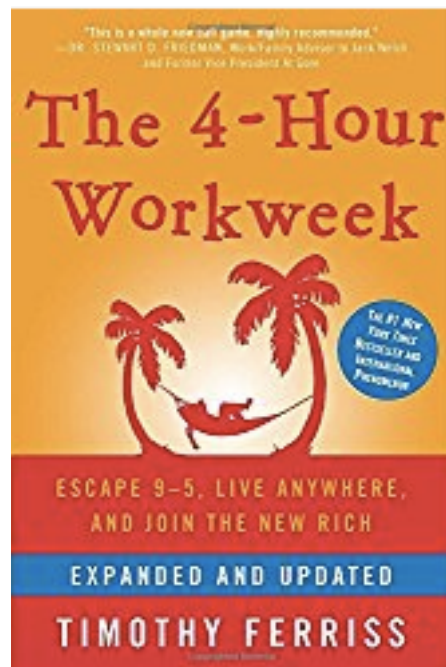# The 4-Hour Work Week

By Tim Ferriss

Synopsis

Let's go ahead and get this out of the way. Even if readers followed all the advice and techniques in this book, they will probably still be working more than 4 hours. The title is a bit over-dramatized but it emphasizes the big impact the ideas in this book can have for readers. The book is all about how to change the way readers look at how they live and work and why they should challenge old assumptions.

"If you are insecure, guess what? The rest of the world is, too. Do not overestimate the competition and underestimate yourself. You are better than you think."

The author writes from a unique vantage point. He created a life and a career he chose out of consistently questioning the traditional assumptions about life and work. He writes in detail about his challenges, failures, and successes candidly and readers can see in detail his transformation using this new life view. His emphasis is on viewing time and mobility as the ultimate currency. It's not about how much money can be made; it's about how having the time and the freedom to live a good life without being broke is possible.

Summary

"The question you should be asking isn't, "What do I want?" or "What are my goals?" but "What would excite me?"

The framework for the book is built with the acronym "DEAL," providing a step-by-step plan for readers to learn how to take back control of their lives.

- **Definition**: Replace self-defeating assumptions.
- **Elimination**: Forget time management; learn to ignore the unimportant.
- **Automation**: Learn to put cash flow on autopilot.

- **Liberation**: Create freedom of location.

Definition

The first few chapters help readers redefine what is possible by thinking differently. Readers learn that being financially rich and being able to live like a millionaire are quite different. Money combined with the value of time and mobility takes on a whole new value. It isn't the money that is so important; it's the ability to live life on our own terms.

Thinking differently means questioning accepted methods and ideas. The book gives readers ten ways that old assumptions are wrong.

- Retirement is worst-case scenario insurance.
- Interest and energy are cyclical.
- Less is not laziness.
- The timing is never right.
- Ask for forgiveness, not permission.
- Emphasize strengths, don't fix weaknesses
- Things in excess become their opposite.
- Money alone is not the solution.
- Relative income is more important than absolute income.
- Distress is bad, eustress is good

"What we fear doing most is usually what we most need to do."

Readers won't be surprised to see that fear is one of the biggest obstacles to changing their life and the book talks about this throughout. By acknowledging that fear and recognizing the very worst outcome, readers can map out steps to recover if the worst does happen. On the flip side, the same approach should be taken with the potential benefit also.

Elimination

This is all about how to get rid of obstacles. Readers will find that once they define what they want to do with their time, they have to learn how to free up the time to do it. One lesson taught here is that by using the Pareto principle, time management becomes less of a factor. The Pareto principle states that 80% of results come from 20% of actions and readers will learn how to make the best of that 20% in this section. The goal of elimination is to free up time, from working remotely to working more productively.

This may be hard to swallow for many readers, but elimination also includes limiting or even eliminating things like reading or watching the news. The book recommends taking five days off from television and web surfing and other time wasters. By removing obstacles that don't contribute to the ultimate goal, readers will find that they have much more time than they thought possible.

> *"By working only when you are most effective, life is both more productive and more enjoyable. It's the perfect example of having your cake and eating it, too."*

Readers will find even more time to live the life they want by stopping interruptions and refusing to waste time. The book outlines three major categories:

Time wasters. Readers will learn how to eliminate all the wasted time that goes into unimportant emails, phone calls, and meetings.

- Time consumers. These are all the things that just have to be done. Customer service, reports, and other necessary tasks can be batched together creating a single interruption instead of multiple ones.
- Empowerment failures. The lesson learned here is to establish clear guidelines up front for delegates to avoid having to stop and approve decisions.

Automation

Successfully defining the life they want to live and eliminating obstacles, readers are ready to put some automation in place to make things easier. While many of the lessons here are about creating a product and starting a business, they apply to most business situations. Readers will learn the importance of building systems to replace themselves if they want to break free. From hiring a virtual assistant to handle less important tasks to learning what can be delegated, readers will find ways to automate much of their work.

"Being able to quit things that don't work is integral to being a winner"

Once the automation is put into motion, the challenge for readers will be to remove themselves from the equation as much as possible. By being able to teach a task and then outsource or delegate it, readers will find that they may not be so busy after all. More automation equals more time.

Liberation

The fourth step readers will learn is how to liberate themselves from the traditional office environment. The book outlines five steps to convince the boss that working remotely is a good idea. Pulling this one off is possible and will free up big chunks of time to live more and work less.

- Increase investment. Readers will learn how to get their employer to invest in them to increase the cost of losing them.
- Prove increased output off-site. The book teaches specific steps to find the opportunities to show that remote work can be more productive.
- Show the business benefit. By presenting the remote work as a business benefit instead of a personal one, readers will be able to better convince their employer.
- Propose a trial period. Starting small, with maybe a day or two to test out the idea, readers will find that their idea will go over better.
- Expand remote time. Assuming all goes well, the lesson here is to slowly increase the remote time to make it more acceptable and, eventually, a permanent solution.

"The goal is not to simply eliminate the bad, which does nothing more than leave you with a vacuum, but to pursue and experience the best in the world."

The book finishes up with advice and guidelines for readers on how to eventually eliminate their job altogether by changing how they view their work and life balance. Readers will ultimately learn that the goal of having time and freedom to live the life they choose has a specific game plan that has been proven to work.

You can get the entire book here.

BLUE OCEAN STRATEGY

By W.Chan & Renee Mauborgne
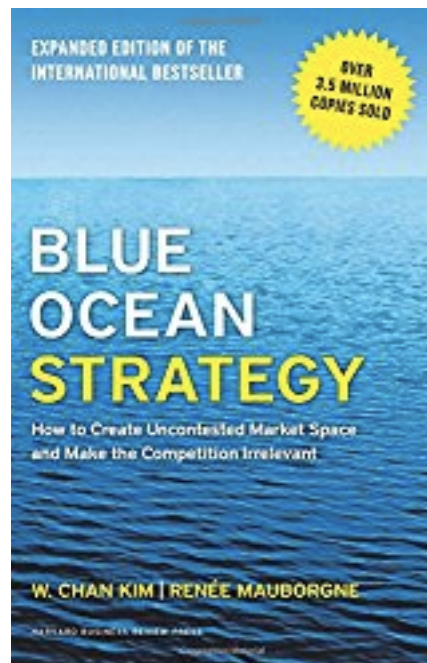
Synopsis

This book challenges readers to rethink traditional incremental innovation approaches. Typically, head-to-head competition is the norm for increasing market share, but this book teaches readers that there is a better way to compete and win. Based on a study of 150 strategies in 30 industries, the authors make their case for using innovation instead of fighting for position in a competitive market. Readers will learn that strategic success depends on creating a "*blue ocean*," a market space that is un crowded and primed for growth, by investing in innovation that brings more value to customers.

"Blue ocean strategy challenges companies to break out of the red ocean of bloody competition by creating uncontested market space that makes the competition irrelevant."

In creating this blue ocean, readers can avoid fighting for incremental competitive advantage and market share in what the authors call "the red ocean." R*ed oceans* are the overcrowded, bloody, cutthroat arenas where companies struggle to stand out and compete amidst shrinking profits. Readers will learn that this approach inhibits value innovation, causes price wars, and limits profit margins, creating a marketplace that prevents sustainable, profitable growth. By creating and capturing their blue ocean, readers can get out of the red ocean and stand out by focusing on innovation that creates a whole new market.

Summary

The blue ocean strategy is based on the alignment of the three strategy positions of value, profit, and people. Readers will find that this approach of value innovation, a process where a company introduces new technologies designed to achieve both product differentiation and low costs, is far more effective than merely pursuing innovation for its own sake. By creating a demand, rather than competing for limited demand, companies can stop fighting a fight they have little chance of winning.

"Value innovation requires companies to orient the whole system toward achieving a leap in value for both buyers and themselves."

The systematic approach of the blue ocean strategy is founded on principles that can create a great leap in value that can make competitors irrelevant. The principles are comprehensive, easy to learn, and easy to implement for a new start-up or an existing business that wants to push the boundaries in a red ocean within their industry. Blue ocean strategy provides a clear four-step process to help readers redesign their market.

Step 1 — Reconstruct the market boundaries. This step involves rethinking assumptions about the size and scope of a particular market. By understanding where the competition is operating and what they offer, readers can find opportunities to create a blue ocean for their business. A prime example of this type of thinking is the consistent growth of the grocery chain Aldi in Australia. By challenging the assumption that they had to compete directly with their established competitors, Aldi found their niche by offering about half of the lines of products that were typically offered. This value innovation approach resulted in the chain opening an average of 30 new stores annually.

Step 2 — Focus on the big picture, not the numbers. By using a strategy canvas, a central diagnostic tool and an action framework developed by the authors for building a compelling blue ocean strategy, readers can determine the demand of a particular niche. It graphically represents, in one simple picture, the current strategies and potential prospects for a company.

Step 3 — Reach beyond existing demand. By focusing on non-customers and why they aren't a customer yet, readers can begin to figure out what innovations would result in more value and a broader market. By challenging the assumptions of demand in their industry, companies can begin to discover ways to create demand with value innovation.

Step 4 — Get the strategic sequence right. Building a blue ocean strategy includes four keys:

- Buyer utility, the extent to which customers can see the value and ease-of-use of a product, is the foundation for creating a product or service that is unique in the marketplace.

- The pricing structure must target large consumer groups. By appealing to the largest customer base with pricing that is seen as a value, readers can differentiate themselves and access a larger market.

- Costs of production must be low enough to ensure a healthy profit consistently. By focusing on reducing waste and increasing efficiency, the bottom line becomes healthier.
- Adoption, implementing practices that minimize customer effort and frustration, is critical in making it easy for customers to buy. By reducing or eliminating obstacles for customers, readers will find that customers are much more inclined to try a product or service.

"What are the alternative industries to your industry? Why do customers trade across them? By focusing on the key factors that lead buyers to trade across alternative industries and eliminating or reducing everything else, you can create a blue ocean of new market space."

Case Study

Cirque du Soleil, the largest theatrical producer in the world, uses circus styles from all over the world to present themes and storylines in their performances. More than 150 million people in over 300 cities have seen cirque's performances since their creation twenty years ago, and their success can be attributed to creating a blue ocean. The circus industry had been steadily declining over the last few decades, and Cirque knew that it couldn't succeed by offering the traditional circus experience. Instead, they intentionally designed their performances to appeal to a completely different audience. Their target audience is adults who can, and will, pay higher prices for a unique entertainment experience.

By understanding the current state of the circus industry and rethinking the traditional circus customer, Cirque was able to create a demand for a different experience, effectively eliminating traditional competition in the industry. Using the principles of the blue ocean strategy, they were able to reinvent the circus experience and create a whole new market in a declining industry. By refusing to compete in the existing red ocean, Cirque found a profitable niche and a unique product that put them in a position of market dominance.

Key Takeaways

- Don't try to outperform competitors
- Create a new marketplace to make competitors obsolete
- Creating value innovation is the key to creating a blue ocean strategy
- Value innovation must include differentiation and cost control elements

Readers who adopt the blue ocean strategies in their own companies will find ways to finally get out of the cycle of traditional competition. They will learn how to innovate their products and services in ways that create broader demand and unique marketplaces by focusing on what customers want and making it easy for them to get it.

You can read the entire book here.

GROWTH HACKER MARKETING

By Ryan Holiday
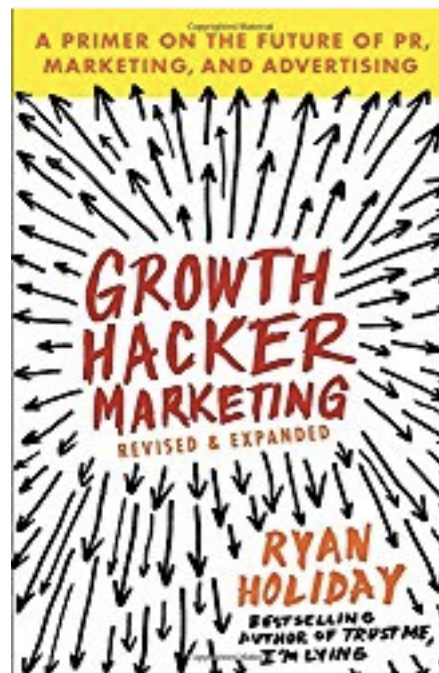
Synopsis

[Growth hacker marketing](#) is a concept that uses a test-and-learn method along with a process of rapid experimentation. By experimenting across marketing channels and applying the results to product development and the campaign structure, companies can quickly identify the most effective channels for marketing. Readers will learn that by experimenting, adapting, and modifying products, their marketing efforts will be more targeted and more successful.

This "hacking" approach has helped companies like Airbnb, Zappos, Uber, and many others bypass the constraints of traditional marketing. By questioning the accepted methods of marketing, these companies opened up a whole new road map to growth. Readers will learn how these businesses rapidly developed a product or service that people wanted, using experimentation and market feedback. They will learn how to create a different perspective of marketing and question common assumptions.

"The end goal of every growth hacker is to build a self-perpetuating marketing machine that reaches millions by itself."

Summary

A "growth hacker" is someone who is focused on growth and uses trial and error methods to find the most effective marketing channels. Readers will learn that popular marketing trends such as "branding" may seem attractive, but they are often time-consuming and often miss the mark. Growth hacking takes a different approach by quickly getting a product or service to market, getting feedback, and modifying the product or the campaign to fit what the market wants. By validating the feedback and moving quickly, "hacking" efforts save time and work and result in a more marketable product or service.

