

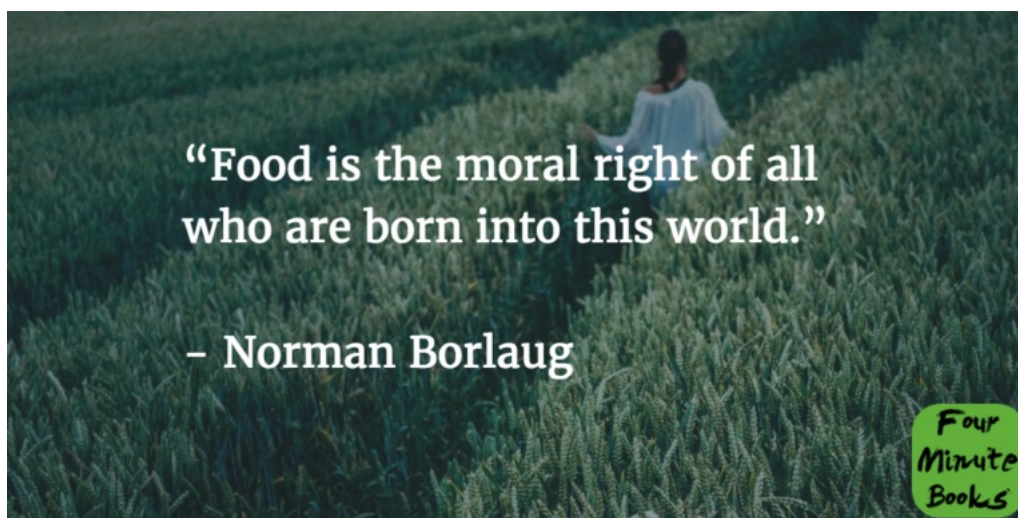
# The Man Who Fed The World Summary

 [fourminutebooks.com/the-man-who-fed-the-world-summary](https://fourminutebooks.com/the-man-who-fed-the-world-summary)

**1-Sentence-Summary:** *The Man Who Fed The World* is the biography of Dr. Norman Borlaug, Nobel Peace Prize laureate and US national hero, who saved over a billion lives by dedicating his own to ending world hunger and leading the green revolution, which helped get agriculture to a point where it can feed the world.

**Read in:** 4 minutes

**Favorite quote from the author:**



Here's a man I'm sure you've never heard of before, yet who has saved more lives than probably anyone in the history of mankind: Dr. Norman Borlaug. Borlaug was born in 1914 in Iowa, in the United States, grew up in a rural setting and from 1930 onwards, dedicated his entire life to one cause: ending world hunger.

Having learned what hunger feels like first hand, as his family was poor, and immensely valuing hard, practical work, helping others and education, he was perfectly suited for this mission. Between 1930 and 1970, he led what would later be called the green revolution, a number of research and development projects to transfer agricultural technology to developing countries, in order to allow them to increase their crop yield and feed their population.

In hindsight, Borlaug's been credited with saving at least one billion (!) lives – that's every single person on Facebook in October 2012 – and received the Nobel Peace Prize for his work.

When I found out *The Man Who Fed The World* was one of Bill Gates's favorites, I had to dig deeper. I think the lessons you can draw from such a man's life go far beyond biology or charity and will help anyone succeed in their cause.

Here are my top 3:

1. Ship now, perfect later.
2. Get your hands dirty.
3. Show, don't tell.

Ready to learn from an Iowan farmer with the brain of a scientist and a heart of gold? Here comes the man who fed the world!

## Lesson 1: Ship a solution now, perfect it later.

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Scientists, almost by definition, love to dabble. They theorize, hypothesize, ponder, think and strategize, and try to come up with incremental improvements to existing ideas. This extensive cycling within the scientific method is important, but when it comes to solving such an immediate threat as world hunger, well, as Borlaug would say: "You can't eat potential."

That's why he always pushed to get new farming techniques and higher-yielding crop seeds into the hands of farmers as fast as possible, even if they weren't perfect. Hunger doesn't wait for anyone, so the only way to fight it was to launch imperfect solutions.

For example in India, small-scale farmers were stuck in their traditions, making government incentives to use new seeds necessary, as well as companies offering free fertilizer at the right time – **so Borlaug pushed hard for both of these things, fully aware that he'd come up with better seeds in the future.**

Look at your own life. How many times have you published, launched or handed in something that you didn't think was perfect at the time and actually regretted it? Chances are, in most cases you were glad you did release it, as there was plenty of time to improve it later.

When I look back at over 300 book summaries in 2016, none of which were perfect when I published them, it becomes abundantly clear to me that shipping now is *always* the better choice.

## Lesson 2: If you want to be respected and really make a difference, you have to get your hands dirty and do it yourself.

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How would you feel if I suddenly walked into your office tomorrow morning and tell you how you can do your job better? "Keep your folders here, save some time by batching email processing there, and oh, about your browser..."

You'd probably tell me to shut up and show me the door – and rightfully so! **If I haven't earned your respect, why would you listen to me?**

To all the farmers Borlaug worked with, he advocated that they go on a farm, work there and get their hands dirty. Otherwise, how could they possibly understand agriculture, learn the language of farmers and earn the right to talk to them? **Doing the hard work of a farmer**

**themselves is the only way for scientists' later advice to be accepted.**

This is true for any field, really. If you want the respect of a community and really make a difference in it, don't sit around and hand out advice based on information, go do shit, learn, put in the work and *then* share what works.

### Lesson 3: Don't tell people what you're going to do for them. Show them. At the very least, do both.

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Actually doing stuff has another advantage: you can **let your results speak for themselves**. In Borlaug's case, changing an entire country's agricultural behavior would always need the support of the government – but a government is hard to convince.

Instead of just *telling* them how his new crops could improve yield or why using chemical fertilizer was a necessary step to take, he *showed* them the results of his previous experiments in other countries.

He didn't argue with the Indian government about the amount of fertilizer they needed to use – he showed them how much yield highly fertilized fields in Pakistan brought and let the numbers do the talking. Similarly, he always took in young, inexperienced, local scientists, gave them a ton of responsibility and groomed them from the ground up to go on to change their countries, like in Mexico, where one of his students later became the head of the Mexican agricultural research program.

Showing, not just telling, is one of the key principles I use in writing my blog posts. It's easy to give people 17 tactics to be more focused without any instructions. So whatever I do, I back it up with concrete, specific examples, instructions and results.

Stop thinking. **Get out there, do the work, get the results, and use those to help people .** There's nothing more convincing than that.

## The Man Who Fed The World Review

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Norman Borlaug, *The Man Who Fed The World*, lived to be 95 years old. He worked hard and tirelessly to end world hunger, day-in and day-out, every single day of those 95 years. That's 34,675 days of hustle. You and I might have a lot less than that, yet we're here, reading (and in my case writing) this post. If there's only one thing to learn from Dr. Norman Borlaug, it's this: It's time to do.

What's the most important thing you can do today? Stop reading now. Go do that.

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## What else can you learn from the blinks?

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- The one trait Borlaug carried throughout all his life
- Which kind of arguing is effective when trying to get societies and governments to cooperate
- What two parts needed to be combined for the green revolution to spread
- How the green revolution has been criticized and why it was easy for Borlaug to dismiss that criticism
- Where we need to turn our agricultural attention next
- The number one pro argument for biotechnology

## Who would I recommend The Man Who Fed The World summary to?

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The 17 year old, who loves learning about genetics in her biology class, the 48 year old farmer, who struggles with bureaucracy and constantly changing governmental policies, and anyone who wants to cause a big change in the world.