

If you do X and also do Y, but Y is not important to you, then Y will distract you from X. If I'm not clear about what I'm going to do and not going to do, then the things that I don't want to spend my time on and don't want to do will end up overwhelming the things I want to do.

The perfect example of this for me is my iPad. I bought an iPad; I returned the iPad. Then I bought the iPad Mini. I discovered that an iPad is a terrible tool for me. I need my technology to produce, and technology that is specifically geared towards consumption is a distraction to me. If I try to check email on the iPad, I will very quickly and easily end up on Netflix watching a video and spend three hours watching *Scandal* or *Weeds*. I need to put that on my Not To Do list.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** There's something concrete that happens when you write something down. It raises your level of commitment. How often do you write down your Not To Do list?

**Peter Bregman:** It's not a daily thing. For example, I recently bought the Apple Watch and I just sold it. It was the same thing as the iPad. For the first couple days, the Apple Watch was helping me to not be distracted because it prevented me from going on to my phone; I could look at the watch instead. I could tell what my calendar was, but as I assessed it, I noticed that I was spending more time looking at the watch than I needed to. I noticed that I would be doing a workout and I kept checking my heart rate, or I would be bored in a meeting and look at my watch and check some stuff. I realized I was falling into some bad habits. I can control myself, but while the value is still there, I figured I might as well sell it to get most of my money back. I periodically notice things and put them on a Not To Do list, but it's not a list that I'm creating every day.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Right, and if you don't have the flexibility to get rid of your iPad — perhaps you need it for flights or whatever — one other thing you can do is just remove the apps that are sucking up your time.

You talk a lot about the role of emotions at work. It can be really difficult to maintain emotional stability when we're flooded with email, constantly on conference calls, and pressed for time. It's very easy to become overwhelmed.



What are some recommendations you can offer for maintaining an even keel throughout the workday?

**Peter Bregman:** I like the one minute beep because it's one of the things that helps me come back to my even keel. We started the conversation talking about meditation and that the point isn't being in bliss for an hour or twenty minutes or ten minutes, however long you're meditating for — the point is coming back to focus. Coming back to that focus gives us an even keel. I'm a big proponent of physically feeling what's going on for us. Feeling my feet on the ground, taking a breath, reminding myself that I'm here physically and I'm grounded. I'm in a place and that allows me to come back to an even keel. We can also take a deep breath for four seconds — this recent book is all about four seconds because that is the amount of time it takes to take a deep breath. Taking a deep breath does things physiologically.

When I lose my balance or get triggered in some way, I have what I call an amygdala hijack. That's what happened when Mike Tyson bit off Evander Holyfield's ear; that was an amygdala hijack, where your emotions take over. We need to slow down that process. Joshua Gordon, who's a neurocognitive scientist, says that the trick is to allow. Your amygdala is in the back of your head (I am simplifying this significantly) and your prefrontal cortex is the part of your brain that's thinking, that makes decisions, and is logical. You need to give enough time for the stimulus to go from your amygdala to your prefrontal cortex. According to Dr. Gordon, it takes about one to two seconds. With *Four Seconds*, I was very generous. I gave people twice as much time as they need. A deep breath also slows down the reaction and allows the stimulus to get there. It slows down your emotional reaction, and it slows down your neurological system. Taking one deep breath, just for four seconds, relaxes you, re-grounds you, and lets you get your footing back. Then you feel your feet on the ground and you can choose a better choice in the moment.

When I do speeches for *Four Seconds*, I say that you need three things. You need a moment of awareness — that moment when you realize you're off balance, you need the ability to resist urges to fly off the handle because that's the thing that is most compelling you, and you need a replacement behavior — something else to do that is more productive than flying off the handle. That's what *Four Seconds* is about: increasing the awareness, increasing the ability to resist urges, and creating replacement behaviors that we can use to be more effective and grounded in situations, where we otherwise might lose our footing.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** What are some replacement behaviors that you personally use?

**Peter Bregman:** It depends on the situation. A great one is when you're late and someone's upset that you're late — What's your immediate response? What do you do when you're late?

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I used to say, "I'm sorry to keep you waiting," but now I say, "Thank you for your flexibility."

**Peter Bregman:** Most people will apologize and excuse. "I'm sorry I'm late, this meeting ran over. I'm sorry I'm late, I really couldn't leave that client meeting," etc. What you're basically conveying in that moment is intention: "I'm sorry I was late, I didn't intend to be late." But the person who's been waiting for you for twenty minutes isn't experiencing your intention. They're experiencing the impact of the result. It's much more effective when you say, "Thank you for your flexibility." "Sorry for keeping you waiting" is an apology



to the impact versus, “Sorry I was held up; the train was late. I couldn’t help it,” which is being sorry about the intention. It’s a subtle difference, but it makes all the difference for the person who’s sitting there. A behavior to replace excusing is to describe your impact, to acknowledge the impact you’ve had on the other person.

Another example in the same vein is blame. We were talking earlier about not being able to leave a meeting because your boss won’t let you. That’s a very ineffective behavior, and we see it all the time in organizations. We see people not taking responsibility and then blaming other people for results. It is better to be responsible and accountable for your power in the situation. A replacement behavior for blame is ownership; it’s the exact opposite. It’s like, “I’m going to own everything that I possibly can,” and I’ve seen that transform groups. I’ve seen people in organizations where blame is flying all over the place because results aren’t what they were expecting. Customer service is blaming sales and sales is blaming marketing and marketing is blaming engineering — everyone’s blaming everyone else.

Then one person stands up and says, “Hello, I want to actually recognize that we have had these poor results and I want to share with you three things that I’ve done that have actually contributed to these poor results. Here is what I’m going to do differently.” I’ve seen that happen and the room stops. There is this eerie silence, then other people start taking ownership. This transforms the meeting. Blame is an act of defensiveness, so the moment of awareness is to realize defensiveness. The behavior that you need to resist is to point at other people and their faults, because you can defend that. The replacement behavior is to take whatever responsibility you can. Let me ask you, Ron, if someone’s in a meeting and they’re blaming other people versus taking ownership, who feels more trustworthy to you and who are you more likely to keep on board?

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I see your point here and I think the average person is actually going to choose the person who is taking ownership. However, in a lot of organizations it really comes down to the leadership behaviors at the top. If the person at the top is pointing fingers, that’s going to spread throughout the organization.

**Peter Bregman:** I have never seen in my twenty-five years of working in organizations, even in the nastiest organizations, a leader rail on someone once they’ve taken responsibility. What I have seen a lot in nasty organizations is the leader saying, “I can’t believe you did this!” When an employee says, “No, I didn’t do that! It’s not what you think!” that incites the leader, and they’re even more angry because you’re not taking responsibility. Because if you screw up, you think you’re going to get really railed, but that’s a misconception. The reality is if you screw up, you better own it; otherwise, you’ll get railed. And I’ve seen this time and time again, it’s not the failure that kills people, it’s their defense against the failure. It’s their denial of the failure, which leaves the leader feeling incredibly vulnerable. For example, if this guy doesn’t see what he did wrong, then I can’t trust him to do anything because he’s going to repeat it over again. It’s a common misconception that when people get yelled at for failure, the way out is to deny the failure, and that is what creates a poor reputation or creates a defensive culture. Does that make sense?

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** That makes a lot of sense, and it’s a really interesting insight that if you take the ownership, you’re going to be viewed as more trustworthy. You’re also positioning yourself to actually do something about it, rather than continuing to be on the defensive. Now let me ask you this: In a lot of cases, it’s not so much that people recognize that they’ve done something wrong and are failing to admit it, but rather that they them-



selves don't see that they've done something wrong. So if you have been accused of something that you really don't believe is your fault, should you also take ownership of it so that you can move forward?

**Peter Bregman:** Take ownership for everything you can possibly take ownership for. We have very strong defense systems, so we don't see ways we've contributed to things that other people see. But even if you don't see it, look for some way you've contributed and own that.

We're expanding the business and bringing in people to coach within organizations. I'm doing demos with people and it's amazing to watch because I train people for a couple days and then I do demos and there are people who I'm saying, "Yes, I think you're ready to coach with us," or "No, I think you're not ready and you need to do X, Y, and Z training first," or "No, you're not right for us." And it's amazing to watch how people respond.

I just read an email yesterday from someone who had an explanation for poor performance in every case, none of which took responsibility. Their response should be, "Thank you. You raise some good points here and I'm going to take them into consideration when I do future demos, but I'm going to take responsibility for everything I could possibly take responsibility for." I could tell you, there's no way I'm hiring this person who sent the email, because they don't have that ability.

There was another person who didn't blame me, but blamed the person they were coaching in the demo. They said, "Well, you know, this isn't a person that I would end up ever working with because they weren't a good coachee." You have to be a good enough coach to work with resistance. Otherwise, you don't need to coach. People who don't take any responsibility for their performance are people I'm not interested in working with, and most people aren't interested working with those people.

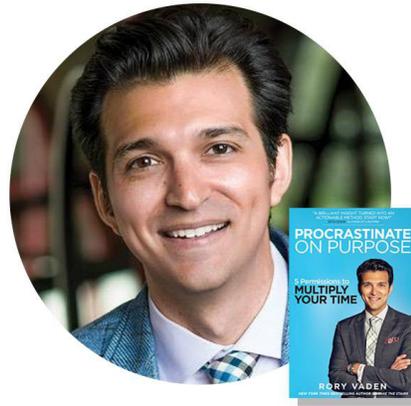
I would suggest that you find wherever there is an opportunity, wherever there's a window to take responsibility for something, take responsibility for that and you'll be trustworthy. People will want to work with you and you'll get better because you'll learn from the mistakes that you made.



## Practical Tips from Peter Bregman

- Set aside five minutes at the beginning of every workday to proactively plan how you will spend the rest of your day.
- Instead of using your To Do list to map out your day, plug the activities you want to work on into specific time slots on your calendar. Committing to a time and place increases the chances that you will follow through.
- From time to time, it helps to use a brief, strategic distraction to ensure that you are working on the right tasks. For example, you can program your alarm to go off every few hours. During that time, take a deep breath and ask, “Am I doing what I most need to be doing right now?” If the answer is no, redirect your attention to what you want to be working on.
- At the end of the day, take five minutes to reflect on what you have accomplished and what you didn’t.
- To avoid time sinks throughout the day, take a few minutes to write a “Not To Do” list. It will help you recognize wasteful activities and establish clear boundaries around how you spend your time and energy.
- For a more effective apology, resist explaining your intention. Instead, apologize by focusing on the impact your actions had on the other person.
- Whenever possible, take responsibility and ownership when things don’t work out. When we avoid responsibility, we focus on why the outcome isn’t our fault. In contrast, taking responsibility directs our attention to actions we can take in the future to achieve a better outcome.





## Rory Vaden on How to Multiply Your Time

Self-Discipline Strategist Rory Vaden's book *Take the Stairs* is a #1 *Wall St Journal*, #1 *USA Today*, and #2 *New York Times* bestseller. As an award-winning entrepreneur and business leader, Rory Co-Founded Southwestern Consulting, a multi-million dollar global consulting practice that helps clients in more than fourteen countries drive educated decisions with relevant data. He's also the Founder of The Center for the Study of Self-Discipline (CSSD).

Rory is the world's leader on defining the psychology around modern day procrastination, called *Priority Dilution*. He speaks and consults on how to say, "No" to the things that don't matter and "Yes" to the things that do. His client list includes companies and groups such as: Cargill, The Million Dollar Roundtable, P&G, True Value, YPO, Wells Fargo Advisors, Land O'Lakes, Novartis, and hundreds more. His insights have recently been featured on/in: Fox News, CNN, *Wall Street Journal*, *Fast Company, Inc.*, *Fortune*, and the *New York Times*.

He is a regular contributor for *American Express Open Forum*, *Huffington Post*, and *The Tennessean*. His articles and insights average more than four million views every month.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** You start your new book, *Procrastinate on Purpose*, with a bold assertion. You say: "Everything you know about time management is wrong." How so?

**Rory Vaden:** Here's the thing: A lot of the clichés that you hear about time management have either been completely discarded or they've been radically updated by the modern thinker. In order to really understand it, I'll take you out on a lightning fast journey on the history of time management theory.

Era number one: Time management theory thinking developed as a body of work in the fifties and sixties. We sometimes call it one-dimensional thinking because it was all about efficiency. The initial strategy was: "I need to do things faster and then I will have more margin and more time left over."



About twenty years later, a gentleman by the name of Dr. Stephen Covey wrote a book that changed the world, *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. In that book, Dr. Covey introduced us to two-dimensional thinking, where the Y-axis was importance and the X-axis was urgency. Dr. Covey taught us that not all tasks are created equal, and he gave us this scoring system to prioritize our time. Prioritizing is good but you have to first focus on what matters most. As great and helpful as that book was to our thinking...

Let's think about this for a second, Ron — do you know what year the book was published?

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Was it in the seventies?

**Rory Vaden:** It was the eighties. It was published in 1989. Think about how different the world is today compared to 1989. In 1989, there was no Internet. There were some cell phones, but no Google and no social media, and most of us still had to get off the couch to change the channel. A lot of us still use Dr. Covey's methodology as our primary way to prioritize and strategize. You cannot solve today's time management problems using yesterday's time management thinking.

So we started to study these people we call "multipliers," and asked: How do the ultra performers of today treat time and how do they think differently? While most people are still thinking in terms of two dimensions of urgency and importance, multipliers have adapted a third dimension we call significance. If importance is about how much something matters and urgency is about how soon something matters, then significance is about how long that thing is going to matter. In other words, "How does this play out tomorrow and the next day and the next day?"

Multipliers had this insight while the rest of us were running around in frenzy, trying to squeeze everything into one day because we are only making calculations of importance and urgency and asking, "What is the most important thing I have to do today?" Multipliers ask a completely different question: "How can I use my time today in a way that creates more time tomorrow?" That's the significance calculation in the subtitle of the book, *5 Permissions to Multiply Your Time*.

To distill that into one sentence — the way that you multiply time is by giving yourself the emotional permission to spend time on things today that create more time tomorrow.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Very interesting. One of the traps that people fall into by using that two-dimensional thinking that you identify in your book is "priority dilution." What is priority dilution and how does it come about?

**Rory Vaden:** The term comes from our first book, *Take the Stairs*. *Take the Stairs* was about overcoming classic procrastination, which is consciously delaying what you know you should be doing. We also talked about a second type of procrastination called "creative avoidance." That's another term that we coined. Creative avoidance is creating things to do as a way of avoiding the things you know you really should be doing but don't want to do. Those are the common types of procrastination. We just casually mentioned this idea of priority dilution in *Take the Stairs*.

Priority dilution is the new procrastination because it is a chronic overachiever's procrastination. Unlike creative avoidance or classic procrastination, priority dilution has nothing to do with being lazy or apathetic or disengaged but still leaves us with our most significant tasks unchecked. As our star rises, we have more priorities on our plate, more responsibili-



ty enters into our purview, and our core priorities start to dilute.

While somebody struggling with creative avoidance is battling distraction, somebody struggling with priority dilution is battling a life of constant interruption and always falling victim to the latest thing, the most recent email. We fall into this trap of trying to do too many things too fast. Multipliers — the people who break free of priority dilution — realize that success is no longer related to the volume of tasks that we complete; it's related to the significance of our accomplishments.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Let's make this actionable. Let's say I've hired you as a consultant to sit down with me and figure out how I can optimize my to-do list and maximize my significance. What are we going to do first?

**Rory Vaden:** First of all, to-do lists are dangerous. Multipliers aren't as concerned about their to-do list as they are about their not-to-do list. The next generation of time management is less about what you do than what you don't do. We call this "eliminating," and it's the first of the five stages in the focus funnel, which we can talk about in a second. The danger of a to-do list and calendar is that they cause you to stop thinking. That's also the benefit. You put something on the calendar and, when the time comes up, you just do it. Initially, that's a great advantage, but it becomes a limiting weakness. It's a "What got you here won't get you there," situation.

Instead, multipliers perpetually reprioritize. You could plan your week on a Sunday night, but the world moves so fast that your plans could dramatically shift between Sunday and Thursday. Multipliers navigate that and they allow for this perpetual reprioritization using something called the focus funnel.

But to answer your question, I would advise you to look at your to-do list and ask yourself the question, "Which one of these things, if I do it today, will create more time or more results for me tomorrow and the next day and the next day?" Don't ask yourself, "Which of these can I get done today?" Don't ask yourself, "Which of these take the least amount of time so I can knock it out right now?"

There is a great limitation to prioritizing that nobody ever talks about. I don't mean to tread on the amazing work that's been done by the productivity thinkers. Prioritizing is good, learning how to focus first on what matters most is still good, but it does nothing to actually create more time. It's more like borrowing time from nine activities on your to-do list to spend on one task.

The next level of results requires the next level of thinking.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** You also argue that multiplying our time requires a shift in mindset. Instead of focusing on increasing our efficiency and getting more done, we need to identify activities that we can eliminate. Tell us about that. How do I eliminate activities that are going to generate more time for me?

**Rory Vaden:** That's a great segue into the focus funnel. The focus funnel is our attempt to create a visual depiction that codifies the actual thought process that multipliers use when they are going through their day and perpetuating reprioritization.

Picture a funnel. At the top of this funnel, you have all the tasks coming in. The first ques-



tion that multipliers ask is, “Can this be eliminated?” If it can’t be eliminated, it drops down and we can talk about what happens next. But the elimination stage is where we have the widest swath of opportunity to immediately create more time,. Anything you say, “No” to today saves you time tomorrow.

One of the other big parts of the *Procrastinate on Purpose* book goes to your question about why we say everything you know about time management is wrong. Everything you’ve ever heard about time management is tips and tricks, tools and technology, calendars and checklists. It’s all apps and ideas to save you time and organize your time. It’s all logical. We’ve come to realize that time management isn’t just logical; it’s emotional. Our feelings of guilt and fear and anxiety and worry dictate how we spend our time much more than our calendar does. We get pulled in these different directions and we respond as emotional human beings to what’s happening in our environment, not just what is on our calendar or our to-do list.

The title of the book, *5 Permissions to Multiply Your Time*, refers to permissions that correspond to each stage in the focus funnel. Within the eliminate stage is what we call the “permission to ignore.” It says that it’s our fault that we’re overwhelmed, not anyone else’s. We are the problem. We’re the ones saying, “Yes” to everything. Most of us are people pleasers. We want to be overachievers. We want to help people. We want to do great work. We don’t want to say, “No.” I used to try to go through life without ever saying, “No” until one of the multipliers that we profiled said to me, “Rory, that is the dumbest thing I’ve ever heard anybody say.”

Anytime you say, “Yes” to one thing, you are simultaneously saying, “No” to an infinite number of others. You’re always saying, “No” to something. You are either consciously saying, “No” to the things that don’t matter or saying, “Yes” to those things and, by default, saying, “No” to the things that do matter. That realization is the foundation of the permission to ignore. Once you have the permission to ignore, you realize that not every email deserves a response, not every meeting deserves your attendance, and not every idea deserves your execution. You have to develop the permission to eliminate. We sometimes refer to this as the sculptor’s principle. Most artists create art by what they add, like to a blank canvas, but sculptors realize perfection is achieved not only when nothing more can be added, but when nothing more can be taken away.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** That’s a powerful metaphor. What can people do to develop the courage to say, “No” to others? I mean, it’s one thing to know that saying, “Yes” to everything dilutes our priorities and prevents us from getting the right things done. But the experience of saying, “No” to others or ignoring their emails — that can be a painful experience in the short term. What can we do to make that experience less distasteful?

**Rory Vaden:** That’s a great question. I don’t know how to instantly cure the fear, but I will give you two ideas. The logical part is asking, “If I say yes to this right now, what might I be saying ‘No’ to?” Most of us don’t think that way. That’s actually the significance calculation; it’s thinking longer term. It’s not just falling victim to that emotion, which in this case is guilt: Sometimes I feel like I have to say, “Yes,” and I can’t say, “No.” So that’s the logical part of it.

The emotional strategy is that you can say, “No” and still be nice. You can become amazing at telling people, “No.” In my book, I describe an author that I approached over the course of six years, trying to get an endorsement. I never got that endorsement. But I got hand-



written letters. I got people coming to tell me “No” in person. The author has never said, “Yes” to me, so I’m still working on it. But I learned that you could say, “No” and still be nice.

I’ve been speaking for over fifteen years; speaking was originally my core business. I have people that I last talked to seven or eight years approach me now about speaking engagements. Over the years, my speaking fee has increased pretty dramatically and they just don’t have the budget for my current fees.

I always felt really bad about that, because that invitation is a compliment, but I can’t do it. We started sending a “no package” to people that we have to refuse. It’s just a little gift box that we send to their team, and it makes me feel better about saying, “No.” What is your “no package?” See if you can put something together.