"A growth hacker is someone who has thrown out the playbook of traditional marketing and replaced it with only what is testable, trackable, and scalable. Their tools are e-mails, pay-per-click ads, blogs, and platform APIs instead of commercials, publicity, and money."

The book teaches readers, step-by-step, how they can become a growth hacker and break out of the traditional marketing cycle.

Step 1: It Begins with Product Market Fit (PMF)

Product market fit is the foundation of a successful growth hacking process. Readers learn that by testing what works, they can design a product that fits the market's needs. The book outlines the keys to getting the PMF right as quickly as possible.

- Don't start with the product, start with the press release, creating a market focus instead of a product or company focus.
- Write the FAQ. This seems like putting the cart before the horse, but it serves to keep the focus on the market and helps in defining product design.
- Now build a prototype. Then test it, modify it, test it again, and so on. Readers will learn that this hack-and-test approach can take many rounds of iteration before they find the best product or service to offer.

Step 2: Finding Your Growth Hack (Targeting the Right People)

Readers will learn that the test-and-learn approach applies to product development and in finding the most effective growth hack. Once the product from the PMF efforts is ready, it's time to take it to market to see what channels will be the most effective. Readers will find these channels by listening to the feedback from the market. Then, they can modify the campaign using the same methods from the first step.

Step 3: Turning 1 into 2 and 2 into 4 – Going Viral

Going viral is the Holy Grail of marketing, and many marketers struggle to understand how to make it happen. Readers will learn here that there are proven methods that take some of the

mystery out of this powerful marketing channel. The premise behind going viral is simply that happy customers like to talk. If companies deliver experiences that exceed expectations, it will drive word of mouth and create a viral environment. Readers will learn that this organic process can be accelerated, decreasing the time for a product to take hold. By getting a product

in the hands of influencers and taking every opportunity to increase visibility, the chance of going viral increases.

Step 4: Close the Loop: Retention & Optimization

Growth hacking is not a one-and-done process. The book teaches readers that growth depends not only on getting new customers but on keeping customers coming back. Customer retention can also be one of the best ways to acquire new customers because these satisfied customers often introduce others to the product or service. A small increase in retention can create a larger increase in growth and profitability. This is why high-growth brands such as Zappos focus on innovation that creates better experiences and a better return.

"80 percent of marketers are unhappy with their ability to measure marketing return on investment (ROI). Not because the tools aren't good enough, but because they're too good, and marketers see for the first time that their marketing strategies are "often flawed and their spending is inefficient."

The founder of Zappos, Nick Swinmum, provides a simple example of growth hacking in action.

Instead of creating a product or service and then sending it out into the world to see if it worked, he took the test-and-learn approach. Swinmum's idea was to sell shoes online, and he wasn't quite sure if his idea had a market. Like a true "hacker," he decided to test the idea before investing his time and effort.

According to Swinmum, "...went to a couple of stores, took some pictures of the shoes, made a website, put them up and told the shoe store, if I sell anything, I'll come here and pay full price. They said okay, knock yourself out. So I did that, made a couple of sales." This simple step gave Nick the feedback he needed to validate his idea as something worth pursuing. By testing

his idea and learning from his little experiment, Swinmum created the foundation for one of the most wildly successful online companies.

The growth hacking lessons readers can learn from the Zappos story is not just that the hacking methods work. It's also that one of the quickest ways to get the growth hacking strategy rolling in the right direction is by finding a way to close the gap between an idea and customer interaction. This is the key to finding the right growth hack. Too often, an idea is put into motion long before any customer interaction occurs. With growth hacking, that interaction happens as early as possible in the process and impacts everything from product development to marketing strategy.

You can get the book [here](#).

Hooked

By Nir Eval
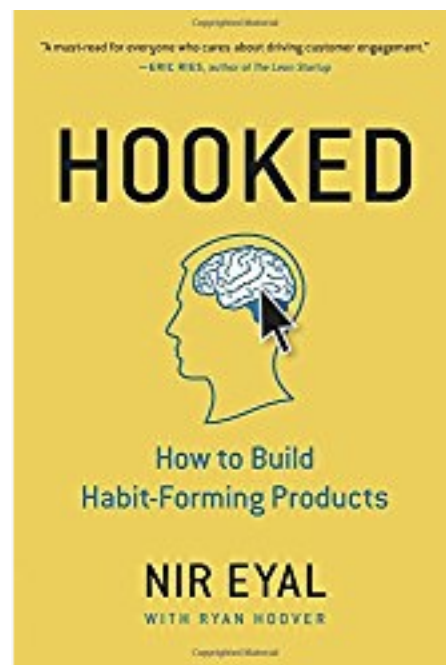
Synopsis

"Hooked" is the result of the author's years of research and practical experience with consumer habits and psychology. The overall theme of the book is to teach readers how customers behave and how to influence their habits with a product. The principles taught here will benefit designers, marketers, start-up founders, and anyone else who wants to learn how to create a product that customers just can't stop using.

"79 percent of smartphone owners check their device within 15 minutes of waking up every morning."

Readers will learn why some products capture customer's imaginations and attention, while others just never get off the ground. Using proven techniques, the Hook Model is all about learning how to engage customers by creating a product that creates a habit. Readers will find case studies of how the four-step process helps to create a product that "hooks" customers. The result is a product that doesn't rely on complicated and expensive marketing but rather relies on the innate tendencies for people to form habits.

The practices outlined in the book will give readers the tools to test consumer habits, influence those habits, and, ultimately, nurture those habits. The goal is to create consistent use of a product that is self-sustaining. By using "hook cycles," these products are designed to bring users back over and over, creating a habit that becomes automatic, frequent, and permanent.

Summary

This book gives readers real-world insights into creating and nurturing user habits that become almost autonomous. Readers will learn how to design and build products that customers love. The book gives examples of successfully "hooking" customers that are behind many well-known products such as Twitter, Pinterest, and Instagram. Readers will learn that by creating a product that is designed to be addictive, they can use some of the most basic tendencies of human behavior to make a product a habit.

"Reducing the thinking required to take the next action increases the likelihood of the desired behavior occurring unconsciously."

The author describes a habit as "Behaviors done with little or no conscious thought." Readers will find practical guidelines for creating these types of behaviors within the "habit zone." The "habit zone" is the place where customers form an attachment to a product without really thinking about it. By using the strategies of the Hooked Model, readers will learn step-by-step how to "hook" a customer.

Four Steps

The strategies outlined in the model follow four specific steps:

Trigger — Readers will learn that a trigger is something that prompts a user to use a product consistently. External triggers are things like emails or texts. Internal triggers are things like checking Instagram habitually.

Action — The key here is to increase the desired actions by making the product as easy to use as possible. At the same time, the design of the product must include incentives to increase a user's motivation to use the product again.

Variable Reward — By varying the incentives and their frequency, readers will learn that the rewards associated with an action keep users in a sort of constant expectation. Research has proven that when people are expecting a reward, the levels of dopamine increase. Increased

levels of dopamine simply make people feel good, and this good feeling must be repeated to keep users "hooked."

Investment — Readers will learn that this step is all about getting the user involved. Whether it's referring a friend, being introduced to new features, or being asked to provide feedback, creating a greater investment from the user keeps the habit alive.

"Instead of relying on expensive marketing, habit-forming companies link their services to the users' daily routines and emotions."

Any company that builds strong user habits will see a direct impact on the bottom line. The key benefits of creating this habitual consumption include customer loyalty, pricing flexibility, growth through networks, and a solid competitive advantage. The results of using these principles successfully are not only increased revenue but also more consistent revenue.

The author teaches readers why this model works and how to use the model to create a product that is irresistible to users and creates the desired habits. By asking specific questions provided by the author, readers can learn how to create a product that has a high level of user interest.

- What habits does your product want to create?
- What problems does your product solve?
- How do users currently solve their problem and why is a better solution necessary?
- How often do you want users to use your product?
- What specific behavior do you want to turn into a habit?

By using these types of questions, readers can systematically learn how to design the right kind of product for creating habitual use.

"The Hook Model is designed to connect the user's problem with the designer's solution frequently enough to form a habit. It is a framework for building products that solve user needs through long-term engagement."

Case Study

YouVersion's wildly popular Bible App, is a perfect example of the Hooked Model in action. Readers have only to consider the numbers to see the impact of the app's design.

- 200 million. The number of times the app has been downloaded
- 244 million. The number of verses shared
- 36 billion. The number of chapters read using the app
- 112 times per second. How often the app is opened

With 12 versions of the Bible App in 900 languages, the app is designed to appeal to a world market. Using **triggers**, such as reminders for a daily reading plan and other notifications, with popular apps like Facebook and Twitter, the app is designed to constantly and consistently remind users to open the app.

The app is also intentionally designed for ease of use. In its earlier versions, it was only available as a website. Once the company created the mobile version, they quickly saw how much easier it was for users to take the desired **actions**.

The **variable rewards** range from the user's natural tendency to feel good about sharing their beliefs to being able to pull up verses of scripture to deal with the problems of daily life. These rewards are based on extensive data that YouVersion has compiled about its target users and includes incentives that appeal to the religious and social aspects.

Each time a user shares the app, shares a verse, creates a bookmark or highlights a verse, they are increasing their **investment** in Bible. Maybe the ultimate investment, users find that even their religious leaders use the app to upload their sermons so users can follow along.

"We often think the Internet enables you to do new things … But people just want to do the same things they've always done."

Just as it was intended, the Bible App is a habit-forming product that has created an impressive fan base. Using consumer psychology, massive amounts of data, and the power of social technology, The Bible App has "hooked" millions of users by using the Hooked Model. Readers will find that by studying the principles outlined in the book and case studies such as Bible they will be able to understand how to build a product that users just can't put down.

You can get the book here.

The Lean Startup

By Eric Ries
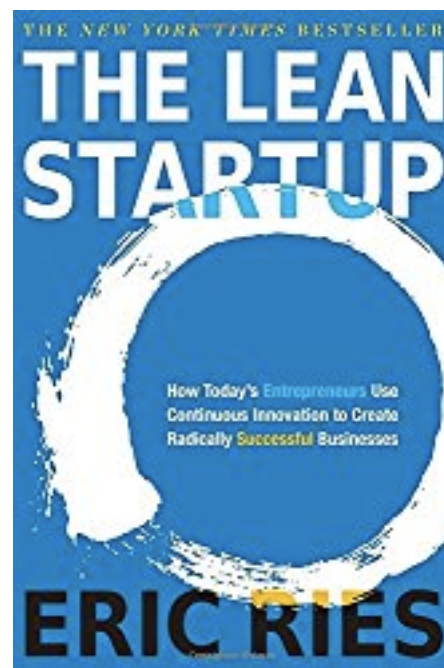
Synopsis

New business ventures are both exciting and risky. New ventures are risky as the main idea may or may not work; yet the chances of success are much greater if there is a recipe for testing and validating said idea early on. Readers of this book will learn scientific approaches to building and managing a startup and how to get a product to market faster.

The lessons in this book teach the fundamentals of product viability from organizing for fast learning to validating what works.

Readers learn the value of testing a product every step of the way to eliminate the wasted time and money that are associated with typical startups.

Lessons here include the importance of getting customer feedback to create a product that appeals to customers before the product is launched. Readers will learn what to measure, how to measure it, and how to use valuable customer feedback to design a better product.

The methods taught here showcase how to drive a startup, how to steer, when to turn, and when to persevere. All designed to grow a business as fast as possible, as lean as possible.

"A startup is a human institution designed to create a new product or service under conditions of extreme uncertainty."

Summary

The structure for using these methods of a lean startup is laid out in three phases: vision, steer, and accelerate.

Vision —

Most entrepreneurs have at least some sort of vision or goal in mind when launching a new venture. They use various strategies or business plans to reach that goal. Readers will learn here that one of the most important lessons is to avoid strategies based on untested theories.

Testing theories means breaking down the larger vision into smaller pieces and finding the weakest elements. Readers will learn that experimenting while building a strategy is a better plan than waiting to release the "perfect" product to later find out there's no market for it.

The result of testing while designing is a product that has been refined based on feedback. The final product will have a better chance of success, as it will solve direct customer needs.

Readers will learn that by using this method, they will have a product that has a built-in audience before it's even launched. A clear, validated vision has the best chance of succeeding.

Steer —

Once a vision is validated and under way, readers learn how to steer their plan for the greatest likelihood of success. Using the "build-measure-learn" feedback loop, readers will learn how to know when to turn (a.k.a: "pivot") and when to keep going.

The first part of this feedback loop involves creating a minimum viable product (MVP) based on what the book calls "leap-of-faith-assumptions." The second part is getting feedback as quickly as possible from the market. The third part is to use that feedback to learn how to make the product more viable.

The goal here is to minimize the amount of time, money, and energy spent in getting the right product to market. By getting a product in front of customers as quickly as possible, perfect or not, a startup will be able to fine-tune their product and their strategy.

Readers will learn that by measuring the results of their initial offering, they will know if they are on the right track. If not, then they will need to pivot their focus. If they are on the right track, they persevere and use the feedback to customize the product based on what customers want or need.

Accelerate —

In keeping with the premise of a lean and fast startup, once a vision is being steered in the right direction, it's time to hit the gas. Readers will learn that this phase is designed to keep things moving while improving along the way.

They will learn how to us the "small batch approach" to get through the feedback loop quickly. They will learn production methods like the "just-in-time" method that keeps innovation and design efforts efficient and effective.

Readers will learn how to find the right growth strategy for sustainable growth and how to keep the focus on moving forward. Other lessons in this section teach readers how to keep accelerating safely by building an adaptive organization that can regulate its own growth, at its own pace.

Readers will also learn how to create an innovative environment that generates new startups as a part of the company's normal course of business.

“The only way to win is to learn faster than anyone else.”

Five Principles

Underlying these three phases are five principles that are the keys to a successful lean startup.

- Entrepreneurs are everywhere. This principle teaches readers that the entrepreneurial spirit is not just reserved for startups. It can be found in small companies, as well as large corporations. It can be found in new companies and established companies. A programmer in a big company who creates a more efficient solution is just as much an entrepreneur as a programmer creating a new app in his basement.

- Entrepreneurship is Management. Readers learn here that the perception of being an entrepreneur is much different than that of being a manager. But this book teaches that entrepreneurship and management can be synonymous. The lesson here is that a startup is basically an organization that needs to be managed.

- Build-Measure-Learn. This principle is all about creating a product that people want. Startups by their very nature are creating something new. Readers will learn the importance of getting that product into the market, seeing how people respond, and learning what works and what doesn't.

- Validated Learning. This section teaches readers to validate all the results of the build-measure-learn process to be sure they are learning the right lessons. The key here is learning how to determine what feedback is valid before applying it to product design or a change in strategy.

- Innovation Accounting. The lesson readers will learn with this principle is simple. Holding entrepreneurs accountable for their outcomes throughout the startup process is

the best way to measure progress. Using checkpoints or milestones to measure results is the surest way to know if a startup is headed in the right direction.

"What if we found ourselves building something that nobody wanted? In that case what did it matter if we did it on time and on budget?"

Learning the Lean Startup methods enables readers to begin building a proven structure that works not only with startups but also with any type of business at any stage. It's not about throwing something out there and seeing if it sticks or necessarily about saving money or time. It's a process with methods that are proven to help build a viable product with a waiting market.

You can get the book here.

7 Habits of Highly Effective People

BY STEPHEN R. COVEY

SYNOPSIS

Our effectiveness is a compilation of habits. Our habits are a compilation of knowledge, skill, and desire. This book focuses on how to develop the most effective habits with a character-driven approaches opposed to other approaches that are personality-driven and developed from the outside in. This "inside-out" approach is composed of three stages.

- Dependence: Relying on others for our survival and happiness.

- Independence: Relying on ourselves and making our own decisions.

- Interdependence: Learning to combine independence and dependence to achieve results that aren't possible independently.

The first three habits focus on self-mastery and moving from dependence to independence. The next three habits focus on collaboration, communication, and moving from independence to interdependence. The seventh habit focuses on maintaining a balanced foundation for effectively using the other habits.

SUMMARY

Habit 1: Be Proactive

This habit teaches that change begins within and how developing a sense of self-awareness gives us more control. Being proactive means taking responsibility for our choices and minimizing the influence of external forces. It means putting an end to being reactive by choosing our own priorities instead.

Habit 2: Begin with the End in Mind

Covey uses the analogy of a funeral to emphasize the foundation of this habit. For developing our own principle-centered character and by understanding the traits we desire, we can imagine what things we would like to hear about ourselves at our own funeral. This exercise helps us determine what values are the most important to us, providing a template for the life we want to live.

Habit 3: Put First Things First

Using the strategies and tools outlined in the third habit, we can identify the key roles in our life and learn how to focus on the most important ones. This means learning how to maintain a balance while keeping the most important values prioritized, so we don't lose sight of our mission.

Habit 4: Think Win/Win

By focusing on agreements and relationships that benefit each party, we learn to take the "win/win" approach. This habit isn't about compromise. It's about committing to deals that are good for everyone using collaboration and understanding or deciding to make "no deal" and walk away. Whether in business or personal life, the benefit of thinking "win/win" is interdependent relationships with no "losers."

Habit 5: Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood

Covey considers this habit to be the most important principle for effective interpersonal relationships. This habit teaches us that by listening effectively, without filtering what we hear with our own biases and views, we can understand the other person's view before presenting our own. This understanding creates an atmosphere of empathy and a commitment to resolution.

Habit 6: Synergize

Synergy: When one plus one equals three or more, when the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. This habit teaches that trust and understanding in relationships can help create solutions that are often better and more beneficial than either person's original solution. It's like an even better version of "win/win" that further develops the habit of interdependence.

Habit 7: Sharpen the Saw

By taking the time to renew ourselves physically, spiritually, mentally, and socially, we create the foundation for learning and living the other habits. From exercise and eating right to keeping our mind sharp and developing deep, meaningful relationships, we take the time to maintain ourselves from the inside out.

Awakening Your Inner Genius

BY SEAN PATRICK

SYNOPSIS

You see, genius is a path, not a gift. Studies of history's greatest geniuses have shown that there is a 'genius code,' if you will. A combination of very specific traits that we can develop in ourselves, and thus, operate at a genius level."

This book is based on research from a variety of sources and proposes that genius is not some mystical, elusive trait, but a combination of many personality characteristics. Genius is not innate; it is a goal that can be achieved by developing separate traits or behaviors to create the "genius code." Becoming a genius certainly isn't easy, but it is achievable.

The concepts are the results of attempts to discover the common traits of "geniuses" from all walks of life, throughout history. Initial research attempts provided few results and did not identify common genius traits. This lack of common ground among the likes of Edison, DaVinci, Socrates and even Ted Williams, uncovered the notion that genius may actually be an extensive combination of skills, traits, and behaviors.

"Thousands of geniuses live and die undiscovered—either by themselves or by others." — Mark Twain

SUMMARY

In the end, over two dozen traits were identified as separate elements of the "genius code." While many of these traits are based on specific attitudes and approaches, the more important ones are all about taking action, persevering, and honing skills through repetition and practice. It turns out that becoming a genius is as much about hard work as it is about thoughts and habits.

It's a common thread in the self-help and motivational publications that it takes 10,000 hours of practice to achieve mastery or genius. This widely accepted concept illustrates the often-unseen efforts that are behind becoming a genius. While developing the numerous skills or traits needed to achieve a genius state, this skill must be developed in a framework of a commitment and perseverance.

"Swing batter, swing!"

Drive, courage, devotion to goals, enthusiasm, optimism, dynamic energy, patience, adaptability, and imagination are all key traits within the "genius code" and traits that Ted Williams developed to become a "genius" in the game of baseball. Williams is considered to be one of the most gifted hitters of all time. He has been described as having almost inhuman natural abilities like eagle-like vision, extraordinary hand-eye coordination, and uncanny instincts. While most people would revel in this sort of praise, Williams was actually offended by these accolades. He knew that his success was a combination of developing the above traits and a lot of hard work over a long period of time. He called such stories of his "gifts" as "a lot of bull."

"Genius is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration." — Thomas Edison

Williams began his journey to greatness at the age of seven when he chose to dedicate his life to one singular task: hitting a baseball perfectly. Williams spent every free minute he had at San Diego's old North Park field hitting balls, every day, year after year. His childhood friends recall seeing him on that field smashing balls with the outer shells completely beaten off, using a splintered bat, held by blistered, bleeding hands. He would give his lunch money to other kids to shag his balls so he could hit as many as possible every day. When the field lights turned off, he would go home and swing a rolled-up newspaper in the mirror until he went to bed. This obsession continued throughout Williams' entire professional career, and the results are no surprise.

"Timing, perseverance, and ten years of trying will eventually make you look like an overnight success." — Biz Stone

The 24 Characteristics of Geniuses

From Mozart to Bill Gates, genius's diverse journeys toward excellence in their respective fields shared a common denominator: the accumulation of thousand hours of unwavering "exercise" of their crafts and the commitment to developing the "genius code."

Here are the characteristics that make up the "genius code." While many of these traits and habits may seem like common sense or simply familiar jargon, it's important to remember two things:

- It's the combination of multiple strengths or characteristics and how they play off one another that is the key to achieving genius status.

- All of these individual traits can be learned, practiced, and mastered.

- DRIVE. Geniuses are driven to work long and hard. They're willing to give all they've got by focusing on their future success.

- COURAGE. It takes courage to try something different or commit to a singular goal.

•DEVOTION TO GOALS. Geniuses know what they want, and they go after it. Day after day, they keep the focus on the prize.

•KNOWLEDGE. Developing a love of learning and making it a constant in daily life opens doors and creates insights.

•HONESTY. Geniuses are honest with others and with themselves. They take responsibility for their success and their mistakes.

•OPTIMISM. Developing the habit of looking at the good instead of the bad helps geniuses take those necessary "leaps of faith."

•ABILITY TO JUDGE. A genius evaluates objectively and approaches obstacles and opportunities with an open mind.

•ENTHUSIASM. Constant attention to keeping themselves "up" is the hallmark of geniuses. They understand how enthusiasm builds upon itself.

•WILLINGNESS TO TAKE CHANCES. Geniuses can learn to take chances by learning to master their fears. They learn from mistakes to minimize the risks of future endeavors.
•DYNAMIC ENERGY. Success and genius won't come knocking. It takes action and energy to go out and find them. Keep the mind and the body sharp and healthy.

•ENTERPRISE. Geniuses seek out opportunities in unlikely places. They learn to know a good idea when they see it.

•PERSUASION. Geniuses know how to motivate people and turn them into resources.

•OUTGOINGNESS. Developing the willingness to interact with others helps geniuses discover different points of view that can be invaluable for their journey.
•ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE. Geniuses can effectively get their ideas across and thrive on feedback.

•PATIENCE. Becoming a genius takes time and requires the patience to put in the work.

•PERCEPTION. Geniuses learn to create clarity in their understanding of people, ideas, and concepts.

•PERFECTIONISM. Striving for perfection is a worthy endeavor. But geniuses know how to keep that perfectionism in check to keep it from holding them back.

•SENSE OF HUMOR. Geniuses don't take themselves too seriously. They know that humor can often dilute stressful situations and setbacks.

•VERSATILITY. A genius looks for variety and different ways of thinking. They know that there are many ways to reach a goal.

•ADAPTABILITY. Being flexible keeps geniuses ready for opportunities and open to new ideas.

•CURIOSITY. Geniuses develop the hunger for learning and the desire to understand how things work.

•INDIVIDUALISM. At some point along their journey, all geniuses must veer away from the ideas of the masses and learn to trust themselves.

•IDEALISM. Geniuses aren't afraid of the impossible. They know that many great successes began with a seemingly impossible dream.

•IMAGINATION. Geniuses know how to see things from different viewpoints and understand the power of asking: "What if..."

Change by Design

BY TIM BROWN

SYNOPSIS

The leader of one of the most successful design companies, Tim Brown, CEO of IDEO, shares what he has learned about how to make "change by design." Tim draws from his years of experience to present the fundamental principles of the design process, from idea to realization. These principles apply not only to products, but to services, procedures, and virtually any other kind of problem. *Change By Design* isn't a "how-to" book, but rather an introduction and explanation of the methods used successfully by design thinkers. These methods aren't just for creative and designers. The principles here are practical ways of thinking for anyone who needs solutions for problems.

SUMMARY

"Design thinking taps into capacities we all have but that are overlooked by more conventional problem-solving practices. It is not only human-centered; it is deeply human in and of itself."

Design Thinking

When most people think of "design," they think of creative types working feverishly in a studio working up sketches, drawings, and prototypes. These creatives seem to have some innate gift, or talent, for innovative ideas and for bringing those ideas to life. This book is designed to change that thinking by explaining how design is a process that applies to many areas in business and life. The design process is relevant to processes, social issues, and policymaking, not just innovative products or services.

"Design thinking relies on our ability to be intuitive, to recognize patterns, to construct ideas that have emotional meaning as well as functionality, to express ourselves in media other than words or symbols."

By seeing design as the ability to understand the big picture, it takes some of the mystery out of the concept of design. This new understanding turns design thinking into a practical tool to help solve problems. Innovative design isn't reserved just for the most insightful and creative; it is a process that can be used by nearly anyone. From the mundane day-to-day issues that most people face in business to more complex issues, design thinking is a process that helps create effective solutions.

"The faster we make our ideas tangible, the sooner we will be able to evaluate them, refine them, and zero in on the best solution."

Innovation, whether it's used for solving global warming or finding a better distribution structure, can come from any environment. As long as people have the freedom to explore, experiment, and take risks, they can design effective solutions for nearly any problem. Through stories and examples, the book presents guidelines on how to create the right environment for design and innovation.

The story of Kristian Simsarian, IDEO designer, illustrates how design thinking works in real life. Simsarian was assigned the task of redesigning the hospital emergency room experience. His approach was to check in as a patient and videotape the experience. The results of his undercover operation provided insights from a unique, but practical, viewpoint. Simsarian recalls spending a lot of his time lying on his back on a gurney staring up at the ceiling. He

describes the feelings of anxiety and uncertainty that made him feel out of control and helpless.

"Whether we find ourselves in the role of customer or client, patient or passenger, we are no longer content to be passive consumers at the far end of the industrial economy."

The insights from this experiment started a series of discussions that led to efforts to improve the overall emergency room experience. The result was a plan to focus on treating patients less like commodities and more like human beings in a vulnerable position. This unique approach helped redefine the ER logistics, creating a less stressful environment for patients. By putting himself in the position to experience what a typical patient encounters, Simsarian was able to help design solutions that had a positive impact on the patient experience.

Putting People First

"The evolution of design to design thinking is the story of the evolution from the creation of products to the analysis of the relationship between people and products, and from there to the relationship between people and people."

In the end, innovation and design are more about people than they are about ideas or things. The concept of putting people first is that solutions to any problem need to be designed with a focus on the human element. It's tough to figure out exactly what people need because they adapt to their situations so readily, often without understanding what they actually need. This natural adaptability prevents people from realizing a problem exists because they simply adapt and move on.

The book presents three keys to understanding these unrealized needs by focusing on the human elements in designing solutions: insight, observation, and empathy.

Insight. Unique insights are discovered by learning from the real-life experiences of other people. When people just aren't able to realize their needs, watching their behaviors provides clues to what's really going on. While far from a scientific or data-based approach, "people watching" often reveals insights that aren't found with a typical analysis using hard data. Observing how people behave can be the best resource for truly understanding their problems.

"Good design thinkers observe. Great design thinkers observe the ordinary."

Observation. Keen observation requires more than just watching how people behave. Sometimes, the deepest insights come from what people don't do. Things left unsaid can be just as important as the things people say. By playing detective, an observer can find valuable information in day-to-day activities and situations. When the simple question "why" is asked over and over again, the often hidden insights come to light for a deeper understanding.

Empathy. Just like in the example of IDEO designer "Kristian Simsarian, by experiencing firsthand what someone is feeling, a deeper understanding emerges. By empathizing with a customer or anyone else, the resulting solutions are shaped by the effects they have on people. When someone feels that a solution, product, or service was created with an obviously human element, the more likely they are to accept the idea.

"Empathy is the mental habit that moves us beyond thinking of people as laboratory rats or standard deviations."

Learning to think like a designer and how the human element plays such a large part in innovation are the foundation of designing change. The book goes into great detail on prototypes and other innovation elements to deepen the understanding. But it's the focus on how design thinking can actually make a difference not only in business but in people's lives that make these concepts so important. It's this underlying theme of creating a better future that is at the core of change by design.