The author I talked about sent me a handwritten letter encouraging me in my journey of being an author, encouraging me about the hard work it takes, and sharing a little bit about their story. They did all of that after the first line, which was, “We regret to inform you that we cannot give endorsements to work that we are not intimately acquainted with. Given the stack of things on my desk clamoring for my attention, I’m not able to dedicate that necessary time, but let me give you a moment of encouragement.”

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** That’s a great tip. And that’s actually what I was hoping you would speak to because we struggle to separate the emotion from the time commitment and end up committing out of guilt to a lot of activities that we know are not in our best interest.

What you’re saying is that we can allay that feeling of guilt by having a pre-programmed response when we don’t want to do an activity. You don’t want to have to think about it every time you say, “No” to something. You want to have a pre-programmed response that ends the interaction in a positive way. I love your tip about sending a gift to people who can’t afford your speaking fees. But let me put you on the spot a little bit.

**Rory Vaden:** All right.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** What if the person you want to say, “No” to another person in your organization or even your manager? Do you have any suggestions about how we can get out of activities that are not in our best long-term interest but where it’s more than just guilt that’s standing in the way?

**Rory Vaden:** See now, Ron, you are just going off script. Now you’re asking the hard questions. It’s delicate. Let’s talk about if it’s your boss, because that is the most common spot where you just say, “No, the heck with you.” It’s delicate if you enjoy having your job. Help your boss think about the longer term. This is kind of a customer service thing; you don’t tell people, “No,” you give them options. When you give them options, they feel some control, but you’re really in control.

If my boss is telling me “Hey, I need to have this done,” the chronic overachiever response is to go, “Okay, I’ll just find a way to do it. I’m going to go home, I’ll work till midnight, I’ll stay up all night, I’ll ignore my family, I want to be a trooper, I’m a hard worker.” I don’t want to discount the value of hustle, that’s what the *Take the Stairs* book is all about. But doing it that way repeatedly can burn you out over time.

In *Take the Stairs*, we talk about having harvest seasons. There are periods in your life



where you need to harvest, but there are also times where you let the seeds grow. With your boss, I would say, “Okay, Ron, I’m happy to do that for you. Here are the ten things that I’m working on; can you help me prioritize what order you would like me to complete these in for you?” It’s kind of the same mentality you would use on yourself.

If you’re a small business owner, you have to make that significance calculation. The boss for all of us is that we only have a limited amount of time and a lot of things to do. Time is our boss, and the way you break free of that is realizing that you actually don’t just have today. You have tomorrow and the next and the next day.

If I’m coaching myself, I say, “Okay, what can I do that really will matter in the long term?” If I’m working for somebody, then I’m going to say, “Look, prioritize for me. Here are the things on my purview; you tell me what you want me to do, but this is how much time I have.” If I’m the employee, I’m going to invite my boss to prioritize for me; that’s how I get around always being burnt out and stressed and feeling like I have to do everything. If you have a boss that just says, “Well, you need to have all of those things done by tomorrow,” then quit.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** That’s it? Quit?

**Rory Vaden:** Say, “No”. I mean that – your job is not worth your health and your stress and your family. There are things that are more important, and harvest season can’t be forever; it’s only a season. If that season is never ending, then you have got to say, “No, I’m not going to do this, I’m going to find something else.”

I’m not encouraging everyone to quit, and most of the people watching are probably not the employee; most of the people watching are probably the boss. You’re probably the leader, that’s why you are here. You are the mover and shaker. And you want to learn how to multiply time not just for you, but also for your organization, and you want to prioritize for your people. So tell them, “I want you spending time on the things that multiply our results. I want you spending time on the things that multiply our time.” That gets rid of bureaucracy. That gets rid of mundane routine. That gets rid of just going through the motions of doing things the way we’ve always done them, and it creates a multiplier culture of procrastinating on purpose or, as we call it, “POP.” It creates a POP culture for your organization.

Imagine if everybody around you was spending time on things today that would make tomorrow better, and the next day and the next day. That’s how you create exponential growth; that’s what leadership is.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Another strategy you describe in your book for multiplying time is automation. In describing that strategy, you suggest that automation is to your time what compounding interest is to your money. What is automation and how do we use it to increase our time?

**Rory Vaden:** That was the biggest insight for me in the entire journey. I was writing a story about a guy who was one of the wealthiest people I know. He was explaining to me that wealthy people think differently about money. He said that, when most people walk in to buy a coffee, they ask themselves, “Do I have five dollars?” A wealthy person goes through a whole different thought process, realizing that if they spend five dollars on that coffee, that’s five dollars they are not investing. And if they were to invest that five dollars instead



of spending it and got an average rate of return of 8% over thirty years, it comes out to be worth about fifty dollars. So rich people don't ask themselves, "Do I have five dollars?" They say, "Is this five dollars coffee worth fifty dollars to me thirty years from now?" As I was writing that story and typed those words, I was like, "Whoa! Automation is to your time what compounding interest is to your money. "

Let me give a practical example. Ron, if I asked you, "Hey, do you happen to have an extra two hours open in your day to set up online bill pay?" You probably would say, "No, I don't have two hours open in my day. I can't remember the time I just had two hours of open space with nothing assigned to the time. If I did have two hours open, I'm pretty sure I wouldn't use it to set up online bill pay. I would probably do something that mattered more." That's how most of us think.

But here's how a multiplier thinks: A multiplier realizes that, if I take two hours today to set up online bill pay, it saves me thirty minutes of bill paying time every month. After just four months, I will have broken even on that investment, and every month thereafter, I will get something that we call ROTI (Return on Time Invested). Anything you create a process for today saves you time tomorrow and the next day and every day thereafter. That's the significance calculation.

I do the things that I can cross off my to-do list to get my little shot of dopamine and feel like I'm productive. But I'm always in that constant rat race, just like someone spending money. Whereas an investor of money says, "If I stop spending money for a little while and I invest it, it's going to grow — compound interest turns my money into more money." Just like that, a multiplier realizes that automation turns his or her time into more time.

That's the second permission — the permission to invest. The permission to say, "I know I have a bunch of fires, that's fine, but here's what I've learned about fires: No matter how fast I fight fires today, there's going to be an equal number of fires tomorrow. I can fight fires all day. I can answer email all day long and not ever be caught up. If I get my inbox to zero, there are going to be new emails tomorrow unless I create a system or a process that prevents that email from ever coming in — unless I create a process that takes care of that task in the future so I don't have to."

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I love that example of bill pay because it's so practical. The interesting thing about this approach is that it doesn't just apply to the way we work — it can also apply to family life. You write, "Anyone who runs a household runs a business." How do we apply these strategies to increase that amount of free time we have at home?

**Rory Vaden:** If you can't eliminate an activity and you can't automate an activity, then it drops down to the bottom of the funnel, which is, "Can I delegate this? Can someone else do it?" We call delegating the permission of imperfect, but it is also the permission to invest because you have to invest time training somebody how to do the task. Delegation is almost like automation, but instead of with a system, it's with a person.

We automate or delegate all sorts of things. I started to notice that 90% of what I buy at the grocery store is the same thing every single time. I committed that to a list and now I have someone go shopping. You might say, "I don't have enough money to hire a personal shopper." I didn't either, but you have to realize that you are always paying someone; you're either paying yourself at your rate of pay to do something, or you are paying somebody else at their rate of pay. We live in a world with Craigslist and Fiverr and many other ways



to find people who need work. Our personal assistant is a stay-at-home mom running the kids around all day anyway, so she can stop in at Target or Home Depot or wherever else we need her to go for us. She is making money and we're creating a job.

I can't tell you everything that you should do, because multiplying time and procrastinating on purpose is about teaching you how to think. If you start making the significance calculation, you'll be able to figure out what matters on your own to-do list. You probably will immediately, think, "Gosh, I've had one hundred ideas that I've never taken the time to explore because I've never had time, but if I do what Rory is talking about and start making the significance calculation, I'll be able to do those things because, while I don't have time today, it's going to create time over the long-term."

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** The thing is, I would imagine some people watching this have perhaps thought about getting a personal shopper or maybe even thought about bringing someone into their home to cook their dinners every night...

**Rory Vaden:** Or clean the house.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Clean the house, right, but they've resisted because of something that you identify in your first book, *Take the Stairs*, called the "pain paradox." What is the pain paradox and how does it get in the way, and how do we overcome it?

**Rory Vaden:** I like to tell a story from where I grew up in Colorado. The state is famous for the Rocky Mountains, in the West side of the state. But a lot of people don't realize that Colorado is divided almost exactly in half and, in the East, we also have the great Kansas plains. Because of that unique topographical landscape, we're one of the only places in the world that has buffalos and cows. When storms come, they always brew from the West and roll out towards the East. A cow can sense that a storm is coming from the West and will run east, trying to get away from the storm. The problem is, cows aren't very fast. Instead of out-running the storm, they actually run with the storm. They're maximizing the amount of pain and time and frustration they experience from that storm.

Humans do the same thing. We spend our lives trying to avoid the inevitable consequences of our choices. People in debt try to find ways around paying our bills. People who are unhealthy make rationalizations for why some treatment doesn't work or won't matter or how they've already tried. People who are struggling in their marriage avoid the difficult but meaningful conversations needed to reconcile that relationship. Multipliers and ultra performers realize that problems procrastinated upon are only amplified. Waiting always makes it worse.

Buffalo wait for the storm to cross right over the crest of the peak of the mountaintop. As the storm rolls over the ridge, the buffalo will turn and charge directly into the storm. By running at the storm, they run straight through it, which minimizes the amount of pain and time and frustration they experience from that storm. That's why it is such a great metaphor for all of us, because we are all dealing with similar storms. We all have fires. We all have interruptions. We all have families. We all have kids. We all have money challenges and financial issues. The only choice we have is how and when we respond to those storms.

The paradox principle says that easy short-term choices lead to difficult long-term consequences, and vice-versa. I don't have extra money lying around to hire people, but I have to make the significance calculation. I have to think longer-term and realize that, if I invest



my money into hiring somebody, it's going to give me more time and more money tomorrow. It's going to free me up to do the things that only I can do.

Looking back at the focus funnel: if you can't eliminate it, automate it, or delegate it, then that task falls out of the bottom of the funnel and you have a task that must be done; and it must be done by you. There's only one remaining question: "Must this task be done now or can it wait until later?" If it must be done now, if you know that it's something that's going to multiply your time, if you know it's something that only you can do, you don't eliminate, automate, or delegate — you concentrate. This is the permission to protect. It's the permission to ignore everything else and say, "Until I accomplish my next most significant priority, everything else is a distraction, so I am going to shut everything down and I'm going to focus on doing the thing that multiplies my time." If it can wait until later, we invite you to let it wait, and we call that not eliminate, automate, or delegate, but procrastinating on purpose — the POP that we mentioned earlier. You POP that activity back to the top of the funnel, and it cycles through the focus funnel until, at some point, it will get eliminated, automated, delegated, or concentrated on. You need that buffalo mentality once you identify something that will multiply your time. You have to give yourself the permission to invest that time and charge into the storm.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I really like that metaphor. The same holds true for your fears. When you have fear in your life, if you run away from it, you just prolong that fear. The best approach to overcoming fears is to face them head on. If you're fearful of flying, you actually want to push yourself to do it a little bit more because the more you do it, the more exposure you have to it, the less uncomfortable it becomes. The same is true for public speaking, and that leads to this next question.

Before becoming an author, you actually spent years competing in something called The World Championship of Public Speaking. Tell us about that experience. How did it come about, and what did you learn in the process of competing about effective public speaking that you didn't know before you started?

**Rory Vaden:** It's funny you ask that question. I don't get asked that a lot.

Southwestern Consulting is a big company now. It's easy to look once somebody is down the road and say, "Oh well, you are a *New York Times* bestseller, you have this big company, so of course you are able to do these things." Those things are the byproduct of what we are talking about, and the journey of speaking is a big one.

When I finished grad school, I spent five months selling books door to door and recruiting other students to do the same over the summer months with Southwestern Advantage. I knocked on twenty thousand doors and recruited sixty students, and I left that business only because I wanted to speak. But I was a kid and I had no credibility in the public world.

I heard about a contest Toastmasters has, called the World Championship of Public Speaking. I thought, "Wow, maybe if I won the World Championship of Public Speaking, that will give me some credibility." So I went out and spoke three hundred and four times over the course of eighteen months. I spent thousands of dollars on coaching courses. I received thousands of evaluations, read dozens of books, and went through all of these classes. In this world championship, there are twenty-five thousand people from ninety to one hundred countries. In 2006, I was twenty-two years old; I made it to the top ten in the world and I lost. In 2007, I studied harder, I practiced more, and I went back with even more fight.



That was the year – I lost again, but I lost higher; I came in second in the world.

I was the first runner-up for the world championship and that facilitated an introduction where I met a man named Zig Ziglar. I developed a mentorship with Zig and got a chance to know him. At the same time, I was starting Southwestern Consulting with two business partners. One of them was one a guy that I had met selling books door to door and the other one was his best friend growing up. Her name is Amanda and we ended up married. The three of us and one other guy started this dream and recruited a few of our other best friends; it's been this team effort. But it all started with selling books at Southwestern, and at Toastmasters and learning to speak and just doing it.

It's fine to be scared, do it scared. It's fine to feel fear. All of this stuff is scary at first because you don't know how to do it, but if you just do it scared, you're going to figure it out. You are a powerful person. You are a creative person.

It's easier than ever to be successful. I consider myself tremendously lucky to have access to people like you. There is literally millions of dollars of advice being expended here with this lineup of people that you've got, and you're just giving that away. It's just amazing, this world that we live in, and I feel lucky and I'm very grateful for things like Southwestern and Zig Ziglar and my other mentors. I'm just grateful.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** If we throw you in a time machine, put you in front of that seventeen year old kid and said you got two minutes, tell him anything about public speaking, what would you say other than doing it scared?

**Rory Vaden:** I guess I'll spoil the premise a little bit: The next book that we are working on is going to be about selling. The core premise is something that's been around Southwestern for a while; it applies to selling, it applies to leadership, it applies to public speaking, and it applies to parenting.

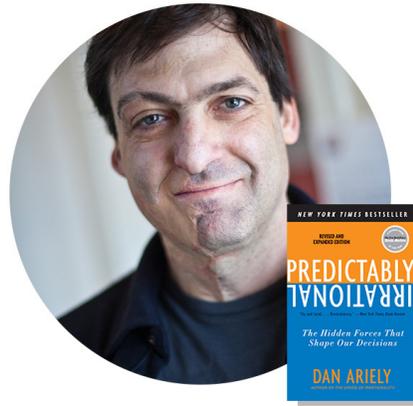
The real secret of overcoming those nerves is this: It's hard to be nervous when your heart is on service. Fear is self-centered. You only feel fear when you are thinking about yourself and whether or not you're going to be good enough, whether or not you're going to figure it out. When you're thinking about how you can help other people, how you can use your tools to support people, all of that fear just falls away. If I had latched onto that at a younger age, I would have been a better leader and a better speaker much sooner.

I don't think about my speech before I give it. I stand behind the stage and pick out one or two people in the audience, and I look at them and think about what would it be like to be that person. I wonder what that person is struggling with — maybe it is a financial struggle or a relationship battle or a health issue. I know for sure everybody is struggling with something. When you become present and you think about that, all of your nerves about what you're going to say go away, because then you go and stand on stage and you're completely there in service of those people.



## Practical Tips From Rory Vaden

- Start your day by asking, “How can I use my time today in a way that creates more time tomorrow?”
- To prioritize effectively between tasks, you need to go beyond simply thinking about *importance* and *urgency*. You also need to take into account *significance*, which represents how long something is going to matter.
- Over the long term, focusing on tasks that hold the greatest significance is the most effective strategy.
- Priority dilution is the most common type of procrastination among high achievers. We dilute our priorities when we take on more and more responsibility, pushing things that really matter to the back burner.
- To avoid priority dilution, give yourself permission to ignore. Not every email deserves a response, not every meeting deserves your attendance, and not every idea deserves your execution.
- Develop a strategy for saying no in advance, so that you don’t have to stop and think about how to phrase your response each time you turn someone down. Create an email template, or write out a script that you can use when doing it in person.
- Look for ways to automate or delegate activities that are not a good use of your time. For example, consider automating bill pay or hiring someone to do your grocery shopping. These are all activities that you could easily do yourself but don’t represent the best use of your time.
- When speaking publicly, one way to minimize your anxiety is to direct your attention outward. We experience fear when our attention is directed inward and we are thinking about ourselves. Try focusing on your audience, and consider all the ways they will benefit from what you have to say.



## Dan Ariely A Behavioral Economist's Guide to Productivity

Dan Ariely is the James B. Duke professor of Psychology and Behavioral Economics at Duke University. He is the founder of The Center for Advanced Hindsight and co-founder of BEworks. Dan's TED talks have been watched over 8 million times. He is the author of New York Times bestsellers *Predictably Irrational* and *The Upside of Irrationality* as well as *The Honest Truth about Dishonesty*.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Dan Ariely, thank you for joining me, it's a real pleasure to have you here. You first became interested in decision making after you were injured in an explosion. Tell us what happened and how that experience influences your work.

**Dan Ariely:** I was next to some magnesium flares when they accidentally exploded. Magnesium flares are those devices the military sends up to the sky to light up the battlefield. They're full of magnesium and burn very hot and bright. The explosion burned me so badly that some of my bones and tendons were visible. I was in the hospital for almost three years

Hospitals are amazing institutions that give you a lot of insights into irrational behavior. We have tremendous advances in medicine, but do crazy things from the perspective of quality of life. I saw a picture of somebody yesterday that went to a new ward in the hospital. The general manager of that ward was proud of the artwork on the wall. When, this person lay down in the bed, though, they realized that you see nothing if you're looking up — it's just this ugly ceiling. They created an amazing institution, but didn't take the patient's perspective into account at all.

I wanted to be a physician after my experience in the hospital. I thought they were doing so many things wrong I could do better and had specific ideas about how I wanted to improve things, but I couldn't operate because of my hands. Someone told me it would be difficult to even touch patients. I went into psychology, not thinking it would really be my path to help people, but it ended up being a wonderful path for me. I spend most of my time trying



to figure out what people do wrong and how we can make things a bit better.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** There was an example in your first book, *Predictably Irrational*, about how the experience of getting an injection was eye opening for you. How so?

**Dan Ariely:** I developed liver problems from the blood transfusions in the hospital. I had to take these terrible medications three times a week for about a year and a half. Each injection made me sick all night.

Imagine coming home from the office or from the university having to inject yourself and knowing it will make you sick. You'll have a headache and be vomiting and shaking all night. But, if you can handle it three times a week for eighteen months, you might not develop liver cirrhosis at thirty years old.

That's the problem with delayed gratification. How much are we willing to sacrifice? It applies to everything — procrastination, overeating, overspending and under-saving, texting and driving, everything. You deny yourself for a possible future reward.

At the end of eighteen months, I was the only patient in the protocol that took their medication on time. The question was "Why?" It wasn't because I love my liver more or I am less irrational; it was because I restructured my environment.

I used reward substitution. Thinking about not having liver cirrhosis thirty years from now would not work. That was too much of a delay. Instead, I thought about the movies. Every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday morning I would rent a few movies. I would carry them in my backpack all day, looking forward to seeing them. I would come home, put the video in so I knew which movie I would watch, injected myself, and then pressed play. I paired something I did not want - the injection - with something I wanted — the movie. It turns out that substitution is an effective strategy. Pairing that unpleasant task with a short-term reward can be helpful to overcome delayed gratification problems.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** You created an app that helps people manage their time. It was so successful Google bought it. I understand Google is planning to incorporate it into Gmail in some fashion.

Why are we so bad at managing our time?

**Dan Ariely:** Most of the misery in this world is man-made and a result of wasting our time, health and money. Another cause is our incredible capacity for hate, but I don't even know where to start with that.

Time is really good to start with. If you have a calendar, I can access the way you manage time. If you look at your calendar, can follow it, and do what you are told, that's a good place to start.

If I wanted to improve your eating habits, I need to go into your kitchen, restaurants, and supermarkets. If I want to improve how you treat your money I would have to deal with your electronic wallets, bank, and credit cards.

Why do we mess up our time so much? Time is all about the opportunity cost. It's much like money in that way. Every time you do something, there is something else you are not doing. What are you not going to do? In this time you spend talking to me, you could do



other things, now what are you not doing? It's hard to figure out.

Here's another time analogy. Imagine I give you thirty dollars in the morning and that's all the money you get for the day. If you have a big breakfast, you don't have money for the bus. If you have a big lunch, you don't have money for beer. If I give you money for a month and add student loans, mortgage payments, and credit card bills, the tradeoffs become difficult.