Creative Confidence

BY TOM KELLEY & DAVID KELLEY

SYNOPSIS

Anyone can be creative. That's the message this book drives home by showing that creativity is an innate ability that requires courage to uncover. It's not so much a case of learning how to be creative, but rather learning how to release creativity by overcoming fears and doubts. The key to being creative is to learn how to take action. Everyone has good ideas at one time or another, but those creative ideas never see the light of day because most people don't have confidence in their creative abilities. They are afraid of failure or being judged.

"If you want more success, you have to be prepared to shrug off more failure."

Learning how to control all those doubts takes the willingness to forgive failure and learn from the lessons those failures hold. No great breakthrough or innovation succeeded without failures. Through tenacity and commitment, creative efforts can survive the uncertainty and setbacks that are always a part of innovation. By refusing to give in and following through, by taking action, confidence in creative abilities grows. With practice and repetition, the creative confidence to experiment and implement becomes a skill that can be learned by anyone.

SUMMARY

Ideas

The first step to putting a creative idea into action is to come up with one. Many people struggle with getting the creative juices flowing which leads to them thinking that they just aren't creative. But it's simply not true. Creative thinking requires learning how to reveal those ideas just waiting to get out. Like any other skill, there are certain steps or prompts that make creativity easier.

"Look for ways to grant yourself creative license, or give yourself the equivalent of a get-out-of-jail-free card."

Choose creativity. It takes a conscious commitment to wanting to be creative to get things going. Don't second-guess or question, just choose.

- Think like a tourist. Inspiration is not usually just hanging around waiting to show itself. It can often only be found in a different environment with new experiences and ideas. Get out of the office and find a different view, read something different, get exposure to something new.

- Take a break. Creativity seems to thrive during periods of relaxation. Stop focusing on the specific task and allow the mind to wander. This wandering will often uncover connections that can't be seen during focused work.

- Who is the end user and what do they want (or need)? Asking this question, whether about an idea, a problem or a product, creates empathy and the ability to focus on some of the more important points.

- Fieldwork. Another reason to get out and about, field work involves simply observing. By observing with no set agenda, it's possible to find those "aha" moments of clarity and revelation.

- Why? This may be the most important question ever when it comes to understanding and creating. By asking "why?", over and over again, the big picture starts to break down into smaller pieces that can expose core elements or issues.

- Re-frame. By re-framing questions or views, a problem or idea can be seen from different angles providing different information. These questions can start with "I wonder what..." and "What if..." or a host of other similar approaches.

"What it means is there is no such thing as a flash of genius. What may appear as a flash of genius is a result of some new connection made by the discoverer's relaxed mind building upon years of study and hard work."

Action

Until someone learns how to put ideas into action, no amount of creativity is going to amount to anything. The action stage is where the ability to overcome fear and doubts is critical. It took courage to commit to creativity and to learn the steps for creative thinking. Now that same courage has to pick up speed and move things forward quickly. Instead of elaborate, detailed plans, the action stage requires moving fast and ignoring the fear of failure and judgments. By setting small goals and checkpoints, the process of taking action becomes less overwhelming and gets the ball rolling.

Here are some of the "action catalysts" suggested by the book to get rid of some of that fear.

Ask for help — Two heads are better than one, especially in creative efforts. It doesn't have to be someone with particular expertise or even experience with creativity. Just bouncing ideas back and forth with someone who can be objective is often more than enough.

Peer pressure — It worked in high school, and it works here. Publicly announce the decision to take action and see what happens. It will be nearly impossible to not follow through without at least a little shame!

Take the stage — By gathering an audience, whether it's a formal focus group or coworkers around the copier, the goal is to have everyone chime in on those creative ideas. The results are often surprising and useful.

Be bad — Perfectionism is the enemy of action. When someone gives themselves permission to produce something completely horrible, it takes the pressure off. The key is to get something, anything, out there and tweak it later. Besides, it's good practice.

Lower the bar — Similar to the willingness to create something awful, lowering the bar means relieving some of the pressure by putting expectations in the right perspective. Very few activities are "life and death" issues. Not everything rides on a single decision, so it's OK to be less than perfect.

Overall

"Like a muscle, your creative abilities will grow and strengthen with practice."

The approach a pottery class took and the results illustrate why taking action is so important in creativity. Half of the students were told that they would be evaluated on the quality of a single clay pot to be completed by the end of the class. The other half were told they would be evaluated on the number of pots they made. It seemed to be a race between quantity and quality.

The students in the first group worked intensely and deliberately week after week to create the very best pot they could. The second group threw pot after pot as quickly as they could with little concern on quality. In the end, the most well-crafted pots came from the second group. The repetitive act of just putting something out there honed their abilities through trial and error, resulting in well-developed skills.

Creativity is not some mystical concept, reserved for those "special" people and their vivid imaginations. It's a skill that can be learned. By practicing ways to come up with ideas and putting fears and doubts in their place to take action, it's possible to build confidence and skill.

Deep Work

BY CAL NEWPORT

SYNOPSIS

This book divides work into two categories: 'Deep Work' and 'Shallow Work.' Shallow work is meetings, emails, phone calls, and the all those other daily tasks. The internet and social media have added even more distractions, creating more problems in time management. Getting these constant interruptions under control allows more time for deep work. Deep work is the tasks that need undivided attention and a distraction-free place. The book offers a simple formula for understanding how it works: High-quality work produced = (Time spent) x (Intensity of focus).

"Professional activities performed in a state of distraction-free concentration that push your cognitive capabilities to their limit. These efforts create new value, improve your skill, and are hard to replicate."

SUMMARY

The need for uninterrupted concentration has become more important than ever because of the amount of information and the never-ending digital distractions. While social media and other digital distractions are notorious time killers, they also provide networking opportunities that can only happen online. The key is to strike a balance with sufficient attention to the important work that needs to be done.

The digital world provides opportunities to develop skills, promote services or products, and interact, but using these powerful tools requires discipline. Developing the ability to know what's important and what isn't is the key to taming shallow work. To understand the concept of deep work, it helps to take a look at the revered concept of multitasking.

Long thought to be a desired trait for any successful person, multitasking has now been shown to be ineffective and a hindrance to deep work. Recent research shows that multitasking is nothing more than single tasking performed by switching from one task to another rapidly. This switching makes real focus almost impossible because attention is divided and diluted. When someone switches his or her attention to checking email or a quick news update, it can take 10-20 minutes to get the mind to re-focus. This lapse in focus makes it difficult to give deep work the attention it needs.

"The ability to concentrate is a skill that gets valuable things done."

Deep work is "the ability to focus without distraction on a cognitively demanding task. It's a skill that allows you to quickly master complicated information and produce better results in less time." Newport describes how deep work allowed him to not only complete this book but also write several peer reviewed papers during the same year. This kind of focus could only be achieved by single tasking and getting shallow work under control.

Taming Shallow Work

Getting a handle on shallow work is tough. It takes effort, focus, and practice to break the habits that may have taken years to develop. The book offers some effective strategies for minimizing distractions and getting control of all that wasted time.

- Stop using social media. Deciding which digital tools and applications provide positive benefits requires a very selective approach. Being selective means objectively identifying time wasters and being ruthless in eliminating them.

- Use website blockers to prevent all those attention grabbers from stealing the time needed for deep work. There are also numerous applications that can be used to create more focused workspaces by cleaning up the computer desktop to eliminate distractions.

- Allot specific time slots for those daily time killers like checking email and returning phone calls. By handling day-to-day routines at the same time and in the same amount of time, they become more manageable.

- Schedule every day as tightly as possible to prevent the shallow work from finding its way into the daily routines. When the important work is scheduled, it simply stands a better chance of being completed efficiently.

"Great creative minds think like artists but work like accountants."

A case study reveals the benefits of identifying and eliminating the damaging distractions that prevent deep work. The Boston Consulting Group conducted their own "deep work" experiment by cutting out nearly all distractions and shallow work. This "no contact day," as they called it, was a commitment by employees not to check emails,

respond to phone calls, etc. This focus on deep work instead of shallow work revealed some important and positive points. Employees became more productive and satisfied with their performance because they were able to focus their efforts. Maybe more telling, the company's customers were still happy and oblivious to this change in focus. Without all those day-to-day distractions, work got done quickly and effectively, and no one was any worse for the wear.

Why Deep Work?

Deep work is simply more productive and effective. It's an important element of success that is becoming more and more necessary.

- Deep work creates an environment where complicated concepts can be learned faster. This ability to understand key concepts is critical to working on important tasks.

- The more deep work skills are developed, the better able someone is to produce high-quality results promptly. As the skills of deep work continue to develop, guarding against the distractions of shallow work becomes easier.

- While deep work is becoming more necessary, it is also becoming increasingly rare because of all the distractions that compete for the time available. By protecting the time needed to focus, results are better, and the work is more satisfying.

- Becoming immersed in deep work that requires specific strengths and abilities brings greater meaning to work. There is something deeply satisfying about getting lost in work that is important and requires great focus.

"Instead of scheduling the occasional break from distraction so you can focus, you should instead schedule the occasional break from focus to give in to distraction."

Tools for Deep Work

Learning how to focus on deep work consistently is a process that includes commitment, practice, and a diverse toolbox. Knowing the importance of deep work is one thing, but learning how to develop deep work skills requires different approaches and different ways of thinking.

- The Rhythmic approach to work, scheduling deep work for the same time each day, creates a routine that increases the chances of deep work becoming a habit.

- The bi-modal method is an alternative if the rhythmic method isn't effective. By scheduling only specific days for deep work, the important work still gets done, and the habit continues to develop.

- A third alternative is a journalistic approach, where specific blocks of time are woven in between meetings and other responsibilities. This method requires planning schedules ahead of time and knowing where these windows of time are available.

Deep work skills can be developed by using a variety of tools. The key is to be willing to experiment and take different approaches to find the time necessary and develop the right skills. With commitment and practice, these skills can be learned and used to create important work better and faster.

First Break All the Rules

By Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman
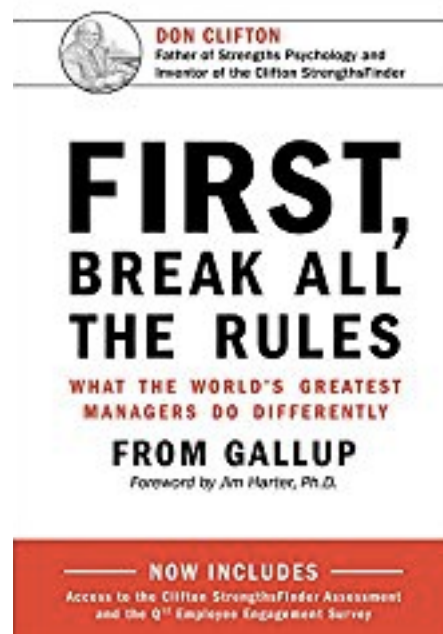
Synopsis

By breaking the rules of traditional management, readers will be able to see things differently and find innovative ways to manage.

Based on interviews with 80,000 managers in 400 companies, the lessons taught here show that the best managers are the ones who break from the conventional methods of management.

Readers will learn how effective their current management style is by using the list of twelve questions in the book to assess where they stand.

By learning, and using, the four keys to unlocking employee's potential, readers will begin to understand how misguided the old rules of business really are and learn how to get more from their employees.

Summary

The four keys for breaking the rules teach readers that effective managers focus on talent, outcomes, developing strengths, and finding the right fit.

"Talent is the multiplier. The more energy and attention you invest in it, the greater the yield. The time you spend with your best is, quite simply, your most productive time."

The first key is to select employees based on talent above other factors. Readers learn here that talent is not as special as they may have thought, but simply a recurring pattern that is effective.

The lessons of the first key teach readers that their job is to help each employee make the most of their talents, why talent can't be created, and that every role requires talent. Once a manager adopts this foundation of hiring for talent, the easier it will be to use the rest of the keys.

"In most cases, no matter what it is, if you measure it and reward it, people will try to excel at it."

The second key is to define the right outcomes. This key teaches readers that management is not about direct control; it's about remote control. By defining what the end result should be, readers will find that they don't have to waste time trying to control the steps along the way.

Define the outcome and get out of the way. Readers will learn that their time is better spent on enhancing employee performance and keeping the focus on the goal. The result will be employees who take responsibility and become more self-reliant.

"...the manager creates performance in each employee by speeding up the reaction between the employee's talent and the company's goals, and between the employee's talent and the customer's needs."

The third key to better management is to focus on strengths and forget about "fixing" employees. This break from traditional management rules teaches that a better way is to focus on employee's strengths and manage their weaknesses.

In the end, the goal is to help employees make the most of the talent that is already there and make sure they are in a job that best uses those talents. With this focus in place, managing the weaknesses will be that much easier.

"The talented employee may join a company because of its charismatic leaders, its generous benefits, and its world-class training programs, but how long that employee stays and how productive he is while he is there is determined by his relationship with his immediate supervisor."

The fourth key teaches that great managers must find the right role for an employee's talents. Readers will find that this key is more complex than it might seem.

The conventional wisdom is that promotions are just part of the system, and are often seen as inevitable. But most readers will be familiar with the unfortunate trend to promote employees until they reach their level of incompetence.

By rethinking how raises and other forms of reward are structured, readers will learn that it is possible to keep an employee in a role where they are most talented.

The lure of climbing the corporate ladder will lose some of its appeal when employees know they can achieve more prestige and earn more money by continuing to excel in a position that fits their talents best.

You can get the book here.

The Five Dysfunctions of a Team

BY PATRICK LENCIONI

SYNOPSIS

This book focuses on how team dynamics can make or break a company. Written as a leadership fable, this story follows a leader and his team as they struggle with the dysfunctional behaviors that will probably be familiar to most professionals. The company has great people with talent but just can't compete because morale is low and the team members just can't agree on common goals.

"*If you could get all the people in an organization rowing in the same direction, you could dominate any industry, in any market, against any competition, at any time.*"

The team is unable to make important decisions, and the company is losing the battle for market share. By identifying the five dysfunctions that are disabling the team, the leader eventually eliminates the issues holding everyone back and turns a dysfunctional group into an effective, committed team.

SUMMARY

Absence of Trust

Trust among a team means all the members can show their weaknesses and be vulnerable without fear that they will be judged or ridiculed. Without this trust, it's hard to for people to be open to new ideas and it makes them afraid to present their own ideas. Teams without trust are just a groups of people who feel the need to be right and to play it safe.

"Remember teamwork begins by building trust. And the only way to do that is to overcome our need for invulnerability."

Trust requires that team members have faith in each other's intentions and confidence that their vulnerabilities won't be used against them. The way to overcome this distrust is for the leader to encourage shared experiences, open dialogue, and an atmosphere of integrity. The leader must lead by example and allow they to be vulnerable first to create a safe environment. With clear expectations and accountability, it is possible for a leader to change the unwanted behaviors.

Fear of Conflict

Trust leads to the ability to use conflict productively. Without this foundation of trust, conflict becomes just another hurdle instead of a healthy way to interact and create. As long as a team fears conflict, it will be difficult to break new ground, gain overall consensus for decisions, and lead to people avoiding any conflict.

"I don't think anyone ever gets completely used to conflict. If it's not a little uncomfortable, then it's not real. The key is to keep doing it anyway."

Leaders must encourage debate and teach people that conflict can be a positive thing. Once a team begins to see that conflict is not something to fear, they will become a healthier, more productive team. Because they have support from their leader and other team members to go beyond their comfort zone, creative conflict will be accepted as a normal part of the team's process.

Lack of Commitment

When teams use productive conflict, it makes it easier for them to commit and buy-in to decisions. Without debate, there is no commitment. People just won't buy into something if they feel that their opinions and thoughts weren't discussed. A lack of commitment will make it impossible to achieve a consensus among a team, leading to disinterest, resentment, and stagnation.

"Commitment is a function of two things: clarity and buy-in."

Leaders can help develop this commitment by encouraging each team member to contribute to every discussion. The leader must promote this open exchange over and over again until it becomes accepted. Once the atmosphere is one of the individuals agreeing to disagree, real

progress is not far behind. By reviewing team decisions after every meeting and defining roles and deadlines, the leader can keep the focus on on-going commitment.

Avoidance of Accountability

Without team commitment, team members will always avoid accountability. Team members who commit to an idea or decision do it because they feel that their input matters and they expect to be held accountable. If their input seems unimportant, they feel that they aren't responsible for results. This lack of accountability in the individual will always weaken the accountability of the team.

"People aren't going to hold each other accountable if they haven't clearly bought into the same plan."

The only way to hold each other, and the team, accountable is by measuring progress. The leader must set the foundation by clearly defining standards, expectations, specific tasks, and deadlines. It's up to the leader to make sure every team member understands what is being measured and how important their contribution will be.

Inattention to Results

It there's no accountability, then there is no focus on results. Team members who don't feel accountable will always put their interests ahead of the team's. Until the desired results are agreed upon by the whole team, nothing worthy will ever happen. With accountability in place, the focus on team results happens naturally and creates a tighter bond among team members. The leader makes sure the desired results are clear and that final results are shared and rewarded in a team setting.

"Our job is to make the results that we need to achieve so clear to everyone in this room that no one would even consider doing something purely to enhance his or her individual status or ego. Because that would diminish our ability to achieve our collective goals. We would all lose."

How To Win Friends and Influence People

BY DALE CARNEGIE

SYNOPSIS

Written over 80 years ago, this is a book that is as relative today as it was when it was first written. The principles are a broad mix of personal and professional advice based on the psychology of relationships. From making friends to succeeding in business, the principles outlined here serve as a proven guide for anyone who wants to build better relationships and get the most out of them.

SUMMARY

PART ONE: FUNDAMENTAL TECHNIQUES IN HANDLING PEOPLE

Principle 1: Don't criticize, condemn, or complain.

Psychologists have proven that rewarding good behavior increases the chance that the behavior will continue. Criticizing bad habits only leads to resentment and makes effective communication almost impossible. It's important to understand that people are influenced by emotion, pride, and ego.

"Criticism is futile because it puts a person on the defensive and usually makes them strive to justify themselves." — Dale Carnegie

Principle 2: Give honest and sincere appreciation.

The need to be appreciated is one of the most basic of human needs. Everyone wants to feel good about themselves and the effort they put forth. When we take the time to sincerely show someone how much they are appreciated, they feel good about themselves and good about the person showing the appreciation.

Principle 3: Arouse in the other person an eager want.

When we want someone to do something, we must relate the request to what is important to them by taking the time to understand what is important to someone and framing our needs with their desires, we make it easy for that person to actually *want* to do something. When a task is relevant to what they consider important, they have a personal stake in making sure the task is done effectively and efficiently.

PART TWO: SIX WAYS TO MAKE PEOPLE LIKE YOU

Principle 1: Become genuinely interested in other people.

It's human nature to be mostly concerned with ourselves. When we take the time to really look at another person, we can often find things that are of genuine interest. People like people who show interest in them and if that interest is genuine, it creates a strong foundation for a real relationship.

Principle 2: Smile.

The simple act of smiling has a positive effect on the person smiling and anyone who sees them smiling. Smiling just makes everyone feel better! Even smiling when talking on the phone has positive effects because the power of smiling comes through in tone and in words, even when it isn't seen.

Principle 3: Remember that a person's name is to that person the sweetest and most important sound in any language.

A person's name is a very personal and important part of their self-worth. Remembering someone's name makes them feel important; forgetting someone's name makes them feel unimportant. Remembering names, and spelling them correctly, is a skill that will help personal and business relationships.

"The average person is more interested in his or her own name than in all the other names on earth put together." — *Dale Carnegie*

Principle 4: Be a good listener. Encourage others to talk about themselves.

Good listeners are often seen as good conversationalists. Developing this skill takes practice, but the payoff is worth it. When we listen to someone intently, without interruption, it shows that we find them important and worth our time. A great rule of thumb is to focus on listening 75% of the time and talking 25% of the time.

Principle 5: Talk in terms of the other person's interests.

Learning what topics interest someone and encouraging them to talk about those topics takes being a good listener to a whole new level. It makes them feel important, interesting, and understood. This skill also benefits the listener. The more someone talks about themselves and their interests, the more we can learn about them and further advance the relationship.

Principle 6: Make the other person feel important – and do it sincerely.

Whether it's an acquaintance, or a complete stranger, when we make an effort to acknowledge someone or something positive about them, we make them feel important. When we make someone feel important, we let them know that they matter to us.

PART THREE: HOW TO WIN PEOPLE TO YOUR WAY OF THINKING

Principle 1: The only way to get the best of an argument is to avoid it.

Arguments simply have no positive outcome. Disagreements are inevitable but how we handle those disagreements means the difference between resolution or indifference. Instead of

confrontation, listening to understand will often lead to insights that lead to a beneficial resolution.

"A man convinced against his will, is of the same opinion still." — *Benjamin Franklin*

Principle 2: Show respect for other people's opinions. Never say, "You're wrong."

A great skill for avoiding arguments altogether is a legitimate respect for other people's opinions. When we tell someone that they are just wrong, we are often insulting them without even realizing it. Wrong, or right, everyone is entitled to their opinion. By being open to other's opinions and listening to what they have to say without judgment, we often find common ground for discussion instead of arguing.

Principle 3: If you're wrong, admit it quickly and emphatically.

Being wrong isn't a weakness, it's a part of being human. All too often, people make a simple mistake into a bigger problem because they just can't admit that they are wrong. By admitting a mistake quickly and clearly, we actually show strength of character and the desire to make things right.

Principle 4: Begin in a friendly way.

No matter how right or seemingly justified someone feels about an issue, their goal should never be to simply prove a point. The goal should always be to express an opinion or have a discussion, as opposed to proving who is right. The best way to do this is to use friendly or neutral words and tone instead of just going head-to-head. The results are much more productive, and the relationship stays intact.

Principle 5: Get the other person saying, "Yes, yes" immediately.

Disagreements are a part of relationships, but when we take the time to find some common ground or something to agree on before jumping right in, we set a positive tone for the conversation. By finding these terms of agreement, we get the other person saying "yes" instead of "no." Whether it's specific points or the outcome itself, getting someone to begin seeing the things that both parties agree on keeps them open and less defensive while a solution is found.

Principle 6: Let the other person do a great deal of talking.

When we let someone do most of the talking, without interruption and while listening intently, we tell that what they have to say is important. By letting someone express themselves completely and encouraging them to share their thoughts, we give them the chance to be heard and understood, which leads to more open and honest relationships.

Principle 7: Let the other person feel that the idea is his or hers.

It's human nature to feel more passionate about our own ideas than the ideas of others. No one likes being told what to do, but everyone likes having their own ideas validated. By asking questions and offering suggestions, it's often possible to help someone come to the desired conclusion as if it were their own. When the idea they are working with comes from themselves, people are much more invested in seeing that idea come to light.

 "When dealing with people, remember you are not dealing with creatures of logic, but creatures of emotion." — *Dale Carnegie*

Principle 8: Try honestly to see things from the other person's point of view.

One of the key skills in effective relationships is the ability to see something from another person's point of view. Not only does this skill make the other person feel important and understood, it often uncovers points that weren't so obvious at first. By understanding why someone has a certain view, the goal becomes more about what is right than about who is right.

Principle 9: Be sympathetic with the other person's ideas and desires.

When we put ourselves in someone else's place, looking at their views from where they stand, we find it easy to have positive interactions instead of an argument or disagreement. Carnegie offers a simple phrase to show that empathy: *"I don't blame you one iota for feeling as you do. If I were you, I would undoubtedly feel just as you do."* This statement is sincere because it's true and it sets the foundation for a constructive conversation.

Principle 10: Appeal to nobler motives.

By appealing to someone's desire to be moral, ethical, or some other noble value, we can often move them to cooperate or be willing to see a certain point of view by simply framing it differently. When someone can justify their change of heart because of a positive value, they are much more likely to do it.

Principle 11: Dramatize your ideas.

Whether it's presenting an idea with a funny story or an elaborate presentation, ideas need a little drama to get noticed. By presenting ideas in a unique or interesting way, we stand a much better chance of getting that idea accepted.

Principle 12: Throw down a challenge.

People love to compete, and they love winning even more. Even with the most mundane task or idea, a good dose of healthy competition is often enough to get more involvement and more productivity. The "prize" for the challenge isn't even that important. The challenge itself and competition that results serve as some very motivating rewards.

PART FOUR: BE A LEADER.

Principle 1: Begin with praise and honest appreciation.

The first step in changing someone with our words is to focus on the positive before the negative. By pointing out the strengths of a person, we put them in a positive mindset. When we get to the negatives, they are much easier to hear and more likely to be accepted.

Principle 2: Call attention to people's mistakes indirectly.

Direct criticism causes resentment and puts people on the defensive. By avoiding giving honest praise with a qualifying "but" that leads into a negative observation, we can often make people more receptive. "You ran great today, BUT you would have won if you had run harder." is much different than: "You ran great today, AND if you run harder next time you will probably win!" What a difference a word makes.

Principle 3: Talk about your own mistakes before criticizing the other person.

People are more likely to take criticism better if they feel that the person criticizing them is not afraid of pointing out their own flaws. By creating the common ground that "nobody is perfect," it's much easier for someone to feel that the criticism is being given for their own good.

Principle 4: Ask questions instead of giving direct orders.

No one likes to be told what to do. By asking people to do something directly or indirectly, it makes it easier for them to comply. "Bring me those books." is quite different than "Could you bring me those books, please?" A small change in words has a great impact.

Principle 5: Let the other person save face.

Never criticize or give negative feedback in public. When we deliver negative information, we can be most effective by doing it privately and in a way that keeps the other person's dignity intact. By considering how we would feel if the roles were reversed, we can usually find a positive way to talk about a negative.

Principle 6: Praise the slightest improvement and praise every improvement. Be "hearty in your approbation and lavish in your praise."

By noting even the smallest steps and minor improvements, frequently and sincerely, we increase the chances of continuing improvement. Think of how we typically respond to babies as they learn to walk: lots of praise and lots of forgiveness when they fall down. The same approach works just as well for adults.

Principle 7: Give the other person a fine reputation to live up to.

When we praise someone in public, or praise them for exhibiting desirable traits or actions, it gives that person a certain reputation that they will naturally want to live up to. If we sincerely tell someone that they are great at something often enough, they will begin to believe it themselves and make it a part of their reputation with themselves.

Principle 8: Use encouragement. Make the fault seem easy to correct.

When we minimize faults and encourage improvements, we create a sense of motivation and belief in a person that makes them feel that they can improve easily. When we focus on the faults, we make them seem much more negative than they often are, killing any motivation to improve.

Principle 9: Make the other person happy about doing the thing you suggest.

Offering incentives, praise, and authority are all great ways to make a person happy to accept decisions and do what we want them to do. If someone doesn't get a promotion, but we make sure to point out how important their current role is and why their performance made them a candidate in the first place, we soften the blow and minimize the resentment.

The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership

BY JOHN C. MAXWELL

SYNOPSIS

"*Many people view leadership the same way they view success, hoping to go as far as they can, to climb the ladder, to achieve the highest position possible for their talent. But contrary to conventional thinking, I believe the bottom line in leadership isn't how far we advance ourselves but how far we advance others. That is achieved by serving others and adding value to their lives.*"

The quote above sums up the foundation of the 21 laws and the philosophy behind them. Based on 40 years of leadership and the observations of successful leaders in business, politics, sports, and other industries, these principles are the core elements of being a leader. The laws are based on the premise that leadership is not just about a business or organization, but also about self-development and the development of others.

SUMMARY

1. **The Law of the Lid**

   • The ability to lead determines a person's level of effectiveness.
   • That level of effectiveness is the "lid" on personal and organizational development.
   • The level of the leader always determines the level of the organization and the effectiveness of his followers.

2. **The Law of Influence**

   •Influence determines the effectiveness of a leader.
   •Effective leadership is not determined by a title or tenure, but by how much influence the leader has with others.

•The ability to influence others will determine success or failure for the leader and the organization.

3. **The Law of Process**

- There are no "born leaders."
- Part of the effectiveness of a leader is the time and commitment they put into developing their skills.
- Leadership is a skill that can be learned and developed over time.
- Leaders must be willing to commit to the sometimes long process of learning leadership skills to become an influential leader.

4. **The Law of Navigation**

- Leaders must be the navigators for their organizations.
- Beginning with a vision, or destination, leaders must plot the course and prepare for any obstacles.
- Leaders keep everything on course to make it easy for followers to know where they are going.

5. **The Law of E.F. Hutton**

- When a real leader speaks, people listen.
- A leader can be identified by his ability to get others to listen.
- Leadership is only as effective as the followers who are willing to listen to the vision.