It's the same with time. Imagine you are a farmer that gets up with the sun stops working when the sun goes down. If your main task of the day was clear, life would be simple. Now we have this incredible richness. We are presented more options and tasks than time. We must figure what not to do.

Our expanding working hours are another challenging. This taxes our mental capacity. We can predict that our physical capacity will run out when we get tired. That's simple. Mental capacity is much more complex. We lack insight into when we are most efficient or when the muse is most active.

Imagine you have a factory. As complications arise and orders come in, you set your priorities. You decide what priorities fit into your productive hours. You decide how much quality you will put into your project depending on the rate of return on your time and effort. The goal of Time Full, the app I sold that will be part of Google Calendar, is to create a simpler, less complex scheduling system so it will be easier to make these decisions.

When I sold the company, we were working on a way to deal with bedtime procrastination. Many people have this problem. It's midnight, you have a busy day tomorrow, you need a good night's sleep, but you don't want to just lie there for twenty minutes waiting on sleep. You send two more emails before bed. Twenty minutes later, you've done fifteen emails. Then it's an hour later. The next morning, you're tired from not getting enough sleep and you aren't that productive. It may not be that bad at first, but that sleep deficit piles up.

My biggest challenge is looking at every research opportunity as something new to learn and a new adventure. This makes it hard for me to say no. I end up with way too many things on my plate. Once I put them on my plate, it is hard to change. I made a vow to be better at this in 2016, so we will see.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** How did you resolve the problem of sleep procrastination with Time Full?

**Dan Ariely:** We didn't test the different approaches before we sold to Google.

The leading candidate was visualizing their expected loss in productivity for tomorrow. You would look at every task you had to do with an eye towards opportunity cost.

Again, it's easiest to relate this to money. I read this beautiful paper on the idea. They gave one group of migrant workers their weekly salary in one envelope. They gave another group their weekly salary in four envelopes, with their children's name on each envelope. When this group reached the decision point of opening the next envelope to spend the money inside, they were also reminded of the opportunity cost.

You know the most important part of your day, besides meetings, is time spent emptying your calendar or writing yourself busy.



The moment I say these are the two hours you need to make progress on your dissertation, the opportunity cost is clear. If you don't fall asleep and I say "Well now it looks like you will only get ninety minutes of useful time on that dissertation," you see that cost rising. We're showing opportunity cost in specific ways, like the inefficiency caused by lack of sleep tomorrow.

The fun part was the decision. Deciding to go to sleep is straightforward, but the opposite isn't deciding not to sleep, it's deciding not to sleep right now. You're just putting off the decision to go to bed. We were trying to get people to decide every thirty minutes. They would decide to either go to bed then or stay up for another thirty minutes. That way they weren't saying "Just one more minute," they were committing to losing another thirty minutes of sleep.

We thought about as a T intersection. The extreme would be "Are you going to sleep tonight or not," but we can't do that. Thirty minutes made the decision more equal — sleep or stay up for thirty more minutes. The idea was you'd say "I don't want to be awake for another thirty minutes, let me asleep." It was a good combination of features, but we never made it to testing.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I read that your injuries make it difficult to type for long periods. I understand you came up with seven ways to work around having to type for extended periods. Can you share some of them?

**Dan Ariely:** My challenge is one of self-control. When I write longer than an hour or more than a couple pages, I have pain in my hands. Over the last few weeks, I've been home and in my office more. I worked too much and I'm still recovering from that self-inflicted pain. I love to work, especially editing. I use my hands a lot when I'm editing, going back and forth between the manuscript and my references — I can't do that with voice commands. It gets hard on my hands. I realized that traveling helps because I can't spend too much time in front of my computer — I'm on the move.

Variety is important — when I get mentally or physically tired from one task I try something else. If I was working on the introduction section of an academic paper — which requires creativity — and felt tired, I would move on to the method section — which is more mechanical.

I also try to do as much as I can with voice. I have an app that records my voice and sends that recording as an email. It's well designed for someone like me that needs to be aware of every mouse click and fine-motor movement with my hands. When I receive emails, I activate this app and respond with a voice recording. I only need to click one button. It attaches my voice recording to a reply email, archives the original email.

I try to do many more things face to face. I believe in having coffee and collaborating by creating connections and common understanding. I've only worked with people I love for a long time, so we know each other well.

Technology, switching channels of communication and working with people for a long time so we understand each other in a deeper way have helped me a lot.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** One challenge to being productive is getting more requests for your time. You've suggested a tool for deciding whether to accept an invitation.



You call it cancel elation; what is it and how do I use it?

**Dan Ariely:** I'll tell you about two tools.

One is when somebody asks you to do something a long time from now, ask yourself how you would respond if it was a request for the near future. Imagine you ask me “Hey would you do this in a year from now?” I look at next January and say, “I have things scheduled so that I have time for whatever you want me to do.” That’s not true, though. My schedule looks free, but the little details of life will creep up; I don’t see them yet. What if you ask me to do something next week or in the next three days — would I cancel something else? When considering something well into the future, bring it closer to see how it ranks against your other priorities. You can see the opportunity cost and then decide.

Cancel elation is not about priorities — it’s about trying to figure out if you want to do something. Cancel elation simulates your experience if someone canceled that task or event. Ask yourself how you would feel if you accepted an invitation and then found out it had been canceled. If you feel elation, you don’t want to do it. You’re doing it out of obligation or discomfort with saying no. If you’re sad, then you should accept the invitation, it’s something you want to do. It’s a way to check how you feel about a request.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** You spend most of your time traveling. Do you have any tips on staying productive for those of us who travel a lot?

**Dan Ariely:** I’m productive most of the time. If everybody had a superpower, mine would be that I’m always productive. If I want to watch a movie or something like that, I incorporate it as the variety I mentioned early.

Sleep is also helpful. Getting enough sleep when you’re always crossing between time zones can be complex. Even though we go to sleep every day, we don’t understand how going to sleep works. My tricks come from conditioning. Doing the same thing every day before going to sleep helps because your body gets conditioned to it. Drinking whiskey — if you’re a whisky drinker — or brushing your teeth or whatever you associate with going to bed. Using different flavors of toothpaste in the morning and evening conditions you to associate one flavor with waking up and the other with going to sleep.

It’s a bad idea to use electronics in bed — the blue light from screens is not healthy. Reading is good, but not on an electronic screen.

A low temperature in the room helps people fall asleep faster and creates more REM sleep, which is the sleep we want.

The research on meditation and mindfulness seems impressive, but I’m not there yet. I close my eyes and I try but my to-do list keeps on popping out. I’ll get there one day.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** What do you do when you’re trying to get to bed and that to-do list of things you have to do tomorrow is popping into your head? What do you do when you’re struggling to sleep?

**Dan Ariely:** The one thing I don’t do is say “I’m not managing so let me get up and keep on working.”

I try to do something I learned in the hospital. The head of the clinical department would



have me think about every part of my body until I've relaxed it. It was like getting a tour of my body and easing the pain. When I'm obsessing over my to-do list, I try to relax and do the same thing for a while. It takes time but you get on the wave and it's better.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Let's switch gears and talk about another area you've studied — honesty. According to your book, *The Honest Truth about Dishonesty*, most people are liars. How do you know?

**Dan Ariely:** We do experiments.

In the simplest one, we take a six-sided die and ask people to toss it. We say we'll pay whatever the die comes upon — if it comes on six, we'll give you six dollars, and so forth. We will pay based on the top side or the bottom — they get to choose, but don't tell us until it's time to pay.

Say the die lands with five on the bottom and two on the top and I say, "What did you pick?" If you picked the bottom, you say bottom — no problem. If you picked the top, there's a conflict. Do you tell the truth and get two dollars or do you change your mind and say bottom to get more money?

People do this twenty times. Every time they pick, they mark a "V" on their paper, roll the die, note what it came up with, and then they say what they chose. We found that people are more successful than probability would allow. Either we pulled from an incredibly lucky sample — again beyond probability — or people are lying. We've done this with over forty thousand people and found that the vast majority lie at least a little.

We also found that basic rationalization influences the size of the lie. People lie more on the six/one die tosses than the five/two and even less on the three/four. If you think about the ways people rationalize — nobody is suffering, everybody is doing it, they screwed me in the past, I'm just making it even — they're all things we say to justify lying. They increase lying and dishonesty without people feeling bad about it.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So you know people are lying because there should be a certain score range with their die. Because they are systematically reporting a more favorable score, you can conclude they are lying?

**Dan Ariely:** That's right.

If you pick the bottom, roughly half the time you should get the high number. There would be deviation, but it should be close — especially as it averages out among more people. When it's averaging closer to 75% high numbers, and more on six/one tosses than three/four tosses, that suggests conscious exaggeration rather than luck.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** You describe another study in your book about business people who travel. You say people who are traveling are more likely to submit a dubious expense when they are further away from home than when they are closer to home. How do you know that and why is that the case?

**Dan Ariely:** We asked people to report on their own behaviors and the behaviors of others. In psychology, we sometimes ask people what somebody else would do. You don't know what other people will do, so you use your own behavior as a guide.



In one experiment, we gave people different scenarios. Say you're in a bar and you want to buy someone a beer. Buying a beer for a stranger is not supposed to be a business expense, but to what extent would you submit this as an expense? If you live in New York, you're more likely to submit that beer in a San Francisco airport bar as a business expense than one in a New York airport bar.

The thing about business expense is interesting because there are lots of ways to justify that. If you say something like "Usually I drink two glasses. This time, I will only drink one," it's easy to justify. Why should my employer benefit from my choice to drink only one rather than my usual two? It's okay to give that other one to somebody else.

One consulting company told me they had a rule: if you stayed in the office after eight pm, you could order food and get a taxi or limo to pick you up. People quickly started waiting until eight, ordering food and a cab, then taking the food to go and leaving. That became the norm and the whole policy backfired. It became much more expensive for the clients because it wasn't something the consulting company was paying for.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Are people are more likely to be dishonest when they're further away from home? Or are there different perceived standards for what's okay to spend when you're on a business trip?

**Dan Ariely:** The mental accounting of saying it's part of the trip makes it easier to justify. We feel the rules are different away from home.

We did a study where we said "Imagine you and your spouse go for a cheap dinner every Tuesday in a Chinese restaurant. You eat a cheap reasonable meal and you drink cheap reasonable wine. One Tuesday, you go to an expensive French restaurant and drink their expensive French wine. It's five times more than your usual spending. Next Tuesday, how likely are you to go back to the French or Chinese restaurant?" We ran the scenario as a regular Tuesday, Valentine's Day, or some other specific event. If it was a regular Tuesday, they kept on going to the French restaurant. If it was Valentine's Day or some other special event, they went back to the Chinese restaurant.

When you're outside your hometown, you feel that whatever you do doesn't reflect on you in the same way. There is the "you" traveling in San Francisco and the "you" at home in New York. If you misbehave in New York, why not keep doing it the next day? If it's the "you" in San Francisco misbehaving, it has less bearing on the "you" back home. This is why that saying, "What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas" is so brilliant. It takes this belief and creates a social norm where we all agree that we are in this world — it's not just me.

Ron Friedman, Ph.D.: Based on the research you've done on honesty and dishonesty, do you have any tips, for the people watching this on how they can be sure that others are not lying to them? Are there steps we can take to make sure that others are being honest with us?

**Dan Ariely:** The standard approach is to think about punishment. We think that, people will behave much better with punishments in place. But we need to think about the other components, like moments of temptation and conflicts of interest.

Conflicts of interest are a beautiful thing. I can buy you a sandwich and a beer and you like me a little better and see life from my perspective. But if you're a politician and I'm a lob-



byist or you're a physician and I'm a drug rep or you're my client and I'm a dentist — those things become worse. Watch your physicians, financial advisors, dentists, and car mechanics. Not because they aren't good people, but because it's hard to overcome conflicts of interest. I try to have as few conflicts of interest as possible and deal with people that have no conflicts of interest.

Think about a financial advisor — would you prefer someone that gets a percentage of the assets they manage or receives a fixed amount up front? It's not painful to pay for somebody a fixed amount, but the conflicts of interest are much reduced.

The final thing I will say is that there is active lying and passive lying. If I ask a question explicitly, people rarely lie — it's hard to lie explicitly. But if I don't ask a question, it's easy for you to not volunteer information.

Think about your tax returns. At the end of the year, they ask if you bought anything from out of state that and did not pay taxes. You're supposed to declare it and pay state taxes. If you're allowed to leave that line blank, people feel comfortable doing that. If you have to write zero and say I declare that I bought nothing online this year that's a much more explicit lie. So, getting people to express themselves in a more clear way is important.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** How does Dan Ariely choose a car mechanic, given it's almost impossible to find one without a conflict of interest?

**Dan Ariely:** It's impossible. Sometimes, you accept that there is a conflict of interest.

The important thing in those situations is to get a second opinion whenever there's a big important decision. Clarify you won't have them do the work so that there's no conflict of interest. You're paying them for their opinion, nothing more.

Some people think that a relationship with somebody will protect them because they care more about you and so on. We did a study with where we looked at lots and lots of dental records. We found that, as the relationship with the patient increased, the dentist felt more free to suggest things that benefited the dentist but not the patient. Because of the increased trust, the patient was more likely to accept those suggestions. I'm not saying stop having long-term relationships, but the idea that having the same dentist or car mechanic for years means they're more likely to take care of us is dangerous. They're just as likely to take advantage of that relationship.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Interesting. You've studied decision making for many years. What advice would you give your twenty-year-old self about being happier, healthier, and more productive?

**Dan Ariely:** That's a tough question. I was injured when I was eighteen, so my twenties were a complex time. I have an interesting life, but I wonder if I would have wanted to know that. I probably would want to know that things would work out, but wouldn't want to know any specific details.

The biggest advice I would give myself is to set my own priorities for life instead of succumbing to the priorities of others. I've figured out that productivity and happiness intersect in what we want to accomplish and taking steps to get that done.

I get lots of emails, I have lots of projects, I take on too many things and for a long time, I



felt that exercising was just self-indulgent.

How could I take thirty minutes out of my day, three or four times each week, when I could answer seventeen more emails or work on another paper? I changed my mind in the last two years. I still think it's indulgent, but I did it. I wished I started a little earlier.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Why do you say that? What would have been the benefits?

**Dan Ariely:** Health and practice.

I still think exercising is self-indulgent. Some exercise is good, but some is self-indulgent. I've learned to enjoy it.

Running gives me time for myself. I put on my headset and listen to some podcasts. It's a fixed time I say, "I can do this." There's nothing to do, I can just listen to things I'm interested in. It's a kind of forced self-indulgence that is fulfilling because it has health benefits.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** That's terrific. Dan Ariely, thank you very much for your time.

**Dan Ariely:** My pleasure, great meeting and looking forward to a time when we could chat more. Take care.



## Practical Tips from Dan Ariely

- To overcome procrastination, pair unpleasant, but necessary tasks with a short-term reward. This will help you overcome your natural aversion to delayed gratification. For example, only allow yourself to watch your favorite television show when you are exercising or folding laundry.
- Budget your time like your money. When you are short on money, you pay your bills according to what is most necessary for your wellbeing. In this same way, allocate time to tasks according to how much closer they bring you to your goals.
- Consider opportunity cost when budgeting your time. When you spend your time on one activity, there are others you are not doing. Ask yourself “If I say ‘yes’ to this, what am I saying ‘no’ to?”
- When unsure whether you should accept an invitation or opportunity, try practicing “cancel elation.” Imagine if you accepted and later found out that the event or opportunity was cancelled. If you would feel relieved, it isn’t something you really want to do and should decline.
- Try changing up your tasks to avoid mental or physical fatigue while staying productive. For example, switch from a physical task to a mental task or from a creative task to a mechanical task. This way you can rest your body or one part of your mind while working with another.
- Develop rituals for going to bed and waking up to condition your body and mind for easy transitions. For example, use different toothpaste flavors for morning and night so your mind and body will instinctively react accordingly.
- To protect yourself from others’ dishonesty:
  - a.) Minimize the incentives for dishonest behavior. For example, choose to pay fixed, upfront fees for services rather than percentages or per-item fees.
  - b.) Ask direct questions. People find it easier to lie by omission than lying outright.
  - c.) Get second opinions on costly procedures or repairs.



## Michael Hyatt How to Have Your Best Year Ever

Michael Hyatt is the author of *Platform: Get Noticed in a Noisy World* (Thomas Nelson). It is a *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *USA Today* bestseller. He is the co-author of the forthcoming book *Living Forward: A Proven Plan to Stop Drifting and Get the Life You Want* (Baker Books) with Daniel Harkavy. Michael is the founder of 5 Days to Your Best Year Ever,™ Platform University®, and Get Published.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Michael Hyatt, thank you for being a part of this summit. I'm a fan of your work and I want to start by asking how you got where you are today.

You spent years working as a successful publisher until a visit to the emergency room led you to re-examine your life. Tell us what happened.

**Michael Hyatt:** I had taken on a high-stress job as the Chief Operating Officer of Thomas Nelson Publisher. I wasn't the CEO yet - that would come a few years later, but it was more stress, more pressure than I had ever known. I ended up in the emergency room thinking I was having a heart attack. They put me on the machines and did all the tests. The doctor said, "I don't know what's going on but your heart is fine."

I took three trips to the emergency room, with all the symptoms of a heart attack. Every time they put me on the treadmill and run me through the tests, they said I was fine. I finally went to a cardiologist who said "It's acid reflux; you're not having a heart attack, but tell me about your life. What's going on in your life?"

I told him about the stress of being the Chief Operating Officer. He said, "If you don't change the way you are living your life, you will end up in the ER with a real heart attack. I would strongly suggest you cut the stress in your life or you will end up been a statistic." That was the big change for me.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** What did you do differently after that conversation?

**Michael Hyatt:** I realized work wasn't everything.



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**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** What did you do differently after that conversation?

**Michael Hyatt:** I realized work wasn't everything.

For many people, work is the driving force of their life. It was for me, in part because my father was an alcoholic that drifted through life with no direction and I over corrected. I said, "By gosh, that will not happen to me." I was ambitious and driven to make a name for myself.

I decided to design my life and be intentional about what I want in my health, from my marriage, from my children, and in every aspect of my life. My work is still an important part, but not everything.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** You wrote that, if you want to have your best year ever, you should begin by asking not what do I hope to achieve, but how do I want to be remembered. How does that question help?

**Michael Hyatt:** If I died today, what would people say? If the only thing people can say is, "He was a hard worker," that would be tragic. I hope my life will count for more.

Imagining the end of your life and considering who would be at your funeral and how they would remember you can put your life into focus. Every day, we get closer to a destination. It's either a destination we choose or one we are drifting towards. We must be conscious of where we're going and design our lives to create a legacy.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** You argue it is better to define our long-term goals with a loved one or with a spouse rather than making those decisions on your own. How does doing it with your loved ones help?

**Michael Hyatt:** Marriage or any significant relationship is a journey. It is like taking a hike; one thing you must agree upon is where you are going. Otherwise, you will not stay together. It can be helpful for couples to set goals together.



My wife and I went through an exercise a couple weeks ago where we sat down and asked ourselves how to make 2016 our best year ever. What would that look like for our health? What would that look like for our relationships with each other, our children, and our grandchildren? What would that look like for my business and our finances?

When you do this, you often discover your spouse's vision differs from yours. Sometimes they are badly out of alignment; sometimes they're only slightly out of alignment.

Intimacy comes out of these deep conversations about the things that matter most. Nothing matters more than where we are going with our lives and where we'll end up.

A couple years ago, my wife said, "I want to take each of the grandkids on a weeklong vacation when they turn thirteen — just us and them."

I never considered that. I said, "Well, tell me how that works. To be honest that doesn't sound much fun."

She reframed it and said, "We want to create a memory for these kids they will never forget."

The more she talked about it, the more I got onboard. I said, "That is a great goal, let's put it on both of our lists, because there is a part each of us can do to make it happen."

When we set goals together, we create alignment.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I like that example.

How do you do it on a practical level? Let's say my wife and I are interested in doing the same thing. Do we each go off into a separate room, come up with a list, and sit down in the kitchen and compare notes? Are there questions we should ask as we compare the lists? How should we go about doing it?

**Michael Hyatt:** Well, I created a program called Five Days is Your Best Year Ever. Registrations are closed until December — I'm not promoting it.

My wife and I watch the videos from the program and go do our own work. You can each set your own goals, but I would be careful. Don't set only work related goals. There are at least ten major domains of life — spiritual, intellectual, emotional, physical, marital, parental, financial and so forth. Set goals for a full life individually, then come back and talk about it. Be open to the fact that this is wet cement. You want to validate with your spouse and get their input. You want their support, their feedback, their creativity and their accountability. When you get stuck or discouraged — or when you are out of ideas — they can help you achieve your goals

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I want to read you a quote from one of your articles: "The most important gift you can give your children is to love their mother."

Can you elaborate?