6. **The Law of Solid Ground**

    Effective leaders must lead from a solid foundation.
    Leaders must have the trust of their followers, and this trust can only be developed by exhibiting character, competence, and connection.

7. **The Law of Respect**

    •Most people will willingly follow someone that they respect.
    •By showing respect for others, and themselves, leaders position themselves as someone worthy to lead.
    •Even with great competence and ability, a leader without respect will never be effective.

"When people respect you as a person, they admire you. When they respect you as a friend, they love you. When they respect you as a leader, they follow you."

8. **The Law of Intuition**

   •Leaders have to know the vision, facts, obstacles, and other elements that affect an organization.
   •But they must also learn to rely on intuition to be the most effective.
   •Leadership is more art than science, and the ability to read people or a specific situation requires experience and instinct.

9. **The Law of Magnetism**

   •We attract people who are most like us.
   •Leaders naturally attract followers who reflect their values and their vision.
   •By developing the skills of an effective leader, that leader will find followers who will eventually be leaders themselves.

10. **The Law of Connection**

    •Leaders touch a heart before they ask for a hand.
    •People don't care how much a leader knows until they know how much that leader cares.
    •Leaders find ways to connect with people before they ask them to follow.

11. **The Law of the Inner Circle**

    •Leaders never lead alone.
    •All effective leaders rely on a strong inner circle that shares their vision and values.
    •A leader's effectiveness is determined by those closest to him and their ability to influence followers.

12. **The Law of Empowerment**

    •A true leader isn't afraid to give some of the power away.
    •The achievements of a leader's followers are determined by the leader's ability to empower them and show their trust in them.
    •Leaders have to lead, but they also know that sometimes they just have to get out of the way.

13. The Law of Reproduction

- All organizations need to foster and develop leaders.
- An effective leader mentors others by sharing their knowledge, creating future leaders that will be critical to the growth of the organization.
- Great leaders are also great teachers.

"The bottom line in leadership isn't how far we advance ourselves but how far we advance others."

14. The Law of Buy-In

- People must be committed to a vision or cause to have an impact.
- The only way to get followers to "buy-in" to an idea or vision is to have them first "buy-in" to the leader.
- The influence and passion of the leader will determine the investment people are willing to make.

15. The Law of Victory

- Leaders understand the importance of unity in their followers.
- By developing an atmosphere of teamwork, leaders can create wins for their team as opposed to individual wins.
- When a team wins together, they become more unified and committed to the cause.

16. The Law of the Big Mo

- Leaders create momentum and focus on helping others keep that momentum going.
- It's simply impossible to further a vision or cause without moving forward.
- Leaders know how to get the ball rolling and keep it rolling.

17. The Law of Priorities

- Leaders understand that activity doesn't necessarily result in production.
- Effective leaders have the ability to determine the most important priorities and know how to help their followers focus on those priorities.

18. **The Law of Sacrifice**

 •Leaders inevitably have to make sacrifices to be a good leader.
 •A leader makes sacrifices on the path to leadership and must be willing to sacrifice things to effectively lead.
 •Sacrifice is a constant in leadership.

19. **The Law of Timing**

 •Leaders understand that the trust their followers have in them is largely based on the leader's actions.
 •A good leader understands that the right choice at the wrong time or the wrong choice at the right time can dilute their influence.
 •Effective leaders learn how to develop their "timing" to make the best decisions possible.

20. **The Law of Explosive Growth**

 •Organizations can only grow with effective leadership.
 •Leaders understand the importance of not only having followers but also the importance of developing future leaders for continuing growth.

21. **The Law of Legacy**

 •A leader's legacy is measured by the future leaders he develops and how effectively the organization operates without him.
 •Leaders understand that the greatest contributions they make are the ones that outlive their reign.

Methods of Persuasion

BY NICK KOLENDA

SYNOPSIS

Nick Kolenda is an entertainer who "reads minds" for a living. His apparent ability to read minds is a process of persuasion. Using proven methods of psychology to influence his subjects, he can give the appearance of being able to read thoughts. While his displays of "mind reading" are entertaining and a lot of fun, the principles he uses to pull it off are based on sound principles of human nature.

Kolenda has taken these basic tenets of psychology and created a guide for anyone that wants to influence or persuade. These methods may seem manipulative and even a bit deceptive, but their application in the real world can be just as much for the good of others as it can be to manipulate them. Whether these methods are used for good or bad, there effectiveness is undeniable.

SUMMARY

The methods outlined in the book include changing people's perceptions and getting them to "buy-in." From presenting messages in a certain way to using peer pressure, the methods here are all part of a strategy to get others to think and act in a certain way.

Mold their perception

A recent study by the California Institute of Technology illustrates how powerful perception is and how easy it is to mold. By creating a study that measured the relation between perception of quality and price, the group was able to prove that higher priced items are perceived as having more value. Twenty people who had an average knowledge of wine were brought

together for a wine tasting. They sampled what they thought were five different brands of wine while being monitored with an MRI. The reality was that there were only three wines.

"If you want people to perceive something more favorably, you should convey high expectations because those expectations will become a lens that will mold their perception."
Two brands of wine were offered twice and were the same price. The $5 bottle of wine was marked with its real price and again with a price tag of $45. The $90 bottle of wine was also marked with its real price and again with a price tag of $10. The results showed that the tasters' brains registered more pleasure when drinking from the higher priced bottles, even though they contained the same wine as the cheap bottles. The results proved that consumer satisfaction can be directly influenced by the expectation of quality whether that quality is real of not.

Elicit congruent attitudes

A congruent attitude simply means an agreement or alignment with a particular idea or product. This alignment with a particular concept can be achieved both in how a message is presented and how others react to that concept. If a company uses a tennis star to deliver their message of how great their tennis gear is, they elicit a congruent attitude because consumers will associate the "messenger's" qualities with the quality of the products.

"When people are free to do as they please, they usually imitate each other." — Eric Hoffer
Similarly, social proof also has a strong influence in aligning attitudes. People typically reflect the actions they see in others to ensure they are behaving "correctly." If everyone else buys a Thunderbolt tennis racket, then it must be good. This line of thinking may be illogical, but it is a very powerful tendency in human nature.

Trigger social pressure

In high school, they called it peer pressure, but when everyone's all grown up, they call it social pressure. No matter what it's called, the influence of groups on individuals is a powerful force in changing behaviors. Everyone has that basic need to be accepted, and they will typically conform to a group's ideas or attitudes usually without even realizing it.

"People can undergo a sudden change of thinking and loyalties under threat of death or intense social pressure..." — Keith Henson
Researchers from Arizona State University discovered that before Billy Graham's televised crusades, his organization had coached thousands of volunteers in certain behaviors. They were instructed on when to come to the stage, when to sing, and when to clap. This appearance of great religious intensity primed the rest of the crowd to behave in similar ways. The infectious atmosphere created a zeal that made the audience ready to accept the message being presented.

Habituate your message

Repetition is one of the easiest, and most powerful, methods of persuasion. By habituating the same message over and over, the power of persuasion takes on a life of its own. Repetition is used so often that its use has become almost invisible on a conscious level. Just listen to any politician or some other influential speaker. They repeat the same message over and over, planting it firmly in the subconscious.

"The power of ads rests more in the repetition of obvious exhortations than in the subtle transmission of values." — Michael Schudson
Psychology studies conducted in the 1970s revealed what has come to be known as the "illusory truth effect." This effect refers to the tendency to believe the information to be correct after repeated exposure. The more someone hears a message, the more believable it is. Psychologists point to the fact that familiarity breeds liking. This familiarity makes a message appear to be truer than if it were being presented for the first time.

Optimize your message

For a message to have maximum effect, it must be optimized. In marketing, optimizing a message simply means personalizing the message based on the preferences of an intended audience. The book outlines the major consumer markets by age and provides traits and tactics for each audience.

Millennials — ages 15 – 35: This group is immersed in the digital world, and digital media is the best way to get a message to them. Texting, chatting, and instant messaging are their preferred way to communicate. This young consumer group is influenced more by engagement than attempts to convert them.

Generation Xers — ages 36 – 50: More savvy and skeptical, this group is all too familiar with traditional marketing tactics and prefers a direct approach. They are more concerned with quality and value than the popularity of a product or message. A brief email or voicemail is effective as long as they are to the point.

Baby Boomers — ages 51 – 69: Baby boomers prefer to engage on a personal level. They value communication skills and relationships. While they are comfortable with digital correspondence, they respond better to phone calls or meeting in person.

Traditionalists — ages 70 – 88: Traditional values and trust are the hallmarks of this group. Their emphasis is on honesty and being open. They typically like to take their time in making decisions.

Drive their momentum and sustain their compliance

By giving someone incentives and periodic rewards over time, their familiarity with an idea or product is reinforced. This reinforcement keeps the relationship constant. Making it easy for someone to continue using a product or service or to have access to a specific message is another way to keep that momentum going.

Mobile applications use "momentum drivers" by sending reminders or special offers. Application developers understand that to sustain user's interest, they must engage end users frequently and in innovative ways. The goal is to make the application a part of the end users day-to-day routine by creating a subconscious habit. The key to momentum and sustainability is to expose people over and over to the product or message.

Now, Discover Your Strengths

BY MARCUS BUCKINGHAM & DONALD O. CLIFTON

SYNOPSIS

Many people spend a lot of time worrying about their weaknesses and shortcomings, and a lot of business books focus on that concern. This book takes the opposite approach by showing that many successful people focus on their strengths instead of their weaknesses. They continue to fine-tune their strengths while learning how to manage their weaknesses. This book provides the tools for identifying strengths with self-evaluation and offers ways to manage weaker skills.

"One thing that holds us back is fearing our weaknesses more than having confidence in our strengths."

SUMMARY

Chapter 1: Strong Lives
A great example of how this focus on strengths can create success is the compelling case of Tiger Woods. To most, it would appear that this professional golfer has mastered the game of golf. But closer inspection reveals that he is actually playing to his strengths. Woods is a mediocre player when it comes to getting out of bunkers, but he is a master of putting and driving. By continuously focusing on the skills of putting and driving, and managing his weakness in bunkers, he has developed into one of the greatest players ever.

"At an early age, you started hearing it: It's a virtue to be "well-rounded."...They might as well have said: Become as dull as you possibly can be."

Chapter 2: Strength Building

A skill is something that can be learned. A talent is something that is inborn. Many successful people exhibit specific strengths that are usually a combination of talent and skills. A successful speaker may be born with charisma and a natural stage presence, but it is usually the learned skills of tone, cadence, and the finer points of rhetoric that turn his talent into the strength of public speaking.

Chapter 3: Strengths Finder

The book encourages readers to identify and understand their top five strengths by reviewing their behaviors in various situations. By evaluating the situations where their responses are the most instinctive or natural, they can begin to see some patterns in their behavior. These patterns of "gut reactions" reveal specific strengths. To further develop an understanding of these strengths, the book also offers an extensive list of strengths as a basis for strength finding.

"Our definition of a weakness is anything that gets in the way of excellent performance."

Chapter 4: The Thirty-Four Themes of Strengths Finder

By offering a list of thirty-four detailed strengths, the book provides an effective way to objectively self-evaluate. This exercise helps clarify areas of mastery and identify areas that need work. The resulting information will become the foundation for improving those strengths and managing the weaknesses. While the exercise is designed to keep the focus on strengths, the act of identifying weaknesses often leads to some productive revelations.

Chapter 5: The Questions You're Asking

By using the question and answer session in the book, readers can learn the most effective way to identify specifics in strengths and weaknesses. These questions promote a deeper understanding of how and why certain strengths are well-developed, and others need work. Understanding weaknesses and learning to manage them is as much a part of the equation as identifying strengths. For example, knowing areas of weakness means knowing when to delegate a specific task to someone more capable.

Chapter 6: Managing Strengths

This section is geared towards managers and helps them identify strengths in the people that work for them. By identifying the strengths of these individuals, a manager can capitalize on those strengths in a number of ways. Creating teams where the strengths and weaknesses of team members compliment one another helps build a more balanced and effective team.

Understanding the strengths of a particular person leads to a better understanding of how to manage that person.

"The only possible failure would be never managing to find the right role or the right partners to help you realize that strength."

Chapter 7: Building a Strengths-Based Organization
With a good understanding of how focusing on strengths can help individuals improve, it's possible to begin building a strengths-based organization. By identifying the strengths needed in a specific role and understanding the strengths of individuals, it makes it easier to match up the right people with the right job. It takes a lot of work and planning to take this strengths-based approach from the individual level to an organizational level, but it pays off with more effective teams and more successful individuals.

On Becoming a Leader

BY WARREN BENNIS

SYNOPSIS

"*Becoming a leader is synonymous with becoming yourself. It's precisely that simple, and it's also that difficult.*"

Like most good books on leadership, this one makes it clear that developing the skills of a leader is very much about self-development. A leader must know himself and the climate in which he leads. That climate includes circumstances, other people, policies, and a host of other factors. To become a leader, we must understand the rules of the game AND know how to play it.

SUMMARY

Mastering the Context

All situations that require leadership have a specific context that impacts decisions. Many leadersallow the situation itself to have too much influence on their decisions. To lead effectively, a leader must make decisions based on the big picture and not on current circumstances.

Bennis uses the story of Norman Lear, a leader in television production, to make his point. Lear created shows that went against the norm of sitcoms in the 60's. He understood the context and saw an opportunity to do something different instead of staying with the status quo. Lear cites four steps for his process of mastering the context.

- Become self-expressive

- Listen to the inner voice
- Learn from the right mentors
- Give oneself over to a guiding vision

By having faith in his own vision and confidence in his ideas, Lear created cutting-edge sitcoms that featured topics and situations that broke new ground.

Understanding the Basics

There are some basic ingredients for becoming a leader. These are not traits that leaders are born with, but skills that are developed through years of experience and learning. These are the must-haves for effective leaders:

- A guiding vision
- Passion
- Self-knowledge
- Candor
- Maturity
- Trust
- Curiosity
- Daring

Knowing Yourself

We are our own best teachers if we accept the responsibility of educating ourselves. Bennis explains that we are capable of learning just about anything and that learning involves reflecting on our own experiences. A leader who knows his strengths and limitations, has the confidence to become a leader.

Knowing the World

Knowing how the world we live in affects our decisions is critical. We learn about the world through our experiences and our mistakes. We learn about the world from mentors, books, and formal education. But it's not just the knowledge we accumulate that helps us; it's the commitment to learning for the sake of learning that helps us understand a world that keeps changing.