**Michael Hyatt:** It goes both ways, but when a couple has a loving, healthy, nurturing relationship kids feel secure. It gives them hope. That is a huge gift to give your kids, particularly in a world with many broken families and kids growing up in single-parent homes.

I intend no condemnation or shame for anybody that has been through that. I know it's



a horrific, terrible thing. But a great marriage doesn't just happen by accident. Important relationships take work.

We have been sold this bill of goods that love is something impossible, you either feel it or you don't. Love doesn't describe a set of emotions, it's a verb - it's something we do.

One thing our kids and even my employees look to is the quality of my marriage. We are teaching them daily how we treat the people who are most important to us in how we treat our spouse.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Do you have any recommendations for maintaining a secure and close relationship when much of your focus on work?

**Michael Hyatt:** You need to make time in your life for those meaningful conversations. I'm a doer, I'm an achiever. On the Strength Finders' Test, achiever is my number one. I love nothing more than to check things off my list. Relationships are not like that. Relationships need space to breathe. They need time for you to cultivate and nurture them.

My wife and I do what almost what everybody has heard of but few do. We do date night every Monday. It's just the two of us — no kids, nobody else. We sit together over dinner and get to know one another. I've been married thirty-seven years, but there is still so much I don't know about my wife. I think she would say the same thing about me.

You've got to make time. What gets on the calendar gets done. Put it on the calendar and make time for each other

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Why Monday night and not the weekend?

**Michael Hyatt:** We like quiet restaurants and they're always quieter on Mondays than they are on weekends.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** You'll probably get fresher foods as well.

Let's say you and your partner agree on those shared goals - what do you do next?

**Michael Hyatt:** Begin to carry out those goals or to execute against them.

I recommend that you stagger the goals so they don't have the same deadline. Making all your goals due on December 31st 2016 is a classic mistake. You have a false sense of security for the first nine months and then realize there are only three months for you to make everything happen. I'm never working on more than two or three goals at any one time.

Every morning, I look at my goals for the year. I don't go into detail, so it only takes about five minutes. They're hanging here on my wall. I check the list and I tick them off. For the two or three I'm tracking for this quarter, I ask myself what I can do today to get closer to accomplishing that goal.

My wife knows what my goals are, I know what her goals are, and we can support one another.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Yeah, and to be clear not everybody watching this is in a relationship. What do you recommend that they do to find someone else to hold them accountable?



**Michael Hyatt:** That's a great question because I think accountability is the missing element in setting goals.

There are essential pieces to effective goal setting. The first piece is clarity, which comes from writing the goal down in a specific format.

The second piece is visibility. How many times have you set goals and they end up in a notebook or desk drawer and you never look at them again? I keep goals visible. They're on Evernote and pinned to my wall. I've got a screensaver with rotating images for each one of my goals.

The third part, which is the point of your question, is accountability. If you're not married, you need a community that can help you keep your goals.

We created a private Facebook group for the VIP edition of the Five Days to Your Best Day Ever course. There are a couple thousand people supporting and encouraging one another. You could start a mastermind group. There could even be someone at work that holds you accountable. I don't believe in sharing all my goals with everybody in the world, but I don't believe in keeping them close to the vest. I believe in selectively sharing them with people willing to be a resource and hold me accountable.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Give us an idea of the direction you'd like the next year of your life to take.

It may not go through the process of writing the goals but we have some idea. Maybe we want a promotion, maybe we were hoping to write a book, maybe we want to be a better parent or a better partner to our spouse but then life gets in the way. Things happen and it's difficult to focus on those long-term objectives when we have many short-term emergencies we are trying to manage.

How do you recommend people stay focused on those long-term objectives?

**Michael Hyatt:** I would definitely recommend writing them down.

We've all heard about this study done at Yale or Harvard, depending on the version you've heard. People wrote down their goals in 1953 and thirty years later the top three percent accomplished more and so on.

That study never happened.

But there was a good study at Dominican University in California by Dr. Gayle Matthews. She discovered the act of writing down your goals increases the likelihood of you achieving that goal by 42%.

If you do nothing else — if you don't have a follow-up system or a strategy — write down your goals. It creates a huge lever in accomplishing them, in part because it produces that clarity.

And I forgot your question, what was your question?

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** The question is what do you do when life gets in the way?

**Michael Hyatt:** You must be clear on the goal, you need to write it down, they must be visible, and then you need a review process so they don't fall away. You need an account-



ability factor built in. Otherwise, we get distracted and they become invisible to us or we hit what I call the messy middle.

The messy middle is when you're too invested to quit but don't know if you have the resources to finish —you're stuck in the middle. When you are pursuing a big goal, it's almost inevitable you'll hit the messy middle. It looks like you will not win and you're in a crisis. To get through the messy middle, it's critical to identify your why for each goal. Ask yourself "What's at stake?" The time to do that is not when you get to the messy middle. The time to do that is when you are planning the goals.

The way I teach goal setting is to identify your why's or key motivations as a series of bullets for each goal. Why does this matter? What's at stake if I don't accomplish this? What's at stake if I do accomplish this?

Get crystal clear on those questions so you can remember when you get to the messy middle and want to quit or want to walk off the field before the whistle blows.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Let's make that concrete for a second. Let's say I'm in the middle of writing a book proposal, and it gets hard or I'm not able to find a publisher, and I say to myself "Why am I doing this?" I can see that as being a source of motivation but I can see that as being a source of pressure and frustration. How would you respond to someone who is saying thinking about the why only makes me more frustrated?

**Michael Hyatt:** We must distinguish between good stress and bad stress. Not all stress is good, and not all stress is bad.

There's good stress — today my trainer worked me hard in my lower body. I want to be in the best shape possible into my late into my years and that is why I go through that stress of working out with a trainer three days a week.

It will put pressure on you, but it keeps the vision alive. What would publishing a book make possible for you?

It's the same thing when I write a book. I've got a book coming out this spring and I'm working on another one right now. My list of motivations makes everything easier. When I was writing my last book, Platform - Get Noticed in a Noisy World, I said that if I can get this book done and on the New York Times list, then I will get tons of requests for speaking engagements. If I get this book done, others will see me as an authority in my subject category. If I get this book done, I will open all kinds of opportunities for consulting and for coaching and create a membership site.

If I don't finish this book I won't feel good about myself. I know I can do this book. I know it's important. There are thousands of people I won't be able to help if I don't get this book done.

So, all that stuff I jot down under the goal and would review it.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** You have an eBook that's available free on your website called Save Ten Hours on Your Work Week. In that eBook, you offer recommendations for staying focused and maintaining your focus over the course of the workday. Could you share some of your favorite tips?

**Michael Hyatt:** Here's one that is surprising for most people — managing your energy. When you're energetic, you think you can leap over buildings with a single bound — you



believe you can tackle anything. When you're tired and drained from not getting enough sleep or being sick, you're stressed and even the smallest task looks insurmountable. The most important thing for me to be productive is to manage my energy. That starts with sleep. There's nothing more important than sleep if you want to be productive, focused, and get important stuff done. I get seven to eight hours of sleep every night. I take a nap — usually for twenty minutes — every day. I'll take a nap after I get off this call because I want to be focused. I want to be energetic and sleep is critically important, as is diet, exercise, and mindset.

There's another book I would recommend that people read called *The Power of Full Engagement*. It's written by a performance coach, have you read it?

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Jim Lehrer and Tony Schwartz.

**Michael Hyatt:** A performance coach for Olympians and just talks about being an Olympian and in business and that begins by managing our energy and I think sleep is a key part.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** You have suggestions for preventing emails from taking over our day and hijacking our attention, how do we better manage our email?

**Michael Hyatt:** Since I wrote that eBook, I've largely given up email. Not completely because I have to use it with some people. But inside of my company we use Slack. Are you familiar with Slack?

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Yes.

**Michael Hyatt:** I love it. Unfortunately, we still use email for correspondence outside the company. I try to limit looking at my emails to twice a day. There is rarely anything urgent — the urgent stuff happens inside my team. I have two email addresses — my super top-secret email address that only my family and colleagues have and my public email address which goes into a help system managed by my assistant. That cuts out about 80% of the emails I would normally receive. I'm only dealing with the stuff from the people that are most important.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** What do you recommend for someone — let's say one of your employees — how do they better manage their emails?

**Michael Hyatt:** I would say it's good to have two email addresses. That makes it easier to at least prioritize. You give email sent to your private email a higher priority than email sent to your public address.

I use email templates extensively. When I was in the publishing world, I realized that people asked the same questions over and over. I jotted down these questions, and I realized I was writing out the same answers to the same thirty-five questions. I thought, "What if I took the answers to those thirty-five questions, drafted a careful response to each one, and I give them my best resources?" I found that you can make these email signatures if you don't have a template in your email client. Just create a signature with each one of them and name them something you will remember.

I used to get a lot of requests to look at book proposals. The short answer was "No," but that left people with no place to go. I crafted a response that let them down easily. I said, "No I can't do that but here are resources and links to those resources." When I got that question, I would put in the email signature with a thorough response and give them a little person-



alization on the front end. It took a fraction of the time of writing out the whole email.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I didn't understand what you meant at the beginning, but now I think I do. You're saying, rather than having the templates and saving them as a Word document, you program them as email signatures and then you use them as template ready to go?

**Michael Hyatt:** Yeah, you pull down your signature list and grab the one suitable for the situation.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Okay, one last question.

You say in the book one of the best things you can do to maximize performance is learning how to quit. What do you mean?

**Michael Hyatt:** I mean there are a lot of things we get into that we later realize are not worth finishing.

I come from the book-publishing world. I've published thousands of books and written eight myself. I can tell you from that experience most books are not worth finishing. Most books would be great essays, but the publisher and author padded them out so they can charge you twenty, twenty-five, thirty bucks for a full book. But then that book is not worth finishing. I used to feel guilty about that. Many people say "I'm not a reader" because they have trouble finishing books. My rule is this: I will read until I lose interest and then I'm done. I go on to the next book. It's not like college where you're reading to regurgitate it in an exam. I'm reading to stimulate my thinking and for the synthesis, not the retention. I'm just trying to synthesize the ideas and use them as raw material I can use to devise my own frameworks, my own ideas, my own creative stuff and I read till I'm done.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Do you feel that way about fiction as well?

**Michael Hyatt:** Definitely but I'm very careful about picking fiction and I don't quit on many fiction books. I've quit on a lot of business books.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** This is an interesting line of questions you have opened. You used to work as a publisher and you got to read a lot of business books — do you have any tips for people who enjoy business books and want to do it more quickly?

**Michael Hyatt:** This will sound crazy, but I listen to almost every book I read, whether I actually read it or not. I belong to Audible, which belongs to Amazon. They have unabridged books there and their little Audible app for the iPhone is fantastic.

That is game changing. You can take your workout or commute and get dual purpose out of it. I can work out, listen to a book; commute, listen to a book and it's a great way to feed your mind while doing something with your body. But, here was the killer – I got this idea from my friend Jeff Cohens, I listened to my books at three times the normal speed...

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Alvin and the Chipmunks dictate them all?

**Michael Hyatt:** Audible has this compression technology that doesn't raise the pitch of the voice. It sounds just as good, just a little fast. Try it for at least twenty minutes — that's the key. When you first try it, you go "No way, I cannot process that fast." But your brain can process much faster than somebody can talk. When you listen to normal speed, your mind wanders. When you listen to it at three times speed, your mind does not wander. I



tested myself on this and my retention is better at that speed than it is at normal speed. Try it — you might only get down to two times but when you can burn through some books quickly at three times speed.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Interesting. I want to ask just one closing question.

If I was to meet you on the elevator and we have thirty seconds and I ask you how do I have my best year ever, what would you say?

**Michael Hyatt:** The way you have your best year ever is to design it. Take responsibility for it. See it as a possibility and don't wait around hoping that somebody else will plan your best year ever. You've got to embrace that concept and make it happen. Anybody can make it happen, they have to own it.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Michael Hyatt, this has been terrific; thank you very much for joining us.

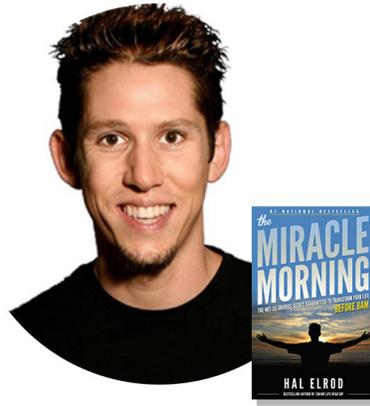
**Michael Hyatt:** Thanks Ron, good to be with you.



## Practical Tips from Michael Hyatt

- Ask yourself how you want to be remembered. If you died today, what would people say at your funeral? Do you want them to remember you as a hard worker, or something more?
- If you have a spouse or partner, make an effort to include him or her when planning your goals. This is like planning a hike. If you don't agree on the destination, you'll end up on separate paths.
- Stagger the deadlines of your goals so that they don't have the same due date. If all your goals have deadlines on Dec. 31st, you're likely to spend most of the year complacent and scramble the last few months. Instead, have goals you track each month or quarter. Each day, look at the goals with the nearest due dates and plan how you will get closer to reaching them.
- Include these three essential elements when setting goals:
  - a.) Clarity – Write your goals out by hand. Be clear about exactly what you want to accomplish. Michael uses a specific format when writing his goals to achieve clarity.
  - b.) Visibility – Keep your goals somewhere that you will always see them and review them regularly. Michael's screensaver has rotating images to remind him of his goals.
  - c.) Accountability – If you set your goals with a spouse or partner, they will help you stay accountable. Otherwise, join or form a group to support or encourage each other. Another option is to share specific goals with potential stakeholders or those who may lend resources to the goal.
- Maintain two email accounts — one public and one private. By only giving your private email to the most important people, you will make prioritizing your emails much simpler.
- Create templates or forms for the messages and replies you send most often. The more you can copy and paste your emails, the more time you can save and stay productive.
- Know when to quit and recognize when things are just not worth finishing. If you are working through a project and book just to say you finished, but your initial motivations are no longer valid or being met, it's time to walk away.
- Play audiobooks at twice to three times the normal speed and/or compression technology to “read” books more efficiently.





## Hal Elrod

### How to Wake Up with More Energy on Less Sleep

Hal Elrod is the #1 bestselling author of *The Miracle Morning: The Not-So-Obvious Secret Guaranteed to Transform Your Life... (Before 8am)*. Hal has appeared on dozens of TV and radio shows across the country, and he's been featured in many books, including *The Education of Millionaires*, the all-time bestselling *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series, *Cutting Edge Sales*, *The 800-Pound Gorilla of Sales*, *Releasing the Chains*, *Living College Life In the Front Row*, and *The Author's Guide To Building An Online Platform*.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Hal Elrod, thank you for being a part of this. I enjoy your work, and what got me interested in your book is the subtitle: “The Not-So-Obvious Secret Guaranteed To Transform Your Life Before 8am”. What is the secret that can transform my life before 8am?

**Hal Elrod:** “Secret” is obviously an over-used term. I threw in “not-so-obvious secret” to change it up. I didn’t come up with that “not-so-obvious part — I learned that from Dan Kennedy.

I was in going through a rough time in 2008 when the economy crashed. After a six-month long downward spiral where I lost my house, I was in the worst shape of my life, and on and on, I started researching things. I told myself “I got to be proactive. What are the world’s most successful people do that I’m not doing?” The thing I kept discovering everywhere I looked — on Forbes, Huffington Post, or Oprah.com, was having a morning ritual. Most of the world’s successful swear by morning rituals.

In contrast, most people have this limiting belief that they’re not a morning person. I was one of them.

And I decided if I want my life to be different I have to do something different first. I decided to wake up an hour earlier and focus that first hour of my day on personal development. I focused on developing my knowledge, my skills, my beliefs, and my habits. I start every day at a level ten to become a level ten person and create that level ten life we all want but few have.



The not-so-obvious secret is waking up early and dedicating the first part of your day to personal development and becoming the person you need to be to create everything you ever wanted for your life.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I want to read you a quote from your book. You write: “How you wake up each day dramatically affects your level of success in life.”

What’s the right way to wake up every day?

**Hal Elrod:** The right way to wake up every day is by embracing the day. Most people resist the act of waking up, which is resisting life. The alarm clock goes off and they go “Oh no, not already.” When the alarm clock goes off in the morning that is life’s first gift to us. Life’s first gift and life’s first opportunity, and for many people life’s first challenge. How are you going to respond to that first gift, that first opportunity, that first challenge given to you?

T. Harv Eker, in his book *Secrets of the Millionaire Mind*, said: “How you do anything is how you do everything.” If you start the day by hitting the snooze button, you’re sending a message to yourself and to the universe that says you don’t have enough discipline to get out of bed in the morning, let alone the discipline be happy and healthy and wealthy and create the things you want in life.

When you start the day by hitting the snooze button, you’re starting the day with procrastination, and a lack of self-discipline.

The opposite of that is setting your intentions before you go to bed. Before you go to bed, you decide how you will feel in the morning. Don’t leave it up to chance. Program your body with the mind-body connection to wake up every morning excited and energized, no matter how many hours of sleep you get.

As a kid growing up, Christmas was my favorite time of year. It was never hard to wake up Christmas morning. If you never celebrated Christmas, think about a vacation, your birthday, your first day of school, or any day that you looked forward to waking up.

On those days you look forward to, is it hard to get yourself out of bed in the morning?

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I get what you’re saying, having something to look forward to will energize you and you’ll want to get up. That’s fair, but a lot of us have great intentions for what we will do tomorrow. Then 6am rolls around and we prefer to stay under the covers to get a bit more rest.

In your book, you say you’ve got a five-step, snooze-proof wake-up strategy. What do I do if I get up in the morning, it’s Winter (I live in Rochester, it’s kind of gray), and I want to stay in bed? How do I defeat that?

**Hal Elrod:** It starts the night before. I’m glad you asked this because the five-step, snooze-proof wake-up strategy is the most important chapter in the entire book. It’s also the shortest one. It’s four pages.

I was giving a speech to a group of fifty-five CEO’s in New York City, for Entrepreneurs’ Organization. I was speaking to their chapter and the CEO of Lawline.com, David Sherman, was introducing me. He said: “I want to make sure I tell you about these steps before I bring Hal up, because I don’t know if he will mention it, but these were the game changers.” He said “My entire life, I’ve never been a morning person. I hit the snooze button almost every day of my entire life.” He said one of the five steps, moving the alarm clock across the



room, was the game changer and he's been a morning person since the first day he did that. I'll run through at least a few of the steps.

Number one is to set your intention before you go to bed. I touched on this earlier, but in the book I give you a bedtime affirmation. It's word-for-word what I said to myself to become a morning person. The night before you go to bed, you read through this statement about how many hours of sleep you're about to get, about how you will feel in the morning. You're not leaving it up to chance. You are taking responsibility for how you will feel in the morning. You're creating it.

That's step one — setting your intention before bed. I always say a Miracle Morning begins with a miracle evening, right? It begins the night before with those intentions you set.

Step two is to move your alarm clock across the room. That's what Dan Sherman called the game-changer. Most people keep their alarm clock within arm's reach. Nine out of ten times when I'm half-asleep and I hear a buzzing sound, I reach over and I stop that annoying sound and I fall back asleep.

If your alarm clock's across the room, you can't do that. You have to stand up, and you go from half-asleep to waking up enough to get out of bed and walk across the room. By then, you're up and your blood is moving. It's easier to get your Miracle Morning started because you're already out of bed.

The third step is to drink a full glass of water first thing in the morning. We're dehydrated when we wake up — it's been six, seven eight or more hours since the last time we had water. But we don't think of it that way, and we wonder why we're tired. I have a full glass of water next to my alarm clock. I turn off the alarm and chug the entire glass to get rehydrated. I brush my teeth, get ready for the day, go downstairs, fill up my second glass, and make my coffee. Most people start their day with a cup of coffee, which is a diuretic. That dehydrates us even more. We spike and crash and have a miserable morning. Start your day with water.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Interesting. You also have a fascinating suggestion that a reader in your community brought up. He went to Home Depot and figured out a way to get his blinds to open every morning before it was time for him to get up. Do you have any other suggestions like that? Any...

**Hal Elrod:** We have over thirty thousand members of our Miracle Morning Facebook group and they're always suggesting and supporting each other and giving suggestions. I've seen ones where they had their bedroom lights on a timer to turn on before their alarm clock goes off so that it's bright inside. People in cold areas put their heater on a timer. That way it's not tempting to stay under the covers because it's warm in their bedroom and warm in the rest of their house.

Those are a few useful tips.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** The flip side is turning your heating down before you go to bed. You want to make it more enticing to be under the covers at ten o'clock or eleven o'clock.