Operating on Instinct

At a certain point, leaders must learn to trust their intuition. Whether we call it the "inner voice" or "just a gut feeling," that instinct is the accumulation of knowledge and experience and is worth listening to.

Deploying Yourself: Strike Hard, Try Everything

Leadership skills can't grow stronger unless we put them to the test over and over. Every leader fails. The best leaders learn to use failure as a chance to try a new approach. The point is to accept failure as part of the process and learn to face the situations we fear by learning new skills.

Moving through the Chaos

The true test of a leader is knowing how to lead when everything is falling apart. Leading in chaotic situations requires a leader that is willing to accept change as inevitable. Managing that change requires adaptability, flexibility, and patience, all while keeping the focus on the overall vision.

Getting People on Your Side

The only way to get people to follow is to gain their trust. Bennis outlines four keys for developing that trust:

- Constancy - Leaders stay on course and lead with consistency.
- Congruity - Leaders walk the talk. They lead by example.
- Reliability - Leaders are dependable and ready to lead in any situation.
- Integrity - Leaders remain committed to their vision and are always true to their word.

Organizations can Help or Hinder

To become a leader, the constraints of the organization must not stop a leader from leading. Whether it's bureaucratic red tape from above, or lack of interest or commitment from below, leaders stay the course. They continue to lead with the skills they have learned, believing in their effectiveness.

Forging the Future

Leaders do much more than lead others. They know how to innovate to keep their organization competitive. They promote effective communication at all levels and create strategic alliances. Leaders know how to tie it all together and lead their followers, and their organization, into a brighter future.

The Ten Faces of Innovation

BY TOM KELLEY & JONATHAN LITTMAN

SYNOPSIS

Design firm and idea factory IDEO has developed ten personas for innovation. These talents, or roles, help teams focus from different points of view to create more useful solutions. These ten "faces" are not just theories on the advantage of seeing things from different viewpoints. They are practical, tested methods that help create better solutions, more insightful team members, and a culture of innovation.

Each persona represents a unique approach to looking at innovation and solving problems. The ten "faces" are categorized into three categories: learning, organizing, and building. These three categories are the basic building blocks of the innovation process, and the personas fine-tune the approach to take with each phase.

SUMMARY

The Learning Personas

The first three personas are learning roles focused on the continuous need for new information. Each of these roles is designed to avoid the stagnation that plagues many organizations. Their focus is typically external because they understand how fast the world is changing and how important it is to keep up. These personas aren't afraid to question accepted views, even when they are their own, and are open to new ideas and new insights. The learning personas are responsible for laying the foundation for the rest of the innovation process with solid information and progressive ideas.

The Anthropologist

This persona focuses on the human factor to discover new knowledge and insights that affect different areas of an organization. How people interact and connect with services, products, and spaces develops a deeper understanding of the customer experience. These cultural observers fulfill their role by putting themselves in a variety of real-life situations.

The Experimenter

Experimenters take a curiosity or "what if" approach. This persona develops new prototypes using "experimentation as implementation," learning by trial and error. They take calculated risks and aren't afraid to take on established practices. BMW reaped the benefits when they took the experimenter view with their successful short films. The car company turned away from their usual advertising channels and created theater-quality films to promote their brand. They had no guarantee that the approach would work, but the risk paid off when the films became a huge success.

The Cross-Pollinator

By exploring other business cultures and industries, cross-pollinators can bring revelations that can only be found in a different environment. Being able to connect and combine ideas and objects is essential for innovation. Organizations can only learn so much within the confines of their own routines and structures. Innovation requires seeing possibilities that couldn't exist without combining familiar and unfamiliar ideas or products.

The Organizing Personas

The next three personas are all about organizing. These personas understand how organizations move through the innovation process and their job is to pull things together. The roles here

require the ability to create strategies that keep the focus on the product or idea throughout the process. They understand that even the best ideas compete for attention, resources, and time. Organizing roles use the information from the learning process to create a strong plan for the building phase.

The Hurdler

The hurdler understands that innovation requires the ability to overcome obstacles. Roadblocks and unexpected delays are just part of the process, and this persona focuses on getting past those obstacles. The 3M worker who invented masking tape had the idea rejected in the beginning, but he stuck with it and kept the idea alive. Since his budget was $100, he used a series of $99 purchase orders to buy the equipment he needed to produce the first run. By bending the rules, he created a product that made the company millions.

The Collaborator

This persona focuses on bringing groups together, serving as a sort of hub for the whole project. The collaborator creates new combinations of personas to create a variety of solutions. Kraft Foods collaborated with Safeway to redesign the transfer of goods from supplier to retailer. By combining different viewpoints, they were able to decrease labor and carrying costs which resulted in greater sales. Capri Sun juice drink sales increased by 167% as a direct result of this collaboration.

The Director

Just like in the movies, the director puts together a talented cast and crew and focuses on bringing out their creativity. This persona knows how to pull together a team with diverse skills and point them in the right direction. A Mattel executive used the director persona to build a team of project leaders and designers. After three months of hard work, a new $100 million toy platform was created resulting in significant profits and recurring revenue.

The Building Personas

The last four personas are building roles that combine the insights and knowledge from the learning phase and the road map from the organizing phase. These personas are responsible for taking the results of the first two phases and setting the innovation process into action. Building personas understand the relationship between customers and a product or service. Their emphasis is always on the customer and how to innovate in ways that benefit the customer. This focus on the customer combined with the skills of design, psychology, and intuition give builders the tools they need to turn ideas into products.

The Experience Architect

This role focuses on the connection between customers and products. Experience architects understand the importance of the entire customer experience and how it can make or break a product or service. Cold Stone Creamery uses showmanship to prepare their frozen desserts, turning a common task into an elaborate and fun performance. This well-designed customer experience creates attention in marketing and allows the company to charge premium prices.

The Set Designer

The set designer creates a stage for innovating teams that inspires and motivates them. They see the physical environment as a tool for influencing behaviors and creativity. Google is one of the best at using the set designer persona. They create work spaces that are very different from traditional spaces.

The spaces at Google range from quiet, solitary corners for deep contemplation to fun, boisterous common areas for building excitement and camaraderie. The company understands how creative work and builds the very best stage for displaying their talents.

The Caregiver

This persona typically focuses on services by anticipating customer needs and dissecting current services. Caregivers naturally take the customer viewpoint to identify opportunities and areas that need to be improved. Wine retailer Best Cellars uses the caregiver persona to increase sales and profits by taking the typical snobbery out of wine shopping by making the process simple and fun. By appealing to a different type of consumer, they increased their market share and profits.

The Storyteller

The storyteller persona creates internal and external narratives that strengthen a brand or product. Using the power of basic human values and reinforcing specific aspects, they create a personal connection between customers and products. Starbucks uses stories about their history and innovative corporate legends to enhance their brand and build strong connections within their teams. Medtronic, a leader in product innovation that consistently experiences high growth, uses firsthand narratives from patients to tell their stories about how their products benefit consumers.

The Art of Innovation

BY TOM KELLEY & JONATHAN LITTMAN

- ## SYNOPSIS

Good companies embrace a culture of mini-failures."
A tour through the systems used by design firm and idea factory IDEO provides an insider's view of how innovation works and why it's a necessity for any business. The sometimes vague concepts that are a part of innovation, like brainstorming and creativity, are broken down and explained clearly enough to make them more practical to use for start-ups and established companies alike. Real-life examples and applications help bring insight into how seeing things from a fresh point of view can result in better services and products that help companies stay competitive.

- ## SUMMARY

"It's not about just coming up with the one genius idea that solves the problem, but trying and failing at a hundred other solutions before arriving at the best one."

Innovation at Work

LEGO was nominated in 2015 by Forbes as the most powerful brand in the world. But just over ten years earlier, in 2004, the toy company was on the edge of bankruptcy. Suffering losses of $300 million and facing the potential end of their once successful company, they realized that typical innovation efforts weren't going to save them. They didn't want a new product; they wanted to revive the popularity of their existing product and brand. Like many companies in similar situations, they hired a new CEO and restructured. But it was by embracing innovation that they were able to bring the company back to life.

The toy maker's first step was to tap into their loyal, and obviously creative, fan base. They hired adult fans of the LEGO brand for their design team and began using crowdsourcing for new toy kit ideas. When the crowdsourcing efforts began to produce useable results, they adopted an open innovation policy by opening up the LEGO Ideas portal. Through user feedback, their online platform began to generate hundreds of new product suggestions each year. They began to use a variety of innovating techniques, from social media to peer selection to encourage fans to contribute new designs.

This invaluable feedback and the willingness to take new and different approaches for their existing product and brand, LEGO found themselves back in business. They eventually implemented a process of rapid prototyping to keep the momentum going. David Gram, head of marketing at Lego's Future Lab, describes this new approach: "We only develop the few key features that are really needed. A typical engineering mistake is wanting to invent all the things the product might consist of in one go … we throw that into the market and get feedback from consumers."

Innovation in Motion

Just like LEGO discovered, companies must learn to innovate to compete, and the IDEO method identifies some basic steps to working with an innovative mindset. Innovation is all about asking questions that reveal opportunities and pitfalls.

Understand the market, client, technology, and constraints.

- Who is the end user and what do they want or need?
- What other companies offer similar products or services?
- What technology is available and is it enough to create the product effectively?
- What are the obstacles that must be overcome?

Observe people, products, and services in real-life situations.

- Data and analysis approaches can provide a lot of useful, necessary information but people's behavior can reveal critical, practical points that must be considered.
- How does the end user use similar products or services?
- Can the concept be designed in a way that makes it easy to use?
- Look for flaws or inconsistencies with a critical eye. These are the very things the end user will see all too quickly.

Evaluate and refine prototypes quickly and frequently.

- Even the crudest prototype reveals something useful.
- A rough sketch or basic outline is the beginning of understanding if the concept will have value.
- As a concept begins to take shape, it can be fine-tuned with more sophisticated methods to move it towards realization.

Implement new concepts and get them to market.

- Innovation is all about moving quickly and steadily forward.
- Time is the enemy of innovation. The first one to market has the advantage.
- It doesn't have to be perfect; it just has to be *out there*. The market will eventually provide the feedback needed to tweak and improve.

IDEO didn't wait till they had everything perfect to launch their innovation company; they forged ahead using the resources available. By getting their service to market quickly with a concept that was "good enough," they eventually landed key accounts with Silicon Valley staples like Apple. Had they waited until they had the "perfect" offering, they would have missed out on valuable feedback and collaboration.

"Noticing that something is broken is an essential prerequisite for coming up with a creative solution to fix it."

Prototyping is the Shorthand of Innovation

Prototypes should be created rapidly to get a project moving forward. Building something and getting it into people's hands is the best way to learn how to fine-tune a design. This lesson is well illustrated by using Amazon as an example. Jeff Bezos, the founder of Amazon, quit his job after learning about the explosive growth of internet commerce. He didn't wait until he had the perfect model to launch his own e-commerce business, he used trial and error by throwing out prototype after prototype. By using the feedback from users, he was able to improve upon each trial until he eventually created the world-wide phenomenon that is Amazon.

The Perfect Brainstorm

IDEO uses hour-long brainstorming sessions to create and improve upon ideas. These sessions are frequent and have a certain "wide-open" atmosphere where (just about!) anything goes. The result is a flurry of activity and conversations that are focused on quantity, not quality.

Sharpen the focus.

What is the goal? Is it a better mouse trap or a more economical mouse trap? Unless everyone understands the goal, those ideas flying around have no real relevance. Create a vision of customers and their needs. Who is the typical user and how will the concept benefit them?

What does the end product or service look like? Even in the beginning stages, there has to be a somewhat defined picture of what it will look like when it's completed.

Use playful rules.

- Creativity doesn't have to be fun, but it sure helps. If everyone takes themselves too seriously, it makes it hard to think outside the box.
- Just like in any other learning environment, games can often be the best teaching and learning
- Playing the devil's advocate may not seem playful, but by doing rounds where ideas are dissected using a sort of mischievous give and take can keep things lively. Just make sure everyone gets their shot.

The space remembers.

Using different methods for creating and recording ideas can lead to different views and more ideas. It's the variety and diversity that keeps the ideas flowing.

- Use the wall and fill it up with sticky notes. Move them around, organize them into categories.
- Write on windows, whiteboards, and other big spaces, so they are within view of the whole group. These diverse methods keep ongoing ideas front and center, creating a foundation for new ideas.
- Draw pictures and diagrams with different types and colors of markers.
- Physically act out scenarios presented from a manufacturer's or customer's point of view.

"Good brainstorms are extremely visual. They include sketching, mind mapping, diagrams, and stick figures. You don't have to be an artist to get your point across with a sketch or diagram."

- ## IN SEARCH OF THE "WET NAP" INTERFACE

Even the most innovative and creative products or services can't succeed if they are difficult to use. Consumers want, and expect, a certain ease-of-use and tend to lose interest quickly at the first signs of difficulty. This "user interface" element is so critical, but it is often overlooked. Nearly everyone has experienced user interface issues at one time or another.

The website that doesn't provide clear directions or steps for using their service or buying their product is an all-too-common experience. The instructions for putting together an end table or swing set can often seem like they require some special knowledge to follow the directions. This confusing and frustrating lack of simplification sends many brands and products to the bottom of the customer's @#%& list!

A simple, but revealing, example of a useful interface can be found with the common Wet Nap. Their directions for their product are right there on the packaging and couldn't be any more clear:

"Tear open and use."

While it probably didn't take a lot of brainstorming, it serves its purpose beautifully. By making a product as easy to use as possible, this ease-of-use becomes a significant feature with clear benefits.

Sometimes, the bells and whistles that seem to be benefits are more harmful than useful. Innovation should be about simplifying without devaluing.

Creating Experiences for Fun and Profit

The customer experience has become as important as customer service and customer satisfaction. Consumers don't just buy things and services; they buy experiences. When the experience of using a product or service evolves into a genuine feature, that experience can become the major selling point. A good idea can outperform a great one if it provides a better or more entertaining experience.