**Hal Elrod:** Great point.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I think you're making a great point of pre-planning, being intentional, and thinking about how you'll feel in the morning before you go to sleep. But it's dif-



difficult for a lot of us to get to bed on time and, as you pointed out, having a Miracle Morning requires having a miracle evening the night before. It's tricky sometimes, especially with young kids. I know you have young kids at home.

What time do you get to bed every night, and how do you stick to that routine?

**Hal Elrod:** I go to bed almost every night at 9:30pm. I wake up at 3:30am though, which is why I go to bed early. It's a habit, it's easy. I don't think about it anymore, it's my routine. But when I started this I went to bed at midnight, one, two, it was all over the place. And consistency is key. Life's a lot easier when you do things at the same times each day, or each day of the week. It becomes automatic; it's a ritual.

What I recommend to people that have trouble getting to bed on time or lose track of time, is first you've got to decide that you're willing to try this for thirty days. A thirty-day challenge is crucial to change the habit. And if you're wondering: is this for me? I will tell you a couple things: number one, I surveyed our members, Miracle Morning Practitioners if you will, because they asked me what percentage of the readers of the Miracle Morning and the community members were already morning people before they read the book. And I didn't know the answer.

My assumption was the majority were already morning people, I don't know. Seventy-two percent had deemed, they said they had never in their entire lives been able to become a morning person until the Miracle Morning. Seventy-two percent, tens of thousands of people the book has kind of converted, if you will. What was your original question? I got off on a tangent.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** How do you get to bed on time?

**Hal Elrod:** How do you get to bed on time?

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** How do you stick to nine thirty every night?

**Hal Elrod:** I set what I call bedtime alarms. One bedtime goes off an hour before, reminding me to wind down and get ready for bed in the next thirty minutes. Twenty or thirty minutes before bed, the second alarm goes off and tells me that it's time to go upstairs and get ready for bed.

Again, it's a habit. You're deciding you'll give up that late night time when science has proven our brain is tired. We are mentally fatigued; it's not our ideal time. Even people that think they're night owls.

Do you know who Pat Flynn is? Smart Passive Income?

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Sure.

**Hal Elrod:** Pat Flynn has been my mentor. I've learned from him, now we've become good friends.

He had me on his show and he said, "Hal, everyone keeps recommending the Miracle Morning." Pat is extremely successful. Seven figure business, great marriage, he's a great dad, and nothing's broken. He said, "Convince me I should give up being a night owl and should try this morning ritual."

I'm thinking, "How am I going to convince somebody that already has this seven-figure



business? Everything is great for him, what am I going to do to convince him?”

To keep a long story short, at the end of the interview he said “Maybe I’m missing out on a level of productivity by not waking up a bit earlier and starting my day with that intention.” He switched over, and he’s done multiple episodes on how the Miracle Morning has changed his life. He said at a minimum, it has multiplied his productivity fourfold.

The idea is to get to bed on time set a couple reminders in your phone, and until it becomes a habit.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I agree with everything you’re saying. But a lot of folks spend much of their day cracking the whip on themselves, and trying to stay focused. The evening rolls around, and it’s the only time of day where they feel like they can have recess. Their kids are in bed and they can go on Netflix or play video games.

It requires a lot of self-control to lie down in an empty room or in a quiet room when you could watch some entertaining shows.

How do you get that self-control when your self-control is more depleted than at any point in the day?

**Hal Elrod:** It’s funny you said Netflix. I ran a call for my group-coaching members yesterday, and one question was how do you get yourself to do the things to get what you want? I used Netflix as the example. If you’ve got a habit of binge watching Netflix until two in the morning, ask yourself is that serving you? Is it getting you closer to your goals or the life you want?

It’s not about an all-or-nothing mentality; it’s about control. It’s about moderation. And it’s setting a Netflix time where I’m allowed to watch two shows each night. I’m not allowed to go eight shows deep into the series. I’m allowed to watch one or two episodes each night.

I’ll tell you my schedule. I get off work at 4pm...

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** What time do you start?

**Hal Elrod:** 4am, but...

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** You work twelve hours a day.

**Hal Elrod:** Kind of. I do my Miracle Morning from 4am to 5am; it’s not work. I do meditation, affirmations, visualization, exercise, reading and journaling. Those are the six practices of the Miracle Morning. From 5am to 6am I do an extended period of reading. I write from 6am to 7am, working on the next books and so forth.

My workday is from 8am until 4pm and I take a two-hour break in the middle. I play basketball every day; I go have lunch, that’s my day. 8 to 4, with a two-hour break in the middle. That’s work.

Dinner’s at 5pm. I play with my kids between 4pm and 5pm, and again between 6pm and 7pm. Bath time is at 7pm, then more time with the kids. They go to bed about 7:30pm. From 7:30pm to 9:30pm I can spend quality time with my wife. We can watch TV or we can read or we can do whatever we want, and then I’m in bed by 9:30.

I’m not missing out on any of that quality time, I just don’t indulge all night.



**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** What about the rest of the Elrods? Are they all Miracle Mornings? Are the kids getting up at 4 in the morning?

**Hal Elrod:** If they are it's not a good day.

I met Robert Kiyosaki, Rich Dad Poor Dad, at an event. I gave him a copy of Miracle Morning. I hesitated. I had it under the table, and I'm thinking, "Robert is a multi-millionaire, he's sixty-five years old, he's not looking for a book to change his life. I don't know if I should give it to him." Then I remembered that you miss all the shots you don't take. I said, "Hey Robert, I'm a huge fan, here you go."

Three weeks later, I got an email from his assistant that said he was a huge fan of Miracle Morning, it was changing his life, and his marriage was improving; all these amazing things, and he wanted to have me on his show.

And... Where was I going with that?

Oh, we're filming a documentary, the Miracle Morning movie, and I was visiting. I was filming Robert for the movie and he wanted his wife to be in the film because they both do the Miracle Morning together. The footage we got of them was inspiring. I brought it home to my night-owl wife who had never done the Miracle Morning in five years. I showed her what they had said about how the Miracle Morning enabled them to grow together when most couples grow apart. Because they grow together every day with the Miracle Morning they'll never grow apart.

We did it together a few weeks ago, and it's been life-changing, marriage changing if you will. Most of the family is on their own schedule. My wife started doing the Miracle Morning, and it's been profound the impact it's having in our marriage.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** That's an interesting point, and that might make for an interesting sequel for you. I can tell you from psychological research, going to bed on time is just one of the best things a couple can do.

You can get romantic, but if you're just lying there together you have some of your deepest conversations. You're free of distractions and you can pay attention to one another.

**Hal Elrod:** That's the same on the flip side, which is what happened during our Miracle Morning. As we're reading our affirmations out loud to each other, we're discussing them. Then we're reading books and discussing what we learned. We're journaling what we're grateful for together. And then the conversations that ensued.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I've heard people recommend going the opposite way by doing the most difficult thing first in the morning. From your perspective, what's the right approach? Do you start with the most enjoyable thing, or start with the most difficult thing?

**Hal Elrod:** Both. The Miracle Morning is pleasurable, and it makes you excited to wake up. Most people say it feels like Christmas every day. I'm excited to get out of bed. I do my reading, and then I do my writing. Writing is my frog. You know Brian Tracy's Eat The Frog First Thing in the Morning — do the hardest thing. For me, writing is one of the hardest things. It's the hardest thing for me to do. It's also one of the first things I do. The Miracle Morning primes your mindset and your body. You get blood and oxygen to the brain. You're doing affirmations that remind you of your highest priorities, your goals, and what you're committed to do to achieve those goals. They're reinforcing the beliefs you need to



be your best self.

You start the day by putting yourself at a level ten, and then you go into the hardest task of your day. I recommend starting your day with personal development because it's one of the easiest things to put off. Then go right into the hardest thing you need to do right after your Miracle Morning when you're in that peak state.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Let's say I'm sold on this Miracle Morning philosophy. What is the first thing I should do right now to take advantage of my mornings?

**Hal Elrod:** People ask me that question a lot after I finish a speech.

My answer is "Do not wait a day to start this. Don't wait until you've read the book. Don't wait until you've mastered the practices."

There are two parts to the essence of the Miracle Morning.

Number one is waking up before you have to be up. Most people set their alarm for the last possible moment they can wake up without getting fired, divorced, having their children taken away from them, etc. I call that a mediocre morning.

Instead, you say "If I have to be up at 6, I'll set my alarm for 5:30 and wake up with discipline, energy, motivation, and intention and purpose. Not when I have to, but when I want to.

Right now, move your phone's alarm back thirty minutes. You could do sixty minutes but start with thirty.

The other part is personal development — activities that allow you to become a better version of the person you were when you went to bed the night before.

Wake up thirty minutes earlier to develop the habit of discipline and focus those first thirty minutes of your day on some form of personal development. It could be meditation, reading, affirmations, journaling, or anything else that moves you towards your goals.

Most people spend their first Miracle Mornings reading the Miracle Morning. As they get into it, they say "Oh okay here's the simple way to start with meditation, I'll do that."

They integrate these practices of the Miracle Morning one at a time.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** You start your book by talking about a personal experience that helped you discover the secret to being successful and being productive.

It might not be the story people are expecting. Can you share a bit about that?

**Hal Elrod:** When I was twenty years old, I was one of the top salespeople for Cutco Cutlery. I was giving a speech one night at a conference, and I got my first standing ovation. It was a special, memorable moment and memorable night.

When I was driving home that night, a full-size Chevy truck — much larger than my little Ford Mustang — got on the freeway going the wrong way. They told me that the truck and I were each going roughly seventy miles an hour when we hit each other head-on.

I don't remember it, but airbags exploded, windshield shattered, and my car spun off the drunk driver. The driver three car lengths behind me didn't have time to even swerve.



He crashed into the door of my car at seventy miles an hour and destroyed the entire left side of my body. I broke eleven bones in this side of my body, I suffered permanent brain damage, punctured my lung, ruptured my spleen, died at the scene of the accident. I was clinically dead for six minutes.

And six days later I came out of a coma. They said I would never walk again. The greatest lesson I learned was personal responsibility. I could have said “Oh I don’t deserve this, I’m a good person,” but those are all victim thoughts that don’t serve me. Whether you’ve had a car accident or people apply that to the government, people project. They act like it’s up to someone else to take care of them. They say “My boss isn’t treating me right, my spouse isn’t treating me right, the government’s not doing things right.” You have to take responsibility for your life, your happiness, and your success. The moment we take responsibility for everything in our life is the moment we gain the power to change anything in our life.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Great stuff. Well Hal Elrod, thank you for your time.

**Hal Elrod:** Thanks man, Ron I appreciate it



## Practical Tips from Hal Elrod

- Wake up early each morning and dedicate the first hour of your day to personal development.
- Each night before bed, set your intentions for the next day to give yourself something to look forward to and make it easier to get up in the morning.
- Put your alarm clock on the opposite side of the room from your bed. Once you've gotten up to turn off the alarm, momentum is on your side to keep going and start your day.
- Drink at least one glass of water in the morning, before anything else. We wake up dehydrated after hours without liquid and need to rehydrate.
- Set reminder alarms to “count down” to bedtime. Hal has one alarm go off to remind him to wind down an hour before he goes to bed and another thirty minutes before he wants to be asleep to remind him to get ready for bed.
- Spend the first hour of your day planning and prepping yourself, and then tackle your biggest challenges while you're in that peak state. Once you've achieved those major victories, the rest of your day is much easier.



## Carrie Wilkerson How to Start a Business While Working for Someone Else

Carrie Wilkerson is a best-selling author, an international speaker, an award-winning podcaster, and a sought-after radio guest. She has been featured on CNN and Fox Business News and named by Forbes as a top small business influencer. Carrie has consulted marketing and launch teams of Dr. John Maxwell, Zig Ziglar, Google small business and other influential business leaders on business strategies and current trends.

Carrie speaks from the experience of a former corporate clock puncher, high school teacher, direct sales representative, growth consultant, and business coach. She got her “big start” in high school bagging groceries for tips on a military base. Now she gives tips to over one hundred thousand men and women as The Barefoot Executive™.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Carrie Wilkerson, thanks so much for joining us. In your book Barefoot Executive you describe job security as being a myth, and I’m curious: what do you mean by that?

**Carrie Wilkerson:** My exact words were: The Easter Bunny and the Tooth Fairy and so many of those things we love to believe in are fairy tales. They’re fun to believe in, and we get a hope from them, but they’re not true.

The only person at a company or business with 100% security is the owner. Everybody else is optional. I don’t want to say it’s foolish to put your hopes, dreams, and aspirations into a job for someone else because it’s the way we grew up, but I would say you can’t put 100% of your hope there. Job security doesn’t exist.

There are plenty of examples in recent history: Enron, the collapse of the banking industry, and so many others. Everybody knows somebody who put their life’s work into a job and woke up with a pink slip in their hand.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** And you make the point that the educational system conditions us to be job-focused and employee-minded, and that that sort of thinking is holding us back.



Why do you think that's the case?

**Carrie Wilkerson:** Let me be clear — I'm not anti-school. I'm a certified teacher. I used to teach in the public school system, my kids have done well in school. We love education and we believe you should keep learning. But the focus in schools is on making good grades, to get into a good college, to get a good job. Nobody ever says talks about starting a great business, or becoming independent.

This is how our society works, and it's a broken system. It was created to take kids out of the fields and mines, to teach them to read and write, and aspire to something better. Our kids aren't in the fields or mines anymore. Unless your chosen career requires certification or licensing, like medicine, law, or finance, long-term schooling is not your best path to freedom — financially or otherwise.

We must teach our children and peers there can be a different way. Starting your own business doesn't make you rogue. Questioning the employment system doesn't make you a rebel. It means you think out of the box in which our societal conditioning has placed us.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So what do you recommend people do if they want to dip their toe into starting a side business? Where do they start?

**Carrie Wilkerson:** I love the we call it a trend. This has been going on for twenty or thirty years.

With that said, I love the trend of people talking on a "side hustle" or a part-time gig. It's a privileged mindset — there are people who work two and three jobs out of necessity. They don't call that their side hustle; they call it paying rent and buying groceries. I love the trend of professionals, or those of us doing what we thought we would always do or even love our jobs, start something on the side. It may be something you can test your hobby out for cash. Maybe you're like Mrs. Fields Cookies, selling these great cookies that everyone compliments. Look at your skills and interests and build on those.

I am not an advocate giving notice to your boss or walking out to start something tomorrow upon which your livelihood depends. That's just irresponsible in this climate. Dip your toe in with something part time.

There's a neat site called vocation vacations. You take time off to explore different possible career paths. I love the idea of doing culinary school in France on your vacation, or interning for somebody taking a sabbatical.

Your passion is not always going to be monetizable. I'll never say, "Find your passion and the money will follow." I don't believe that. See what's working for other people, what excites you, and what's manageable with what you're already doing. This makes it much easier to take a risk. Your mortgage and bills are covered, so you can wade in and see what you can do.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Can you give us some examples of businesses a person can start with little capital on their own?

**Carrie Wilkerson:** Service businesses are the best for that.

My friend and his wife paid off sixty grand in debt over a summer and fall mowing and edging lawns. Their only investment was a lawnmower they bought at a yard sale. They both had full-time jobs and two little kids sometimes playing on the lawn with them while they



were working. But there was little capital investment, just lots of effort. Most service businesses need little capital investment — your skill set is your product.

One of my brothers is a financial analyst and specializes in certain software. On the weekends, he consults for other companies that want his expertise but don't want to bring somebody in full time. When you do the math, he makes more on the weekends than his full-time job. He has no capital outlay. You can do childcare, cooking for people, keep kids, graphic design or coding if you have the skills, you can do social media... there are a lot of options.

You might not have the money for a Silicon Valley-type startup, but there are so many things you can do with nothing more than your knowledge, what you can easily access, and what you have on-hand.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** And what are common mistakes you see people making when they're starting a side business?

**Carrie Wilkerson:** Number one would be spending too much money on new equipment or software.

Number two would be thinking they need to receive certifications in everything. Monetize what you know and learn as you earn. Stop delaying with expenses and "needs" If you want to be a coach, coach from your experience. You don't need certifications to start.

Number one is spending too much; number two is waiting until you're qualified enough. Number three would be chasing after something because somebody else is doing it. If wealth motivated us, we might try to do exactly what someone like Donald Trump does. The problem is that we lack the experience and contacts to do what Trump is doing right now. Even Trump didn't start out by doing what he does now. Don't chase what somebody else is doing just because they're doing it.

Number four would be chasing something because it's trendy. If somebody who doesn't like social media becomes a social media manager because it's a hot and trendy career right now, they won't enjoy it, it won't be natural to them, and it will be a mess.

The other mistake is that people over-estimate what they can do in one year and underestimate what they can do in five.

A huge mistake people make is not being patient. Saying they'll make six figures in six weeks or create software and sell a company for fifteen million because someone else did it. You need patience. Desperation is good, but desperation for survival can sink you.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Another suggestion is to find a mastermind group. What is a mastermind group, and how do you go about finding the right one for you?

**Carrie Wilkerson:** It can be called a networking group, peer accountability, or so many other possible names. We get the term mastermind from Napoleon Hill's book *Think and Grow Rich*, where the power of the minds collaborating is bigger than the individual mind.

Working at home can be lonely and full of second-guessing. Even if you are a decisive go-getter like me, you can still second guess yourself, and berate yourself.

A mastermind is a group of like-minded people working on similar goals and aspirations that bounces things off of each other. You can challenge each other and be accountable to



each other. These groups range from free to very expensive. I've been part of groups that were over twenty grand a year, and I've reached out to four or five people to have coffee and talk once a month.

It's important to be around business-minded people. When you've been in an educational system that grooms you a certain way and you suddenly divert, you'll get questioned, you'll get ridiculed, and you'll get berated in certain subtle ways. You need a group of people like believers in different faiths need the church. The church body helps support them: women's groups for certain things, support groups after you lose someone you love. This is like a business support group.

So don't get hung up on the term mastermind. You need like-minded people growing in the same direction as you that understand you want something different for your life.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** And another suggestion you make is to find a coach. What type of coach are you looking for, and how do you find the right one?

**Carrie Wilkerson:** Let me back up a little, because I wrote the book several years ago and my thinking has changed a bit. I would rather say, let's start with a mentor first. Mentor slash coach. And we can almost use those interchangeably. And the first thing many people say is "Oh I can't afford a coach," or "Oh I can't afford a mentor." I pick one person a year to follow whether I invest with them or not. I follow their blog, buy their book, and/or watch their interviews. I pick that person for a specific reason. Sometimes it's for positive examples, others were for examples of what not to do. I followed this person and decided that they were on a road I don't want to travel, even if they were having success in spite of those things.

In seventh grade, our teacher was in Zig Ziglar's Sunday school class at First Baptist Dallas. Zig Ziglar wrote this curriculum for kids, Self Esteem and Goal Setting, and he was piloting it through several classes to present to school districts for widespread adoption. I was in one of the classes. I experienced Zig Ziglar's goal setting and motivational training and I consider him my first mentor. I read his books every time a new one came out. I mentored with him several years ago in person. I had the honor of being on his Ziglarcast and I spoke with him on stage. Even when I was in seventh grade I found a mentor, somebody to follow, and somebody to model after.

Don't use income as an excuse, follow somebody's blog. Choose carefully and don't follow everybody at the same time. Get off those lists and, pay attention to one voice in your head. Sometimes it's not about the business lessons, but the life lessons you can learn from them with balance and priorities. Pick somebody to mentor.

If you want to hire a coach, don't hire them out of desperation. Don't expect them to be Miracle Max from *The Princess Bride* to bring you back to life. Don't expect them to rescue you. When you blame coaches and mentors, when you make excuses, the problem is not them. It's you.

So find a mentor to model first. Hire coaches when you need help with specific scaling or instruction or a particular method.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** What type of coach? Let's say I want a coach, and I have some savings. How do I go about finding the right coach?

**Carrie Wilkerson:** If you're in a group of like-minded people, one or two will have a coach.



Look there. Watch people's videos on YouTube. Subscribe to some podcasts and see who resonates with you. My criteria may differ from other people's criteria. I don't choose based on people's income, or the parties they throw on their yacht, or their exclusive getaways, or any status symbols.

I like to see who has similar values. I'm not saying I never had a coach who diverged with me, but they had a process or path I admired and respected. Who seems consistent? Look for positive and negative reviews. Look for satisfied clients and ask them questions on Facebook. Ask how long they've been with that coach, and the biggest takeaway. If they have a long list of coaches with whom they've worked as a comparison, that's a big red flag. That means they're a coach jumper, and I would take their opinion with a grain of salt. But wade in slowly.

When you're looking at a specific coach, be on their podcast. Read their blog posts. Read their book if they have one. Go to their live event if they have one. Wade in. Don't hire them because they have a successful client that loves them. Do your due diligence. It shocks me how people will spend more time looking for a hotel or studying the car they will drive than the person with whom they will trust their business. Do your research and ask questions. If that person's office can't answer questions or give testimonials, it's not a coach you want to work with.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So one way of finding the right coach is to listen to some podcasts of people in the space you're trying to get into and contact the people that resonate with you to see if they'll coach you. Is that right?

**Carrie Wilkerson:** Yeah. You can dig a little deeper. You can read their book, research their offerings, and be on their webinars. If they're coaching, they'll make it available somewhere. Go through the process; see how it resonates with you. Don't make a sudden decision before you know somebody. Don't propose before you go on a few dates. If they have incoming strategy sessions, great, but you need to know there's an offer at the end. You should be almost certain before you get to that step.

Email their office to ask what kind of programs they offer. Do they have a page of testimonials from past clients? Do they work with anybody in your space? Ask to connect with them. If they're hesitant about testimonials, or hesitant to connect you with past clients, it's a huge red flag.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** One concern people might have about starting a side business is feeling they lack the expertise to be taken seriously. What would you say to those people?

**Carrie Wilkerson:** Well you read my book, so you know I will say everybody is a fifth grader to somebody. Every fourth grader admires a fifth grader. My kids are a great example of this. They are eight, eleven, eighteen and twenty. The eight-year-old can always relate more to the eleven-year-old than she can to the eighteen-year-old. She loves and looks up to the eighteen-year-old, but if she wants somebody to show her how to tie her shoes or do something related to eight-year-old stuff, she goes to the eleven-year-old first. Because she's closer in expertise there.

You will always have a little more expertise than somebody else. Are you the expert in your field yet? Not necessarily, but you're an expert to somebody. If you've trained several dogs and people ask you dog training questions, you're an expert to people who have never studied the subject. You are a guru to them. I don't care about the Dog Whisperer guy. He has a TV show, he's unreliable. But you, you are reachable, relatable, and trustworthy. I can't



trust him, he's on TV. I don't know what's real and what's production. Those dogs might be trained before he gets them.

You don't have to work with the best in the industry. Work with somebody who's a fifth grader to your fourth grader.

When you send out emails, somebody may respond and say "Wow, I know way more about you than this." Don't let that threaten you, don't let that stop you from doing what you do. Beginners will learn from you.

As a woman who has given birth and adopted, I will say I'm way more experienced than the people who have not. I can give advice. Would I consider myself a parenting expert? Nope. Would I consider myself a childbirth expert? No. Would I consider myself an adoption expert? Maybe. But I am qualified to give advice, I'm qualified to mentor somebody through the process, and I'm qualified to work with them. I'm even qualified to write a book, not as the foremost expert, but you need to get over yourselves guys. Quit second-guessing.

Oprah didn't start as Oprah; Doctor Phil didn't start out as Doctor Phil. We all start out as who we are with the skill set we have, and there are people that can learn from us in powerful ways.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** And you argue that the way successful entrepreneurs prioritize their to-do list differs from the way employees do. You will learn at least the power of prioritizing correctly. How do they do it differently?

**Carrie Wilkerson:** Employees don't have as much control over their schedules. They come into the office and respond to emails or texts that came in overnight. They prioritize according to what the company needs, what the boss needs.

When you are your own boss, there are many ways to do this wrong. One way entrepreneurs fail is keeping an employee mindset and reacting all day long. As the boss, you come in and say "What do I need worked on first? What furthers the company today, what furthers revenues today, what furthers reputation today, and what furthers growth today?" Be in charge of yourself, no one else will do that.

Many people hire a coach to keep them on task. Quit paying somebody to manage you. That's such a waste of money. Manage yourself and focus on what gets you to your goals quickest. Look at what your goals are, what your primary motive is in your business, and work on those things. Stop checking Facebook to see who talked about you. Stop checking the blog to see if there's a new comment. Work on your goal-furthering activities first and quit acting like an employee. If you have an employee mindset, you'll always be an employee.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So how do you get out of that mindset? In fairness to people who hire a coach because they want someone to tell them what to do, I'm not sure it's a lack of effort holding them back. They don't know how to do it.

**Carrie Wilkerson:** There's a difference in hiring a coach to guide you and hiring a coach to smack you on the hand and make you accountable from the time you wake up to the time you go to bed. To make a Star Wars reference (though I've never watched any of them), people are not texting Yoda saying, "What do I do next? I can't make myself get up early enough, how do I fit in my workout?" It's kind of silly.



When you hire a Yoda, when you hire a guide, they will give you the plan and trust you can get your shoes on in the morning. They will trust you know when to shower. They will trust that, if you can't get it all done, you can figure out you need to wake up early, stay up a little later or get off the stupid TV and unsubscribe from some of the mess you're doing. I'm not against the Yoda model. I'm against the Super Nanny model of needing someone to move in with us and mind our behavior every minute.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** It does.

Carrie Wilkerson, thank you very much, you were wonderful.

**Carrie Wilkerson:** Thank you.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** If people want to connect with you, what's the best way of doing that?

**Carrie Wilkerson:** I'm very engaged online, you can find me on the Barefoot Executive Facebook page; I'm active there. My YouTube channel is BarefootExec, and if you go to my website there's a free seven-day video series to help redirect you with some of those activities and lots more. So I'd love to see you guys there.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Great, well Carrie thank you so much for your time, you were terrific.

**Carrie Wilkerson:** Thanks for having me.



## Practical Tips from Carrie Wilkerson

- Do not place all of your hopes and faith in a job working for someone else. The only person with 100% job security is the owner.
- Consider starting a business instead of jumping into an advanced degree, unless your chosen career requires certification or a license. Our education system is designed to make you a better employee, not necessarily self-sufficient or how to run your own business.
- Look at your hobbies or what you're good at in your daily life for side business ideas. Follow the example of Mrs. Fields turning her love of baking into a business selling cookies.
- Don't waste time or money on new equipment or certification classes. Start now with what you have or what you know and add to your arsenal as specific client demands require it. Many side businesses need little to no capital investment, especially service businesses. Some examples:
  - a.) Use your lawn equipment – or buy cheap used equipment — to start a lawn care business.
  - b.) If your “day job” requires a specialized skill, start a consulting business to provide that skill to other businesses.
  - c.) Bilingual? Start a translation business.
  - d.) If you're an excellent typist or have a good grasp of the written language, start a business doing transcription, editing, or even writing.
- Play to your strengths. Don't try to start a business based on what's trendy if you have no real interest or skill in that industry.
- Don't judge yourself by other's success. Even they had to start on the bottom and put in time building their business, knowledge, and resources. Be patient and build on your successes.
- Join or gather a group of like-minded professionals. These groups can provide accountability for your goals, moral support, and sounding boards and feedback for your ideas.
- Choose one person to follow each year and learn from their successes and failures. Read everything they write, watch or listen to their talks and interviews, and consume all their content. Learn what to do and what not to do.
- Hire a coach to work on specific methods or strategies, but first research them thoroughly to make sure they are effective and a good fit for you. Talk to past clients, ask for testimonials and reviews, listen to their talks, and even interview them before committing.
- You don't need to be the top expert in your field. Everybody is a fifth grader to somebody else's fourth grader. You can build a career on helping people with less expertise and knowledge than you and then increase that knowledge to help more people.





## Chandler Bolt

### How Self-Publishing a Book Can Transform Your Career

Chandler Bolt is a five-time bestselling author and entrepreneur. He's helped hundreds of students start (and finish) their books. His courses combine comprehensive video training with written materials, live events, and hands-on coaching. He has coached everyone from six-figure entrepreneurs to directors of major corporations to stay-at-home parents and students. In just two years, Chandler went from college dropout to five-time bestselling author.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Chandler Bolt, thank you very much for being part of this.

You argue that writing a book is one of the smartest things anyone can do for their career. Why is that?

**Chandler Bolt:** That's a great question.

If you look at everyone on this summit, what's beside their picture? A book, right? That's a great example of how a book has become the new business card.

If you give someone a business card, they'll take it, nod, smile, stick it in their pocket, and probably throw it away by the time they leave. If you give them a book, they feel bad about throwing it away. Throwing a book away feels wasteful. So they put the book on their desk or somewhere in their office and every time they see it they think of you.

A book can bring in passive income, obviously. It can also bring in leads, boost your authority, and establish your business. I've built a seven-figure business just off the back end of books. Before I wrote my first book, I was nobody.

The most important reason, which few people talk about or realize, is that writing a book makes you into a different person. There's a psychological hurdle there where you feel like it's something you can never do. Once you clear that hurdle and write your first book, you stop and think, "If I can do this, what else can I do?" You begin to consider all new possibilities. It was a huge confidence booster for me to say, "Okay, I actually can do this. My book is that stepping stone that gets me to where I want to be."



**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So, I want to ask you a tough question.

You own a business called Self Publishing School where you teach people how to write and publish their own books. Isn't there a stigma around self-publishing?

**Chandler Bolt:** I think there has been for a while, and, it was warranted up until the last few years.

My brother plays in this Grammy-nominated band named Need to Breathe. I've learned that the publishing industry and the music industry are very similar and outdated. People look at writing, publishing, and marketing books the same way we did as far back as the 1950's. The only real change among traditional publishing has been consolidation. I won't bore people with the entire history of the publishing industry, but Amazon entering the market has changed the game.

Traditional publishers offer distribution to bookstores around the world. Now that sites like Amazon exist, you no longer need those distribution channels.

It was once thought that a publisher's name on your book lent you credibility. When was the last time you really paid attention to a book's publisher? Especially with consolidation, the publisher's name is almost irrelevant.

Publishers have marketing departments that will push your book — if they think it's worth it. With the rise of social media and cheap web hosting, you have complete control over how much, how often, and where your book gets pushed.

For all these advantages that no longer even exist, publishers take the majority of your royalties. They can delay your book's release up to two years until it fits in with their plans. If you don't sell enough copies, you'll have to give back your advance and you may never see any money from sales.

Much like banks only give money to people that don't really need it, publishers only give publishing deals to authors that don't need it.

These are just a few reasons that self-publishing has become a more viable option for authors. I would argue that it's their best option.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Let's say I'd like to write a book but I'm working full time and raising two kids under the age of eight. I can barely squeak out enough time to get to the gym.

When am I supposed to write a book when I can't even find time to watch The Daily Show?

**Chandler Bolt:** Great question.

That's one of the biggest excuses that I get when I'm teaching. The good news is I've worked out a simplified process. If you have thirty minutes a day, you can write a book in a month. Anyone can find thirty minutes in their day. Get off of Facebook, skip a TV show... you can find that time. If it's something you really want to do, it's worth making the time.

Most people tell themselves, "I don't have the time right now" or "The timing isn't right." I've got news for you – the timing will never be right. The stars are never going to magically align and a yellow brick road will not appear in front of you because you've written a book. There's never a magical time where your responsibilities will disappear and you'll have all the time in the world to write a book. You're going to have to fit it in like everything else



you decide to do.

There's this great Zig Ziglar quote: "If you wait for all the lights to turn green before starting your journey, you'll never leave your driveway." You're going to have to start before you're ready and "have time."

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Thirty minutes a day for thirty day sounds really appealing. Can you give us two or three examples of shortcuts to writing a book that our viewers may have not considered?

**Chandler Bolt:** I actually have a three step process.

The first step is doing a mind map. Mind mapping is basically putting your book idea in the middle of a blank sheet of paper. From there, you have bubbles with ideas and draw lines to connect related thoughts and ideas. It's important that you get everything out there and not filter your thoughts and ideas. I've seen people spend fifteen to forty-five minutes on this have this light bulb moment where they realize that they not only have plenty of material to write one book, they've got more enough for two or three books and have to decide which they'll write first.

Step two is making an outline. Form the common ideas from your mind map into three, five, maybe even seven sections or groups. Once you have determined the sections, list them across the top of a fresh sheet of paper. The ideas in those sections will become your chapters. Now that you have your sections and chapters, you have the roadmap for your book. Don't obsess over the order of the sections or chapters too much — your outline doesn't have to be perfect. You can revise things as you work through the book.

Step three is getting in there and writing the damn thing.

I actually repeat these three steps chapter by chapter. On the first chapter, I'll spend ten minutes mind-mapping everything I know. I'll spend ten more minutes forming that into an outline. I'll spend between forty and sixty minutes actually writing that chapter. While I'm writing, I keep the outline by my computer go point by point. It feels weird at first, but the process helps you realize that you have way more than you thought.

Here's a little bonus tip if you're not a great writer. I've never been a great writer; I was a C English student. My English teachers hated me and I think they had fun just marking up my papers and making fun of me behind my back. If you told me I would be writing books and have five bestsellers, I would never believe that. I go through the first couple steps mind-mapping an outline and then just speak it out loud. You can use a service like Rev.com or the Rev app, which I prefer. They'll transcribe your audio for like a dollar per minute. I find it much easier to just speak my ideas out loud.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** And so you speak it and, if it still doesn't sound great, maybe you can find an editor?

**Chandler Bolt:** Exactly.

A good editor can turn your third-grade paper into a really polished book.

We've got a couple editors going to town right now on my sixth book because my work needs a lot of editing. The concepts are there but need more development. We got some great editors to polish it off.



**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** How do you go about finding a good editor?

**Chandler Bolt:** I prefer freelance sites like Upwork. It's important that you communicate the expectations upfront, including your timeline. I subscribe to Parkinson's Law: "Work expands to fill the time available for its completion," so I prefer to move fast and stay focused on what's important. Editing can just go for eternity because there's always more you can do. I make sure that they have a reason for wanting to work on my book. I make sure that they know my timeline upfront.

Here's another tip that I love. When I go through eLance or Upwork, or any of those sites, I add small requirements to make sure they pay attention to details. I usually use the "purple cow" method. I'll say to put "purple cow" in the first line of your response. I'll delete the responses that don't follow that direction. That way I can filter out people who don't pay attention to details or can't follow directions.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** One other tip that you have for people concerned about their effectiveness as writers is to stop thinking of yourself as a writer and start thinking of yourself as a storyteller. What do you mean by that?

**Chandler Bolt:** There's this stigma or hang-up where people think that they have to be a writer to become an author. Being a writer seems very intimidating. But a good writer could be a horrible author if they don't know how to get the point across or be entertaining.

A book is really just a collection of stories. Everyone has a story to tell. We have stories from our childhoods. We have stories from six months ago. We even have stories from this morning.

If you think of authorship as telling stories instead of writing, it can be much less intimidating.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** That's an interesting way to look at it.

Over half a million self-published books were released in 2015. Many of them – I would say the vast majority – will never be bestsellers.

Once you've released a book, how do you make sure that it gets the attention you feel it deserves?

**Chandler Bolt:** I would argue that the marketing starts well before the book comes out. You have to build marketing into the book by identifying your target audience and tailoring the book for that audience.

I talk about the shotgun versus the rifle approach. Shotgun blasts spread across a wide area, whereas the bullet from a rifle has a specific target. Unless you're close to your target, a shotgun is inefficient. You may hit a lot of targets, but you won't have much effect on any of them. A well-aimed bullet will only hit one target, but it has a major effect on that target.

Most people use a shotgun approach when they publish their books. Gurus tell them, "You have to have a mailing list! You need Facebook ads! You need Twitter! Don't forget a landing page!" It's overwhelming and they're trying to well on so many platforms that they really aren't having any effect at all. And let's be honest — 80% of the suggested methods aren't worth their time anyway.

I'm a big believer in the Pareto, or 80/20, principle. Focus on the 20% of things that will give



you 80% of the results.

One of the biggest things in that 20% is making sure you have a great cover. I'm amazed at how much time people will spend making a good book only to spend maybe five seconds on a cover. They'll say something like "I'm not going to spend more than fifty bucks on this cover!" Which is crazy because that cover is literally your first impression. When people are browsing through the millions of books on Amazon, you need to grab their face and say "Hey, look at me!" If your cover looks like an amateur threw it together in Microsoft Paint, people will assume you put no time or effort into your book and it sucks.

You need a good, solid cover. Not just a cover that looks nice — a cover designed to sell. You don't have to have a pretty picture, but make the title stand out. Your name doesn't have to be huge unless you're well known and can sell a book just based on your name. The job of your cover is to draw the reader in and get them to take that next step and say, "I need to know more about this book."

So having a good cover, getting a lot of reviews – that's really important for the longevity of your book, especially in the Amazon ecosystem.

I can think of a couple other things...

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Actually, could we stop there for a second? You made a point I want to expand upon.

You say reviews help sell more books; how does that work?

**Chandler Bolt:** Well, it's a form of social proof.

Imagine the days before Yelp. If you drive into a town and there are two restaurants across the street from each other. The restaurant on your right is so crowded that there's a line outside. The one on the left only has two or three people. Unless you're more concerned with time than food quality, you're going into the restaurant on the right. It's going to suck waiting in that line, but there must be a reason for people lining up for one restaurant when there's a nearly empty one right across the street.

When there are a lot of reviews on a book or a restaurant, you look at them and you're like "Oh man, these ratings aren't too great – not going there." You see those reviews and it's instant social proof.

There are rankings in Amazon but nobody pays attention beyond the number one spot in each category.

I wanted to say two other things about positioning. Amazon has categories and keywords. You have the capability to choose a couple categories and position them well and go after keywords that are important to your book.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I know a bunch of authors who want to write a good book, but feel like asking people to write reviews for them is distasteful.

If you had them all in a room, what would you say to them?

**Chandler Bolt:** Oh man, that's a great question, Ron.

We run into this all the time in our program. There are the people who say "Oh my gosh,



writing is so hard and I would just love to speak this and then skip on the marketing and selling it part.” Then we have other people that take the leap into joining the program or to take the leap in doing a book. Usually, that willingness indicates those people are good writers, since it’s hard to make that leap otherwise. Those good writers usually hate marketing, too. It makes them feel slimy. It’s hard and uncomfortable brings back memories of all the times they’ve been rejected.

I’m a marketer at heart. I’m really good at it and I love it. That’s why my books do so well and it’s why our students’ books do so well. It wasn’t always like that, though. I’m a people person. I like people to like me. I don’t like making them uncomfortable or imposing on them. I had to learn to be a marketer.

Someone once told me that the first rule of sales is that you have to believe in what you are selling. If you don’t believe in what you are doing, then why write a book? If you’ve written the book that probably means you believe in it. Now you have to take it to a whole other level of conviction. You have to believe that people will suffer without your book and it’s your job to show them that they need this book. Look at marketing as helping others that need the information you have. Believing in what you are doing and your message is the foundation of marketing and promoting your book.

It really comes down to fear. We’re scared of embarrassing ourselves. We’re afraid of looking stupid. If we let people miss out on this book and suffer without our message just to save face, we’re being selfish.

I was talking to a student whose book was for young teens. She was a Regional Manager Jack in the Boxes. She told me, “I see these teens in our stores that just need someone to talk to them and help them.”

I was getting down to her avatar and there was this young single mother working at Jack in the Box ...

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Just to clarify for people watching, by avatar you mean the stereotypical buyer of this book?

**Chandler Bolt:** Yeah exactly, thanks for clarifying. It’s the person for whom you’re writing. That was her person. It was someone in one of the stores that she knew.

She was struggling with marketing, too. I told her to imagine she didn’t write this book or – better yet – that she wrote the book but was too scared to put it out because she was worried about what people might say or scared of that first negative review. I told her to imagine six to twelve months from now, that young woman still doesn’t have that message. Her life is no better. I asked my student how that made you feel?

Her answer, of course, was “Pretty crappy.” She had an opportunity to help but didn’t because she was too embarrassed to sell.

If you look at it that way, if you are really passionate about your message, you have to cast your fears aside and get over yourself.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** And how do you recommend the authors watching this ask for reviews?

**Chandler Bolt:** There are several ways.



Don't beat around the bush - you have to ask. There needs to be some urgency, like "Can you leave a review by this date?" There needs to be a time cap. If they are friends of yours, or if they love what you are doing, they'll want to write the perfect review. They'll put it off thinking "It's going to take at least a half an hour to get right." I would suggest telling them "You can just go back and change the review later if you want, just put it on there for now."

Another way is publically pushing for milestones. Tell people "I want to have fifty reviews by Saturday, or launch week." You've set a goal for people to rally behind. Push that deadline and remind people that they can go back and revise the review later. The important thing is to meet that deadline.

There was another tip I received from an author early in the program. He told me, "I scrap for every review I get; they are that important. If someone sends me an email telling me how much they loved my book or how it helped them, I ask, 'Would you mind just copy and pasting that as a review? Here's the link - that would be so helpful.'"

Just little things like that will help a ton.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I've also heard you describe a technique that you say can get you on the best seller list on Amazon for self-published books. How does that work?

**Chandler Bolt:** That's the positioning inside of Amazon that I touched on earlier.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I think it had something to do with offering it for free and then....