- •Experiences should be entertaining. Customers who are entertained stay longer, spend more, and come back more often. Think Disney. Disney understands entertainment obviously, but they also understand that by appealing to children, parents are certain to follow.
- •Tell a story. The story of a brand or service must be clear and consistent. Most people know that their life won't be completely changed by buying a new car, but the commercials and other media sure make it seem that way.
- •Fix it. Progressive companies look for flaws in the customer experience and fix them. The popularity of cell phones with large, easy-to-read buttons with seniors is a perfect example of how finding a problem and addressing it leads to more sales.
- •Rethink services often. By focusing on making services easier and better, companies can often find ways to stand out from the competition and provide a better experience. Staples understood this concept, and it led them to create the "Easy Button." While the

"button" isn't really a tangible feature, it's extensive use in marketing helps promote their commitment to making their services "easy."

•Little experiences make a big difference. A great illustration is the JanSport warranty card. The card uses humor to change the traditionally dry topic of product warranties into something a little more personal. It reads: "Hi. Warranty Service Camp is really cool. They say they're sending me home soon...gotta run...we're doing zipper races today!" A little humor goes a long way.

•   ZERO TO SIXTY

A climate of innovation must have a sense of urgency. The world of business, entertainment, and especially the digital world are moving fast, and the only way to compete is to innovate faster. The quicker the innovation, the quicker the service or product goes to market. Just like with prototypes, the overall innovation efforts have to be put out there fast. Creating this atmosphere of speed not only fuels innovation, but it also creates an exciting and dynamic climate where innovation thrives. Remember, the first to market often wins in the end.

Coloring Outside the Lines

It's tough to break old habits and question the status quo. Innovation requires breaking away from traditional methods and ideas and getting outside that comfort zone. Pushing the limit requires a thick skin and a willingness to fail, sometimes miserably.

•Fail often to succeed sooner. There is no success without risk.

•Don't focus on what might be lost, but on what might be gained. Fear cripples creativity.

•Break the rules. Rules breakers are traditionally the people who have positively changed the way things are done or made.

•Don't go too far! At least color on the same page.

Live the Future

Knowing what the future holds just isn't possible, but that uncertainty is at the heart of innovation. There's just no way to know, but there are plenty of ways to make an educated guess. Learn what products or services are currently state-of-the-art by doing research and seeking out other innovators.

Seek out empowerment products that make people more effective, smarter, prettier, popular, etc., and build ideas off of them. Find the hotspots for an industry, from physical locations to publications and observe to learn.

The Art of War

BY SUN TZU

SYNOPSIS

The Art of War was written by a Chinese general named Sun Tzu more than 2,500 years ago. Revered for its practical advice on warfare, the lessons here apply to anyone who leads others. Each chapter focuses on a different aspect of war, along with practical advice for leading effectively. Three of the more important elements of success in battle, leadership, strategy, and tactics, are critical for victory.

SUMMARY

Leadership

The first chapters focus on leading effectively, not just in regards to strategy and tactics, but in how to instill confidence and purpose in followers. The focus here is on being strong and confident, but also on caring and being responsible for the well-being of others.

There are five dangerous faults which may affect a general:

- Recklessness, which leads to destruction.
- Cowardice, which leads to capture.
- A hasty temper, which can be provoked by insults.
- A delicacy of honor, which is sensitive to shame.
- Over-solicitude for his men, which exposes him to worry and trouble.

"Regard your soldiers as your children, and they will follow you into the deepest valleys; look upon them as your own beloved sons, and they will stand by you even unto death."

Generals must lead by example, and they must exhibit behaviors and traits that give confidence to their men. When a leader takes unnecessary risks or makes decisions without thinking them through, his recklessness affects everyone in his command and weakens his authority. Soldiers expect their leaders to keep them on the right path to victory and keep them out of danger.

Leaders who are afraid to make decisions allow doubt and fear to take hold in their followers, causing confusion and unrest. Avoiding making decisions is another form of recklessness because doing nothing can be just as dangerous as doing something recklessly. When a general delays making the decision to advance or retreat, that hesitation can mean life or death, defeat or victory.

Leaders who are quick to anger are seen as out of control, unpredictable, and even unstable. If the leader has no self-control, it makes it difficult for his men to take his direction and leadership ability seriously. All leaders need a core of followers who help with strategies, planning, and other aspects of a successful campaign. When this core is afraid to speak out, valuable input and feedback are lost because of the fear of reprimand.

A strong leader should have a sense pride and dignity, in themselves, their men, and their purpose. This pride shouldn't be confused with self-importance. This type of pride is about having pride in the efforts of a campaign and the men who are responsible for making it a success. The strong leader reacts quickly to any external attack, or to any internal dissension among the ranks. This pride serves as the foundation for a cohesive unit.

A good leader cares about his followers but understands that there is a fine line between caring and enabling. When men know that their general cares, they respect him and the overall efforts of what they are trying to accomplish. But when a leader becomes more concerned with the troop's favor than the campaign itself, the results are destructive. Men become complacent, lose their motivation, and their commitment wanes.

Strategy

Once a general or manager learns how to lead, he must learn how to use strategy. In battle, effective strategies require knowing the enemy and what conditions are most likely to be encountered. These strategies must be well-designed to address as many potential obstacles as possible, but they must also be flexible when encountering the unknown.

Which army is stronger?

- On which side are the officers and men more highly trained?
- Which of the two generals has the most ability?
- In which army is there the greater constancy both in reward and punishment?

"If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle."

An army must know the strengths and weaknesses of their enemy to have any chance of victory. Understanding if the enemy is stronger or weaker determines how to create a winning strategy. When facing an army of superior strength, tactics and creativity play a big part in minimizing the opponent's advantage. Going head-to-head with a superior army is simply not practical. It takes cunning, extensive preparation, and the ability to change tactics quickly.

When an army is faced with an enemy that possesses superior training and leadership, the strategies of a campaign must reflect that. This is where creativity and alternative methods must be used to dilute the opponent's advantage. An effective general knows how to create sound strategies using proven techniques, but he also knows how to make adjustments and when to deviate from traditional tactics.

Perhaps one of the greatest strengths a general can have is knowing and accepting when they are less capable than an opposing general. Personal pride and the desire to appear invincible can be a weakness if it prevents a general from seeing reality clearly. With an understanding of how they compare to their foe, an effective general can build a strategy that includes elements to negate that disadvantage.

Discipline is necessary for keeping campaigns focused and for instilling a sense of group purpose. Knowing how men are rewarded and punished, and the consistency of the consequences indicates the level of discipline. If the enemy punishes their men too harshly or inconsistently, there is a good chance those men will be less disciplined in their commitment to the campaign. Of course, the same applies to a general's own troops. Knowing this important factor identifies weaknesses that can be exploited through focused strategy.

"Engage people with what they expect; it is what they are able to discern and confirms their projections. It settles them into predictable patterns of response, occupying their minds while you wait for the extraordinary moment — that which they cannot anticipate."

Tactics

While strategies focus on what to do, tactics focus on how to do it. Even the best of strategies will fail if they can't be implemented with effective methods. Men who follow blindly are certainly loyal, but men who understand the tactics of a strategy are far superior.

- So in war, the way is to avoid what is strong and to strike at what is weak.
- Therefore the good fighter will be terrible in his onset, and prompt in his decision.
- Whoever is first in the field and awaits the coming of the enemy, will be fresh for the fight; whoever is second in the field and has to hasten to battle will arrive exhausted.

Facing a stronger enemy requires understanding where the enemy is weak to increase the chances of victory. No matter how strong, or how well-trained, every army has weaknesses that can be exploited. By attacking these weaknesses, the chances for success are greater, and these successes help create confidence. These attacks minimize the enemy's advantages and can slowly neutralize their strengths.

A general who leads effectively, instilling confidence and purpose in his men, has prepared his troops for swift action. With sound strategies and tactics in place, a general and his men are prepared to attack quickly and ferociously. They are confident in their leader, confident in the strategies, and confident that they have the very best chance of being victorious.

Generals understand the importance of arriving for battle first. When an army can get to the battlefield before their opponent, they have some distinct advantages. They are able to prepare, both physically and psychologically, for the battle to come to them. When the enemy arrives, they are tired from the journey and then must face an opponent who is rested and ready.

"*Do not repeat the tactics which have gained you one victory, but let your methods be regulated by the infinite variety of circumstances.*"

The Great Game of Business

By Jack Stack & Bo Burlingham

Synopsis

The laws of business this book teaches are basic, common sense rules that most readers will have heard either from a boss or maybe even a parent!

The laws apply not only to business managers but to anyone that cares about running an honest and fair organization. These laws are relevant from the bottom of an organization to the top.

Summary

The First Law:

"You get what you give"

Hard work pays off. By rewarding employees in a way that is equivalent to what they put into their job, they will be happier and more productive. They will also feel like they are part of a team and an important part of a company's success.

The Second Law:

"It's easy to stop one guy, but it's pretty hard to stop 100"

This law emphasizes the power of teamwork. Readers will learn how the power of a group cooperating towards a common goal is so much greater than individual contributions. This law also reflects the benefits of the first law by building a team atmosphere with happy employees.

The Third Law:

"What goes around comes around"

By understanding this age-old law, readers can begin to create a work environment where everyone is more aware of the impact they have. Whether it's through words or actions, everything an employee expresses has consequences. Make sure they are good ones.

The Fourth Law:

"You do what you gotta do"

As the author states, the fourth law is all about "taking the hill." It teaches the lesson that by creating an atmosphere of not only getting things done, but also an atmosphere of looking at things in creative ways. Moving forward in the midst of challenges or mistakes, and simply doing what has to be done to reach a goal is a mindset that reveals potential and provides empowerment.

The Fifth Law:

"You gotta wanna"

If someone doesn't want to do something, they won't do it. Nothing new there, but readers can find practical advice for motivating employees to "wanna." To make people want to do something, you have to show them how their stake in the game is valuable and important and convince them that their contributions will be good for them and the organization.

The Sixth Law:

"You can sometimes fool the fans, but you can never fool the players"

Just like anyone reading this book, the people on the inside always know more about the state of things than the people on the outside. The sixth law means that even when things are in turmoil within an organization, everyone needs to have their game face on. Employees know all about the strengths and weakness of a company, but the customer should only know the strengths.

The Seventh Law:

"When you raise the bottom, the top rises"

This one is all about understanding how important each role is within a company, even the seemingly small ones. Readers will learn that by recognizing the efforts of the lowest

employees, they can elevate the entire organization. Happy, confident employees make for happy, confident bosses.

The Eighth Law:

"When people set their own targets, they usually hit them"

This law ties right into the fifth law. It's hard for a person to set a goal and then say they don't "wanna." It's all about getting an employee to buy in by creating a climate where employees set their own targets based on a clear outcome. Most readers already know the time and energy it takes to micro-manage, so stepping back and letting employees take the reigns for a bit may be a welcome change.

The Ninth Law:

"If nobody pays attention, people stop caring"

The ninth law teaches readers a very basic law of human nature and how it relates to business. Acknowledging and recognizing how each and every employee contributes to a company is one of the best ways to let employees know that they matter. If the boss doesn't pay attention to the efforts of an employee, then that's the same as not paying attention to the employee. If the boss doesn't care, then why should the employee?

The Tenth Law:

"As they say in Missouri: 'Shit rolls downhill." By which we mean change begins at the top"

The power in most organizations is at the top, so any real change must come from there. But readers will learn that change may come from the top, but it begins with honest feedback from the field and from other managers. If the person at the top cares about creating a healthy, profitable work environment, then it's up to the rest of the organization to make sure the concerns and issues reach the top.

The Ultimate Higher Law:

"When you appeal to the highest level of thinking, you get the highest level of performance."

This really makes 11 laws, but this one is important. Readers will understand this law best by reading what the author has to say in his own words:

"I don't want people just to do a job. I want them to have a purpose in what the Hell they're doing. I want them to be going somewhere. I want them to be excited about getting up in the morning, to look forward to what they're going to do that day."

That means treating employees with respect. It means respecting their efforts, their intelligence, and their creativity. This is the essence of all the laws and readers who take these lessons to heart and start using these principles will see a new and better culture arise in their own organization.

The Team Handbook

BY PETER R. SCHOLTES, BRIAN L. JOINER, BARBARA J. STREIBEL(550+ WORDS)

SYNOPSIS

There's really no other way to put it. This book is 'the' handbook for building great teams. There is no fluff, no elaborate theories. Only practical advice proven to work. Managers and leaders already know how important a team can be and they know how hard it is to build a great one. This book has all the tools for building those great teams.

"*To succeed, organizations must rely on the knowledge, skills, experience, and perspective of a wide range of people to solve multifaceted problems, make good decisions, and deliver effective solutions. This is where dynamic, productive teams can make the difference.*"

Full of useful templates and step-by-step guidelines, this a *workbook* in the best sense of the word. There's lots of white space for notes and plenty of worksheets to help keep everything together. Each area of team development, team management, and team dynamics is covered in great detail.

SUMMARY

To build effective teams, it's important first to determine what kind of team is needed. Depending on whether it's a department team, special task team, or some other type, these teams may be permanent or temporary. A sample of different types of teams provides a good understanding of the differences and how they contribute.

Functional Teams

These types of teams are some of the more traditional and are usually permanent. They may be departmental teams, production teams, or safety teams. Regardless of their department or focus, they are an essential part of the day-to-day operations. These teams can often be self-managing as long as expectations are clear and results are monitored.

Project Teams

These are specialized teams built to address a specific issue or design a specific solution. They are usually temporary and are often made up of members from different areas of the organization. A project team requires clear direction, deadlines, and detailed focus. These teams need strong leadership and a variety of resources.

Virtual Teams

Virtual teams are becoming more and more commonplace. These are teams that are physically located outside the organization. They may be in different cities or even in different countries and use technology to interact. They are usually made up of team members with very specific skills and should require very little supervision.

Overall

The book expands on even more types of teams and how they are designed for particular needs. The extensive detail provided on the types of teams is a good sample of how this book treats just about every aspect of team building and team management. There just doesn't seem to be

any aspect of a team that goes unaddressed, from detailed roles to handling conflict.

Some key points in putting a team together include the need for a team leader, coach, and sponsor. Each of these roles has their own responsibilities to make the team effective and the book provides the details for each role. It's recommended that regardless of the type of team, it's best to have five to seven members in addition to the above roles.

Every team needs certain things to be the most productive. Goals, purposes, boundaries, and access to people in-the-know are just a few of the important points that must be in place. There is plenty of practical advice for managing a team including how to have effective discussions and step-by-step modules for problem-solving.

From improving teams to managing specific types of team members, the book breaks down just about every possible obstacle that great teams face. It's a lot of material and will take time to implement, but the pay-off