**Chandler Bolt:** We have a "free to pay" strategy.

We offer a book for free the first two to three days then switch over to pay. The thousands of downloads you get during the free period get you some Amazon juice that carries over to when you switch to pay and helps you out.

It's really all about leveraging the Amazon ecosystem. People hear "free" and say, "I don't want to devalue my work. I'm a consultant or whatever and I don't want people to think I'm just Joe Shmoe over here putting out a free e-book." But putting a book up for free over just a few days gets the message out there. It doesn't devalue your work; it promotes your work.

Another thing I've found works really well is using launch teams. "Launch team" is just a fancy word for a group of people that support your book. The group could be family members, co-workers, friends, evangelical customers... you name it. There can be anywhere from five people to five hundred or even more depending on your level of influence. I have people apply to be on my launch team. They agree to read the book ahead of time, spread the word, leave a review during launch week, and give support in any way they can leading up to the launch. In return, they get a free advance copy of the book, they get a look behind the scenes of a successful book launch, they get to surround themselves with like-minded people, they get access to me, and a big one that people like is they get their name on the acknowledgment page of the book.

Authors are scared to even ask people to be on their launch team. But you'll find that people come out of the woodwork to live vicariously through you. People want to write a book but are too scared to do it. When they see you asking for help, they say, "Oh man Ron is doing it and I want to just help any way I can." It doesn't matter if they have editing skills or design skills. They're just supportive people. You'll see people come out of the woodwork to support you. That helps to get some early momentum and a lot of reviews, as we talked



about earlier.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Besides creating Self-Publishing School, you've written a book on Productivity Hacks for Entrepreneurs.

Could you share two or three hacks that you suspect not enough people are using?

**Chandler Bolt:** Definitely. I got my start in the book world when I wrote *The Productive Person and Productivity Hacks for Entrepreneurs*.

I love that stuff. I started my first six-figure business when I was in college. It was just a crazy time with a lot of stuff to do and not a lot of time so I was kind of forced into...

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** What were you selling?

**Chandler Bolt:** It was a company named Student Painters. They teach you how to run a painting company. College pro, college works, student painters — there are several different versions. You run an exterior painting company - anything from houses to construction. You go from zero to whatever you make of it.

There was a lot of knocking on doors, cold calling, flyers, lawn signs, and hiring college students. It was a crash course.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So you started that business?

**Chandler Bolt:** Well I didn't start Student Painters. It's a franchise-type model.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Got it.

**Chandler Bolt:** You learn how to run a business by actually running a business. Learning by doing — crazy concept, right? Learning from people who had never actually run a business at school was frustrating for me. I found out about this program and said, "Oh man this looks amazing."

It was a crash course in sales. That's where I learned that lesson I mentioned earlier about getting over myself. I learned how to run a business and everything associated with that - all that while I was going to school. My first book stemmed from that experience.

Anyway, a couple tips that I think people aren't using.

One is going to sound generic — goal setting. Not only goal setting but breaking your goals down.

At the time of this interview, it's around the beginning of the New Year. Everyone is making New Year's resolutions, these things that we just do once a year and 99% of people don't even think about it. Right around January 15th, it's already gone.

Instead, I break my goals down monthly. I have twelve New Year's resolutions-type goal sessions each year. Then I break those down weekly, and I break that down daily. By breaking them down, I make them simple.

I set my goals at the beginning of the month. Every Sunday night I look at what I need to do that week to stay on track for the month's goals. Every night before sleep, I look at what I need to do the next day to bring those goals forward.



Another one is being proactive instead of reactive. Being proactive in the morning and making that sacred. That means not checking social media or email. I don't care what business you are in, your clients can wait two hours while you get your most important work done. It's important to be very disciplined with that early time and have at least a power hour, if not two, at the beginning of the day to make sure you're being proactive instead of reactive.

The last thing I think few people do is track their time. You can't improve your time if you aren't tracking it.

There are two apps I recommend. The first is Rescue Time for your computer, which tracks in the background. You don't have to do anything besides install it. You get a weekly report of you productivity. It tells you how much time you spend on sites like Facebook or Amazon and how much you spend on productive things.

The other one is Toggle. It requires a change of habit — you have to manually click it — so it's a little bit tougher. Right before this interview, I clicked onto my Toggle time. That allows you to look back and zoom out to get a broader view of your time. You can see how you spent your time over the last week, last month, last three months, and so forth. Was it CEO activities? Was it administrative stuff that I could pay someone less than ten bucks per hour to do? Was it just time wasting? That was a game changer for me because it showed me the power of switching cost and how often my ADD brain just jumped from activity to activity. When you have to manually click off from one task to another, it's an eye opener that first week or two.

So you can't improve how you are spending your time if you don't first track it.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Why do you need both Rescue Time and Toggle if they do essentially the same thing?

**Chandler Bolt:** It's overkill, but Toggle gives me another level of granularity. Rescue Time was my gateway into time tracking. Now I just keep Rescue Time running in the background, but Toggle is where I really look.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Okay interesting.

**Chandler Bolt:** It depends on the level of commitment.

I recommend starting with Rescue Time because you don't have to change your habit. Toggle is for when you graduate into your MBA.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Interesting.

I have a question that a fan of yours and a friend of mine gave me. I told him you were coming on and he had a question for you.

You've had some tremendous success early in your life. What is the best piece of financial advice you have received and implemented?

**Chandler Bolt:** Oh wow, that's a great question.

There are two things that come to mind so I'm going to cheat here.

The first thing is, don't take advice from someone with whom you wouldn't gladly switch



places. That really hit me because I had a business mentor with an awesome business but family life that sucked. His wife and kids hate him. He is on his third marriage. So I take his advice with a grain of salt, and maybe not at all.

The main one – and people will be like “Oh yeah, I’ve heard that one before,” but it’s good advice. You are the average of the five closest people with whom you surround yourself. Tony Robbins says it in a slightly different way: “Proximity is power.” He even goes further in saying that, “Your reality is equal to the expectations of your peer group.” Whatever your peers expect of you, that’s how successful you’ll be. He goes even further and says your peers are people you respect enough that you would change for them. It could be family or it could be friends. That’s easy to say and it’s almost become a cliché. People have heard that, but they don’t actively do anything about it.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** How do you make sure that the five people surrounding you are five people you respect?

**Chandler Bolt:** I’ve made some huge sacrifices.

When I dropped out of school, I thought to myself, “I want to go and do things that 99% of people haven’t done. Why do I take the same path 99% of people take?” It may not really be 99%, but you know what I mean. I told myself, “I’m going to drop out of school and not leave myself an out. I’m going to sink the ships, burn the bridges. That’s how I’m going to do it.” If I failed, it would be embarrassing, so I said, “I’m not going to stay in my college town, and I’m not going to my hometown. I’m going to move away.”

So I moved to Des Moines, Iowa, into an entrepreneurial house. It’s a house filled with guys running their own businesses. That was the motivation I needed.

I’ve now created an entrepreneurial house here in San Francisco. There are five of us in the house. We are all running online businesses, earning six or seven figures. It’s an environment where every day - not only just in business but also in business and in health, in life, spiritually - we support each other. It’s an atmosphere that drives you to excellence.

On top of that, I go to conferences. I’m in Masterminds. I’m always searching.

It goes back to the saying “If you are the smartest person in the room, you are in the wrong room.” I want to be the dumbest person in the room to the point where I’m almost scared to speak out; I just need to sit down and listen.

That’s what I try to create for myself on a continual basis. It comes with a lot of sacrifices. Moving all the way to Des Moines and then all the way to San Diego is an uncomfortable experience; you don’t know anyone. Within like a month or two you are like “Man, why did I do this? It’s such a bad decision.” But it really does help over the long term.

I’m going to wrap it up because I know I’ve been long winded on this, but every time I start to get into the comfort zone it’s an alarm that I need to shake things up. I need to either move or surround myself with different people.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Tell us about the new book that you’re wrapping up this month.

**Chandler Bolt:** Yeah, I’m so excited for this Ron.

This book gives a ten-thousand-foot view on everything that we teach inside Self-Publishing School about how to write, market, and publish your first book. We’re gunning for New



York Times. It's a whole other animal and we're having a lot of fun with it.

It's been a lot of love and labor. The title is TBD. We have several working titles for it, but call it "The New York Times Book." The moment we get off this interview, I'm going to wrap the content, edit and, wrap this thing up.

This is by far the biggest book we have ever done. We're launching it May 3rd.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Is it going to be in stores?

**Chandler Bolt:** Absolutely.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** So we can look forward to seeing it May 3rd.

If someone is interested in getting that book, what can they do? Can they go to your website?

**Chandler Bolt:** Yeah, exactly.

We're doing some pre-orders. We are actually going to give away the book for free; all you have to do is cover shipping.

We are doing that starting mid-February, that's when you can check it out. Just go to [self-publishingschool.com](http://self-publishingschool.com) and you'll find info there

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Great, Chandler Bolt thank you very much.

**Chandler Bolt:** Sweet, thanks Ron



## Practical Tips from Chandler Bolt

- Writing a book is one of the best things you can do for your career. A book can lend you authority, provide passive income, attract leads, and — perhaps most importantly — serve as a rite of passage that provides you with the confidence to face nearly any challenge.
- Don't let a publisher's lack of interest stop you. The ease of digital distribution on sites like Amazon.com has made self-publishing a viable — and often preferable — option for authors.
- Set aside thirty minutes each day to work on your book. You could be finished within a month.
- Follow this three-step process to make your writing as efficient as possible:
  - a.) Mind-mapping – Brainstorm ideas around the subject of your book. Draw lines to connect related thoughts and ideas.
  - b.) Outline – Group your related thoughts and ideas into sections. The main ideas in these sections will become the chapters of your book.
  - c.) Write. Expand upon your main ideas in each chapter. If necessary, repeat these steps for each chapter. Once each chapter is done, you have your book!
- Think of authorship as sharing stories if you find the idea of writing intimidating.
- Record yourself talking through your ideas if you don't like to write. You can then outsource the transcription of the recordings and the editing of those transcripts into the text of your book.
- Focus on the things that will bring you the most benefit when marketing your book. Book covers and reviews are two commonly overlooked, but very important, things that get your book noticed.
- Think of the people your book will help and how their lives will suffer if they never find you. In that light, it's selfish to avoid doing whatever it takes to make your book visible.
- Set monthly goals for yourself.
  - a.) On the first of each month, set your goals.
  - b.) Every Sunday, decide what you need to do that week to accomplish your goals.
  - c.) Every night before bed, decide what you will do the next day to make your goals happen.
- Use time trackers to see how much time you spend on activities. You may find you're spending much of your time on goals that do little or nothing to move you towards your goals.
- Surround yourself with people smarter and more successful than you. This will push you to step out of your comfort zone and strive to do more.



## John Lee Dumas How to Grow Your Network Through Podcasting

John Lee Dumas is the founder and host of Entrepreneur on Fire, which was named “Best of iTunes 2013.” John interviews today’s most inspiring and successful entrepreneurs seven days a week. He has been featured in Forbes, Fast Company, Success, Inc., and TIME magazine. John founded Podcasters’ Paradise, a community where over fifteen hundred podcasters learn how to create, grow, and monetize their podcast in a supportive environment.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** John Lee Dumas, thank you for being part of the Summit. You have one of the most successful podcasts in America, called Entrepreneur on Fire. And I’m curious if you could tell us what you were doing before you started that podcast.

**John Lee Dumas:** The most relevant time to go back to would be when I graduated college and joined the Army. I was an officer in the US Army for eight years – four active, four in the reserves, did a thirteen-month tour of duty in Iraq, which was intense for a twenty-three-year-old. When I got out of the military I tried a bunch of different things over six years — all failed.

Law school, I quit after one semester. Commercial real estate, both in San Diego and back in Maine. It wasn’t for me. Corporate finance with John Hancock. I was dying a slow death in a cubicle. These career paths weren’t for me. I struggled with them and I failed.

Back in 2012, I had my “Ah-ha” moment for a seven-day-a-week podcast interviewing inspiring successful entrepreneurs. That turned into Entrepreneur on Fire. Three and a half years later, I’ve recorded over twelve hundred episodes, consistently generating over a million listeners each month and growing.

It’s been quite the journey.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I mentioned in the thought process. When you started the podcast, were you thinking you would do it as a business full time or were you going to experiment and use it to grow my network?



**John Lee Dumas:** The former. I went all in. I was like “This is for me. This is the first time I’ve been excited about what I’ve been doing for over six years now. This has lit a spark inside. Let’s go all in.” That’s when I quit my job.

I hired a mentor — Jamie Tardy, the host of The Eventual Millionaire. It was critical to hire somebody where I wanted to be. Many people hire mentors because they’re successful in business or in life. You need to find somebody who’s successful at a place you want to get and can guide you there.

Jamie was a perfect hire as a mentor and that changed everything.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** What did starting a podcast do for your professional network?

**John Lee Dumas:** It did everything. I had no professional network before. Now I have one of the best professional networks in the online marketing game. I’ve had personal, one-on-one, intimate conversations with twelve hundred of the most successful, inspiring entrepreneurs in the world and it’s been an absolute game changer.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Is it realistic for someone to have a full-time job and podcast or do they have to quit their job and do it full time like you did?

**John Lee Dumas:** They do not have to quit their job. I went all in. I was the first seven-day-a-week podcaster interviewing entrepreneurs. That is not a road you have to take. Many successful podcasters have it as a side hustle.

It’s a once a week podcast. They block off six hours one day a month, record four shows back to back, and schedule them to be released once a week. Six hours each month and they have a weekly podcast growing their audience.

A great example is Mark Mason of The Late Night Internet Marketing Podcast. He does his day job, and then he comes home. He records a podcast and then he hangs out with his family. And then, you know, he goes about his business. And he’s doing it as a side hustle building a great business.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Let’s assume for a second technology is not a barrier for the people watching this. Anybody can hire someone or do a bunch of internet searches on how you get the right technology and get your podcast up on iTunes.

What tips can you offer people about to start a podcast on how to make it successful?

**John Lee Dumas:** The biggest tip I can recommend is free. I spent a lot of time creating this and it has everything you need to create and monetize your own podcast. It’s at Free-PodcastCourse.com. It has fifteen free video tutorials covering equipment, technical details, creating, launching, growing, and monetizing. It is a complete course in fifteen days. If you’re looking to do anything along podcasting that course is for you because, again, technology holds many people back.

This is a microphone plugged into my computer with a C920 video. You and I are chatting to thousands of people Ron. It’s a lot easier than people think it is.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Let’s say I’ve got the technology down. How do I make sure people will listen?

**John Lee Dumas:** This is where it gets a bit more difficult. Podcasting is one of those areas



where you need to find your niche. There is a lot of noise out there. There's podcasting, Snapchat, Periscope. Meerkat, Blab. Many things vying for our attention.

Why is somebody going to listen to you? They will listen to you and you will grow an audience because you are offering something unique. I like to use the acronym UVD or Unique Value Distinguisher.

You need to check all three boxes. What is the unique value distinguisher of your podcast that will make someone say, "It's like this podcast was made for me?"

I can tell you my UVD with Entrepreneur on Fire. I was unique, the first seven-day-a-week podcast. There wasn't a podcast like it out there. I was the first one interviewing successful entrepreneurs. Value — I brought value. Well, my podcast did — I didn't have value to give. My guests had the value. I brought on credible and authority figures to give value from Day One. Distinguisher — I distinguished myself by having a formatted show that asked, "What's your worst entrepreneurial moment? Let's hear about the lessons learned. What's your 'Ah-ha' moment? How'd you turn that moment into success? Let's go through this rapid-fire lightning round of questions. I can hear your resource, your book. What held you back? The best advice you ever had?"

When people press play on my podcast, they know what they'll get. It's a structured and formatted show. That was my UVD. When you're starting a podcast, can you check those three blocks? If you can, you're off to the races.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** There're one hundred thousand podcasts in the iTunes store. Back in 2012, I'd imagine it was a fraction of that. If you were starting your podcast today, do you think you would have anywhere near the success you had?

**John Lee Dumas:** Not with the same podcast. Entrepreneur on Fire is a broad podcast. I interview entrepreneurs about their journey. I could gain traction and momentum because it was unique in the space. It would no longer be unique in the space if I launched it today.

I would find a much more niche topic and own that market. Many people are terrified about niching down because they think, "If I niche down, I will block out future listeners."

When you don't niche down, you get lost in the noise. When you do niche down, when you go one inch wide and one mile deep, you will be that singular voice in a void that needs to be filled.

You will get those raving fans and then your momentum will start. Then you can broaden your audience and topic. You don't have to remain niched, but you need to get your momentum in that niche before you broaden out.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Let's talk about some of the other obstacles people face after recording their podcast. One thing I see many people getting stuck on is how often they need to release these podcasts to gain momentum.

What's your recommendation for someone starting out? Once a week, once every two weeks, once a month, once a day?

**John Lee Dumas:** One of the most popular questions I get, and I have the same answer every single time. My friends, I will not listen to your podcast — why ask me how often you should record, what topic you should use, or how long it should be?



There's a clear formula that will give you all the answers to these questions called Creating Your Avatar. That's your one perfect listener. Not a targeted demographic, which is like someone between the ages of twenty-five and fifty that likes to watch football on the weekends. You want an avatar — one perfect listener. And once you know that one perfect listener inside and out they'll answer those questions.

Let me give you a quick example. Jimmy is my avatar for Entrepreneur on Fire. He's thirty-six years old, has a wife and two kids ages three and five. He has a twenty-seven-minute commute alone every day. Jimmy sits in a cubicle at a job he hates every single day for nine hours and drives home. Then he hangs out with his kids, has dinner with his family, spends time with his wife, puts his kids to bed, and hangs out on the couch by himself at night. Jimmy is depressed because he's spending 90% of his life doing things he doesn't enjoy.

That's my avatar. I could go on for another twenty minutes about him because I know him that well.

Every time I have a question about how many times per week or how long my podcast should be, I say "WWJD? What would Jimmy do? What would Jimmy want?"

Think about what your avatar would want once you've created it. They will give you all the answers and that's a huge weight lifted off your shoulders. Focus in on that.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Good tip. Let's switch gears for a second and look at it from the perspective of someone who's about to go on a podcast. You've interviewed twelve hundred guests. What do the best guests do?

**John Lee Dumas:** The best guests tell stories. They don't make vague, overarching comments like "Fill fast, fill forward, and fill often." Those things may be true, but we've all heard them before.

With Entrepreneur on Fire, I always say, "I want to hear about your worst entrepreneurial moment." I want you to tell me that story. I don't care what you think about failure. What I care about is a time you failed. I want to hear about that failure because it will be interesting and I can take lessons from that.

Guests that won't give stories don't give good interviews. That's why I force those out of my guests and people flock to Entrepreneur on Fire to the tune of over a million listeners a month.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** What's your biggest failure in Entrepreneur on Fire?

**John Lee Dumas:** My biggest failure was my failure to launch. My launch date was August 15, 2012. I had everything ready, forty interviews, website, social media, ready to go. I woke up the fifteenth paralyzed with fear and I didn't launch.

I delayed my launch for five weeks with BS excuses. The only reason I launched five weeks later is because my mentor said, "John if you don't launch today I'll fire you." Getting fired by my mentor was the only thing that scared me more than launching.

I launched that day and all my fears were silly fears we have. It's part of the imposter syndrome. The success of Entrepreneur on Fire was pushed back at least five weeks because of that crazy fear I had for no good reason.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I know many people go on the podcast circuit and meet a lot of



different hosts they like and want to form relationships with.

But they want to do it in a way that doesn't feel contrived or too self-promotional. What would you recommend? You've talked to twelve hundred people. I'd imagine you've developed relationships with some of them. What would you recommend guests do if they're interested in maintaining a relationship with hosts?

**John Lee Dumas:** I love when my guests reach out and update me about what happened with their episode. They say, "John, after the episode I got X number of people reaching out. I heard these comments and this email I got from somebody after hearing me on your show."

I love that kind of interaction. That brings me closer to my guests. It's a great opportunity for a guest to share feedback they got with the actual host. The host loves it when they can see their show's having an impact.

Their audience is taking action and supporting the guest. Then to check in and say "John, I wanted to say Hi and thanks again for having me on the show. Is there anything I can do to help? What do you have going on right now? I'd love to share with my audience."

My answer to that was usually "No but thank you." I appreciate that because I was building social credibility and these favors for a time I would cash them in, which we will talk about in a minute.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** You've published a book called The Freedom Journal. Tell us about it.

**John Lee Dumas:** The Freedom Journal was a big inspiration for several reasons. When you interview over twelve hundred entrepreneurs, people will reach out to you saying "John, what is the secret to all these entrepreneurs' success? What's the magic bullet? What's their secret sauce?"

My answer would always "These people work hard. That's their secret to success." But I realized that wasn't the best answer. I was giving the obvious answer.

I wanted to take a step back and think about it. I realized that the one commonality was that they know how to set and accomplish goals. The entrepreneurs I see out there struggling don't know how to do that.

I created a tool that would bridge that gap for everybody. In January 2015, I started this journey to create The Freedom Journal. It's a gorgeous, leather-bound, gold embossed book. I sourced the materials. I created the designs, the illustrations, everything within. It's an amazing work of art I worked hard on.

The Freedom Journal will guide you in setting and accomplishing your top goal in one hundred days. I was passionate about creating a physical product. We have enough stuff in the cloud, PDFs, and apps on our phones.

There needs to be something you can touch, on your desk holding you accountable in a powerful way. That's on your nightstand at night staring at you saying, "Hey, you have a goal to accomplish."

That's why I wanted to make this the first physical product we've made. I took a year to create this. On January 4th, 2016 we launched a Kickstarter campaign for people to check out



what we have with The Freedom Journal, pledge to that campaign, and can get the hard-cover version of The Freedom Journal to set and accomplish their top goal in one hundred days.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Now, you argue writing your goals and keeping a journal can keep you accountable. It's almost like having a coach in a way. How does a journal make you more accountable?

**John Lee Dumas:** People make the huge mistake of getting caught up in this amazing virtual world in which we live.

I love the virtual world and I love how you and I can do this from our own homes. You're in Rochester, New York. I'm in San Diego, California. We are having an amazing conversation. I love the ability to have this conversation. But we need to live in the real world, too.

Putting pen to paper and writing differs from typing it up, saving it on your computer. It empowers you and makes an imprint on your conscious and subconscious. That's what I wanted to do.

I've seen this work for me setting and accomplishing my big goals over these last three and a half years. I built Entrepreneur on Fire into a seven figure a year business by doing things like this. That's why I wanted to bring The Freedom Journal to people. To bring them the ability, the tools, and the solution to these struggles.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** One thing people should note — and this highlights the value of writing things down — is you pay attention a lot more closely when you're writing things down than when you type things.

It requires more effort and we think more quickly than we write. You process things more deeply when you write them down. That speaks to the value of what you're doing.

**John Lee Dumas:** Having something on your desk, on your nightstand, or in your book bag when you pull it out at Starbucks makes people take you seriously.

They see you take what you're doing seriously. You're making this happen. We're not hiding behind our keyboards anymore. It's out there in the open, making a pledge, making it happen.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Another part of The Freedom Journal is that you offer tips and resources they can use to elevate their productivity. I'm curious if you can share two or three of your favorite resources you included in the journal.

**John Lee Dumas:** One is Schedule Once. That's a tool I use to own my calendar and to own my time. Whenever I need to coordinate with someone else, I give them a link to my Schedule Once account. They can book an appointment or whatever on my calendar. It has automated reminders and follow-ups. All the information they need is there. It cuts out 99% of back and forth which I love.

Another tool I'm obsessed with is called WorkFlowy. It's a great little to do app right in my browsers. It's always there. I can write an idea that comes and use bullets. I can search for whatever I need in an efficient manner.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I will backtrack with one last question I forgot to ask earlier.



How do you get the high profile guests you want on your show when you have no following, you're starting out, and people don't know who you are?

**John Lee Dumas:** You need to know what kind of guests you're going after, first. Once you know which kind of guests are ideal for your show, there's a great method I used to launch Entrepreneur on Fire with no name or experience.

I wanted to interview successful entrepreneurs, so I went to the speakers page on websites of conferences about entrepreneurship. There were sometimes ten, twenty, fifty, or more. At the bigger conferences, there were one hundred speakers talking about some form of entrepreneurship. If they appealed to me, I would go to their website linked right on that page. I would go to their contact me form and say "Hey, I see you're speaking at Social Media Marketing World here in San Diego. It's a great conference. I will attend," or "I will attend with a virtual ticket. I can't wait to see you present and would love to have you on my show to ask you about your authority or expertise."

I'd get a yes nine times out of ten. These people will travel — often for free — to speak for forty-five minutes in front of a crowd and then come back. You better believe they'll sit down in a living room for a twenty-minute audio-only interview because this is what they're looking to do. They're credible authority figures with something to say and the desire to spread their word.

Whatever industry or niche you're in, there are conferences all over the world right now hosting great speakers. Go to the conference websites, click on the speakers tab, and have a field day.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Well. John Lee Dumas, thank you for your time.

**John Lee Dumas:** Wow. Love it.



## Practical Tips from John Lee Dumas

- Choose a mentor should have accomplished most, if not all, of your goals and be able to help you reach them.
- It's unnecessary to quit your job or neglect your personal life to start a podcast. Some podcasters devote as little as six hours per month to record a weekly podcast.
- Your podcast should be Unique, add Value, and have some type of Distinguisher from other podcasts.
- Find a specific, underserved audience to target with your podcast. Do not be afraid to "niche down." Once you're established, you can branch out to a broader audience.
- Create an avatar of your one perfect listener. Decide what their life is like. What is their career? What are their goals, their hopes, and their dreams? What are their needs that aren't being met? How much time do they have for listening to podcasts? The more detail, the better. Keep this person in mind when making any podcast decisions.
- Look for guests and interview subjects with a story to tell. Learn what types of questions to ask to draw those stories out. Avoid guests that only spout platitudes, clichés, or empty advice that everyone has already heard. As Johnny says, "I don't care what you think about failure. What I care about is a time you failed. I want to hear about that failure because it will be interesting and I can take lessons from that."
- Write your goals and track your progress in a handwritten journal. By writing instead of typing, you force yourself to slow down, pay attention, and think about those goals and your progress.





## Laura Stack

### What To Do When There's Too Much To Do

Laura is the President & CEO of The Productivity Pro, Inc., a boutique consulting firm helping leaders increase workplace performance in high-stress environments. Her latest book, *Doing the Right Things Right: How the Effective Executive Spends Time* (Berrett-Koehler), hits bookstores in January 2016. Stack is a past president of the National Speakers Association and is a member of its prestigious CPAE Speaker Hall of Fame, which has fewer than 175 members worldwide. She is a high-content Certified Speaking Professional (CSP), who educates, entertains, and motivates professionals to deliver bottom-line results.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Laura Stack, thank you for being a part of this event. There is a term in your upcoming book I love — infobesity. Tell us, what is infobesity and how do we prevent it from happening to us?

**Laura Stack:** Infobesity is a glut of information. Too many ads, too many emails, too many blogs. Irrelevant information comes at you all day long. It's distracting you from focusing on those high-value things all day.

You want to set filters on your email. Many people don't even know you can turn off those alerts that pop up every time you get an email. Set a rule to receive alerts for emails from the people you deem important. Set automatic filing rules to make it easier to prioritize your inbox.

I have rules set up that anytime I get something with LinkedIn in the subject or from a LinkedIn discussion group move it to this folder, any time it says Facebook move it to this folder. If it's from a restaurant, shopping, coupons, newsletters, things you get you want to review at some point but you don't want it in your inbox.

Just be careful as you're doing your business online to make sure you're doing real business. Many people get caught up clicking on links, clicking ads, and so on. My mom the psychologist calls that OSS — Oh Shiny Syndrome.



People have OSS and they don't stay focused on the reason they're there. We need to control ourselves and put up barriers and boundaries from this irrelevant information that distracts us from important work.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** When you're overwhelmed, it becomes difficult to prioritize. Everything seems urgent. One step you point out is minimizing the distractions eating up our cognitive resources throughout the day

The title of your next book is *Doing the Right Things Right*. Aside from minimizing distractions, what else should we be doing to focus on the right things?

**Laura Stack:** That's a great question.

People get focused on the wrong things because they're overwhelmed. They're paralyzed. If they have one hundred and seventeen things to do, it's difficult to decide what to do next.

After being a public speaker for twenty-five years, the biggest challenge for audience members is deciding what to do. Most people go off the rails in that moment of choosing what to do next. There's this decision dilemma of looking at too much and asking what's next.

You could do thirty-seven different things in that moment. People need clarity. There are five different patterns people are using.

Some people do things based on what they feel like doing. They're tempted to do something fun, easy, trivial, or quick to check things off. They want a sense of accomplishment.

Other people do things in the order they appear. That's the problem with monitoring your inbox all day — emails don't come in priority order.

Some people do things based on who's screaming the loudest. People have fake crises. If you're the type that without boundaries for squeaky wheels, you do things in the wrong order.

Some people do things as they think of them. "Oh, I need to make that call. Oh, I need to send that back." They're not focused.

Some people depend on sticky notes and piles of papers. They have seventeen half-started emails on their screens in random and distracted patterns

Be aware of what you do in that moment of decision. Are you deciding based on the fun things, what you think of, or what comes in first instead of value, impact, output, results, sales, profitability, or however your job is measured?

Make sure you're making purposeful choices instead of feeling overwhelmed and defaulting to one of those other patterns.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** How do you make sure you're always thinking about what to do next instead of having to rethink if you're making the best use of your time? How do you minimize the resources spent on decision-making?

**Laura Stack:** Well, a lot of it is workflow and minimizing the decision in the first place because you already decided what to do next.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Can you give an example?



**Laura Stack:** If an email comes into my inbox and I don't want to file it because I might lose it or forget to reply, I will keep it as new or flag it. Another choice is to convert that email into a task with a date on it make it a priority item.

As soon as you say I need to...Bam. You need to know what to do with that information, where it goes, what is the priority. With that prioritized task list when I leave work every night, I already know what will do until the next thing comes in.

There needs to be a continual ability to triage that information. If you can't process like that, there's something broken with your system.

The number of things people need to do paralyzes them. When it comes right down to it, there isn't as much to do as it seems. They're overwhelmed by what might fall through the cracks or what they don't know.

Get away, be strategic, and think. Maybe don't take your computer. Go to Starbucks with a pad of paper and a pencil. Sometimes it helps to write everything on your mind and then put it in a prioritized list. I use Outlook. There are all kinds of apps and devices out there. That's how I write my books.

You can't always be in your space. I like to go to hotels, check in on a Friday, and check out on a Sunday to get away from that day-to-day type of thing.

There can be many reasons for people not thinking strategically, whether it's workflow, not giving themselves enough room, or not having a third place to go.

It depends on the person.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** The title of your earlier book is What To Do When There's Too Much To Do. What's your advice for people who are facing a deadline and are overwhelmed?

**Laura Stack:** They will need to sit down and outline a plan of attack and the steps you need to take.

When you write a book, there's much that goes into that in the way of research, outlines, marketing and writing time. If you don't have a project plan worked into your workflow along with all the other projects going on, you can't get this piece finished in time to do the others.

A lot of that is your classic organizing, planning, prioritizing, and scheduling. Some people may need to revisit that system if they don't have a good project management plan.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** What if it's a client emergency? What if you've got a great system but three clients call Friday night saying, "I need this report by Monday?" You're stressed out. The problem isn't your system; you've got too much stuff coming in. What do you do?

**Laura Stack:** Be flexible and realize who your best customer is. But you don't have to say "Yes" to customers. You can say "No." There is often a way to set boundaries, push back, negotiate or compromise.

There are often ways you can say, "What can I do for you? I can't do this piece but I can do this piece." Sometimes I find out what's going on behind that. What's the real need? I've had clients ask me, "Okay. By tomorrow, I need your handouts and your slide."



I respond, “My speech isn’t for six months, what’s going on?”

“We’re trying to get this on our website.”

“How about a title and a description and a photo by tomorrow?”

Help clients through those types of requests rather than losing your weekend by saying “Yes” to everything.

A little negotiation and push back would be reasonable in that case.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** To be productive, we need to differentiate between availability and accessibility. Tell us about that.

**Laura Stack:** Well, many people are way too available. They end up doing their work after hours when everyone’s gone, it cuts into their family time, or they’re working nights and weekends because they aren’t limiting their availability.

I like to think about accessibility. I’m not available to everyone at anyone’s whim, but I’m accessible within parameters I’ve already defined.

This isn’t laying down the law. If you have a team of people, you want to have discussions about that. What meetings can you set up with key team members? Do you have those one-on-one coachings set up? You can’t leave that to chance. If you do you get those drops-ins, whether it’s a text, a call, an email, or someone in your office.

One of my clients is with Microsoft. He has what he calls GM hours, general manager hours. He says, “Think about when we were in school and the professor had office hours.” It’s scheduling your interruptions in advance. It’s not being available to everyone but being accessible within certain times and certain parameters.

When he told people, “I welcome your visits and questions during these hours,” guess when people showed up. During those hours. Accessibility is a process of creating periods where you will be available and periods to do your work, focus, concentrate, and be strategic.

Companies say, “We want our people to be strategic enablers of business,” but don’t give them any time to be strategic. Some teams are coming up with creative ways to use signals. Everybody wears a red baseball cap, put a flag up, has a little stop sign at the door, or something like that.

You can’t have it up all day. You put it up for three thirty-minute periods or one ninety-minute period each day. When someone sees that signal they know not to interrupt you.

People are trying to get creative in making sure they have time to focus on their real work without saying “I don’t have time for you.”

Find that middle ground.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Telling internal colleagues “I’m accessible between 3 and 5 in the afternoon” may work, but what do you do if you’re an entrepreneur and everybody is a client?

**Laura Stack:** Well, I’m an entrepreneur, but I still have specific parameters. I don’t start



conference calls until a certain time and I don't take conference calls after a certain time. I have three children, I want to exercise, and I have a life.

It's a matter of letting other people know when you are available. You block out your calendar for appointments. There's no need to tell anyone it's a meeting with yourself to work. Let them know when you are available without making excuses.

I don't tell people on the East Coast I'm available anytime. What if they say eight in the morning? That's six my time. That would be chaotic for me because I have a dog and cats and children running around. Be direct and confident about your availability.

I put my phone on airplane mode so I don't get texts and phone calls while I'm trying to focus. I fly over one hundred thousand miles each year. When I'm on a plane I'm not available. The world has not fallen apart. Clients have not fired me because I wasn't able to return their email within five hours.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** There's a great section in your book about knowing the financial value of your time and how that can help you decide how your time is best spent. I'm wondering if you can give us an example or two of mistakes you've noticed people making when they don't know the financial value of their time.

**Laura Stack:** I've seen CEOs typing their own meeting minutes and handling their calendars. I've seen CFOs doing their own expense reports. These are people making hundreds of thousands of dollars a year who may have problems with declining revenues or not hitting their numbers or goals.

No wonder, you're spending your time doing \$15 an hour jobs. They say it's to save the company money. I look at a concept of a personal return on investment. We talk about ROI all the time. But what's PROI?

What's your personal return on investment in time spent on an activity versus the result for your organization? It's important to consider with technology becoming less expensive and organizations getting flatter with administrative and management layers stripped away.

Entrepreneurs are the worst at this. They think, "Well, I could do that." Then they're up until midnight doing things they can hire somebody for \$20 an hour to do and their time is worth hundreds of dollars an hour.

What do you bring to this organization that nobody else can do? What key responsibilities does your organization rely on you to do? If something doesn't fall under those areas, outsource it, delegate it, or eliminate it.

It's always a good acid test to ask, "If I had unlimited resources, could I hire this out could I get someone else to do this?"

There are sites like Upwork, where you can hire someone to do almost anything. I have twenty-five independent contractors doing work for me outside my and my employees' PROI or key responsibilities.

That's another thing to talk about with your team. Ask them, "What are the top three things you think I'm responsible for?" They make a list, you make a list, and you compare them. Are they the same?



**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** I like the example of UpWork. I noticed the benefits of that, too. If UpWork were to disappear tomorrow, what tasks would you most miss having done by someone else?

**Laura Stack:** Oh my gosh. I have my graphics done through there, a project of scanning photos, and PowerPoint slides done there. I need this graphic animated and this flyer or banner done. They're random things that make little sense for me to use a full-time PowerPoint expert, graphics designer, or someone to add this banner on a website. Those are the key people you would miss.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Getting back to the question I asked about not knowing the value of your time. I want to bring it up a great example because many people can relate.

You talk about trying to save your company money by taking a hotel room not at the conference site.

Could you talk a bit about that?

**Laura Stack:** That's a running joke with my colleagues of the National Speakers Association and me. We go to conferences and get a hotel block. Maybe you're at a Marriott and the hotel rate is \$249. Someone goes "Oh, I can spend \$189 and go down the street and stay there."

Talking about the differences in transportation, your time walking... I don't even drive myself to the airport. I hire someone to drive me because it isn't worth the hour I take to drive myself. What I could do if I weren't schlepping myself over to the airport or, in this case, the hotel?

They're missing out on those hours of networking and interaction. You miss out on a lot when you don't stay at the conference hotel. Spend a few extra bucks and save yourself hours of time. "Saving" that money defeats the purpose.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** If you're spending an hour walking to the conference and back every day, think about what you're getting paid per hour — are you saving that much?

Let's say it's a \$249 versus \$149. Is it worth \$100 to save an hour of your time if you could meet one potential client and it would pay for itself?

**Laura Stack:** It's not just \$100. It's the multiplier of that. It's thousands of dollars in the deal you missed because you spent that hour walking rather than networking with your clients or prospective clients.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** One final question for you Laura. You talk about the importance of the speed of your thinking and how that influences your productivity. One recommendation for improving your thinking speed is taking an acting class. I thought that was an interesting recommendation.

Have you taken an acting class and, if so, has it benefited you in some concrete ways?

**Laura Stack:** Oh gosh. You're calling me on my writing. I've taken many acting classes. I was in theater growing up, middle school, and high school. I was in my first play at eight years old, playing Ngana in South Pacific with the cadets at the Air Force Academy.

I learned a lot through acting. I continued as an adult, but more improvisational comedy.



I would recommend everyone take improvisational comedy. It's amazing what it does to cause you to keep that brain moving quickly.

Think on your feet. Be ready for something out of left field. If you're a salesperson in front of your customers asking tough questions, that helps you think better on your feet. Even if you learn how to take the time to answer a question but stall in your career, it's a great tool to have.

Your brain forces itself to work more quickly. My kids are all in drama. It's an important skill to stand up in front of a group of people, project confidence, speak your piece, say what you believe in a confident way, and handle things you're unprepared for.

It's great for innovation, creativity. There are all kinds of benefits that would come out of improv. I highly recommend it.

**Ron Friedman, Ph.D.:** Terrific. Well, Laura Stack, it's been a pleasure. Thank you for joining us.

**Laura Stack:** Thank you, Ron. Appreciate it.



## Practical Tips from Laura Stack

- Avoid irrelevant information to stay focused. Turn off notifications, especially when working. Set up automatic filters on your inbox to make sure you only have to deal with priority emails and can deal with the rest later.
- Be aware and purposeful in your decisions of what to do “next.” Choose your next task based on what has the most impact on the metrics you or your bosses use to measure success instead of what’s fun, what’s most obvious, or the biggest “fire.”
- Create a system to triage incoming tasks. Set your daily priorities the night before. When checking email, set priority tags based on how important they really are for your bottom line.
- Don’t immediately say, “yes” to every request that comes in. Often, last-minute emergencies from clients, coworkers, or bosses have alternate solutions. Don’t be afraid to push back and negotiate to find a solution, or to even say, “no” if you can’t find a solution that works for everyone.
- Set “office hours” to be accessible if needed to avoid sacrificing productivity or personal time to be available on demand. Set appointments with yourself to work on important tasks or have personal time and make those appointments inviolate.
- Know the financial value of your time and recognize when it makes more sense to outsource work. Focus on the things only you can do. A CEO making hundreds of thousands of dollars per year should not be spending his time on jobs that someone could be paid ten dollars per hour to do.
- Don’t make cost cuts that will cost you at least that much in time lost. If you save \$100 on a hotel room, but it costs you an hour in commuting that you could use to make a \$1,000 connection or sale, you’ve just lost money.
- Take acting classes to speed up your thinking. Improvisational comedy, in particular, helps you learn how to think on your feet and become more productive and innovative.





## About the Host: Ron Friedman, Ph.D.

Ron Friedman, Ph.D., is an award-winning social psychologist that specializes in human motivation. His new book, ***The Best Place to Work: The Art and Science of Creating an Extraordinary Workplace***, has been described as “stunning,” “eye-opening,” and “a contemporary classic,” and praised by best-selling authors Daniel Pink, David Allen, Marshall Goldsmith, Susan Cain, and Adam Grant.

Dr. Friedman has served on the faculty of the University of Rochester, Nazareth College, and Hobart and William Smith Colleges, and has consulted for Fortune 500 companies, political leaders, and the world’s leading non-profits. Popular accounts of his research have appeared on NPR and in major newspapers, including *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Boston Globe*, the *Globe and Mail*, *The Guardian*, as well as magazines such as *Men’s Health*, *Shape*, and *Allure*.

He is a contributor to *Harvard Business Review*, CNN, and *Forbes*, and frequently **delivers keynotes** on the science of workplace excellence.