

Surrounded by Setbacks

What's in it for me? Learn how to conquer setbacks and relentlessly pursue your dreams.

For 20 years, Thomas Erikson tried to get publishers interested in his books. And for 20 years they ignored him. In fact, he has a thick file full of rejection letters. But he kept going, reworking his texts and taking all the feedback on board. Finally, his first book, *Surrounded by Idiots*, was published. That book went on to sell over three million copies. Most people, faced with so many years of demoralizing rejections, would have thrown in the towel. But Erikson persisted. What allowed him to keep working in pursuit of his dreams for so long? And what secrets can you learn that will allow you to do the same? That's what you're about to discover in these blinks. In these blinks, you'll learn

why radical overnight life changes will always fail; the secret to Netflix's success; and how to stop complaining about your life and start taking action.

It's time to wake up and take full responsibility for your life.

What are the complaints you re-hash with your colleagues every Monday over lunch? We all have things we're concerned about; things we wish were different. In fact, we become so used to our complaints that it becomes like a background soundtrack that we don't even hear anymore. There's nothing wrong with worrying and complaining. But don't fool yourself that it's going to change anything in your life. As the saying goes, talk is cheap. And, unfortunately, good intentions are too. The only thing that's going to change your life is action. More, specifically, your actions. The key message here is: It's time to wake up and take full responsibility for your life. Most people live in a cozy place called Laterville. It's a comfortable suburb, where everyone plods along, punching the clock at their jobs, and doing okay. Nothing ruffles the status quo, and no one sticks their heads out too much. People talk about wanting to start their own companies, or write books, or change their relationships with their children. Sometimes they even have elaborate plans for how to make that happen. But no one ever does anything about it. After all, there's plenty of time. Why not start tomorrow? You probably also live in some version of Laterville. You know you want things to be different, but you don't actually take the steps to make it so. You allow yourself to be distracted by your phone, or sucked into a friend's drama, or convinced to work overtime again. Before you know it, months have gone by and you're no closer to reaching your dreams. You can blame being stuck on your boss, or your friend, or capitalism, or any number of things. But the truth is, the only person who's really responsible for your life is you. You're responsible for your decisions, 100 percent of the time – both the actions you take and the ones that you don't. And you're also responsible for the way you react to things that happen to you. That's something you should find empowering: if you're responsible for your life it means you don't have to wait around for someone to come and make it better. You have the power to change it. Right now. No matter what cards you've been dealt. But first of all, you need to learn how to face your fears, and deal with any setbacks that come your way.

Face your fears and confront problems head-on.

Have you ever had a gnawing feeling in the pit of your stomach that something was wrong? Perhaps your wife began acting weirdly when you asked why she'd been coming home late. Or you noticed that your boss stopped giving you demanding assignments, and began micro-managing your work. Maybe you've been worrying about your physical health. Most people have well-honed intuitions that can pick up on potential problems quickly. Unfortunately, most people also have a well-honed ability to deny what they don't want to see. But, look closely and you'll find that behind this denial is usually fear. Fear of looking bad, or being a failure; fear of losing your job, or your relationship. These lurking fears can paralyze you – you may be unhappy, but at least it's a safe, familiar unhappiness. The key message here is: Face your fears and confront problems head-on. Your fears are never going to go away. They're part of your unique survival system, designed to keep you safe. But you don't have to allow yourself to be limited by them. You can, as the famous slogan goes, feel the fear and do it anyway! Take a moment to think about something in your life that you're concerned about, and actively ignoring. Now write down three actions you can take to deal with the problem. If that makes it sound simple, that's because it is! And the more you practice actively dealing with your problems, the easier it becomes. Start with something small, like going to the doctor for a physical if you're concerned about your health. Then work up to confronting your boss about underestimating your capabilities. People around you may be uncomfortable when you start confronting your problems. They may see your change of behavior as threatening because it shines a light on things they've been avoiding as well. But addressing issues head-on will always be positive for your relationships in the end. And if people are unable to support you, it will give you the chance to seek out others who do. We all have problems and obstacles in our lives, and we always will. But there's nothing wrong with that. Setbacks are what give us the opportunity to learn and grow – but only if we confront them.

Big change comes in small steps.

Meet Harry. Harry was a college football player who used to be fit and healthy. But for the last 20 years, he's spent most of his free time on the couch, surfing the internet and gorging on junk food. Harry usually wakes up feeling foggy and exhausted. He shows up at work and goes through the motions, but he can't concentrate on anything. One day, Harry catches a glimpse of himself and realizes something needs to change. He looks old and worn out, and bitter. So, he embarks on a radical life makeover. He starts getting up at 5:00 a.m. and biking to work, and then going to the gym six nights a week. He gives up junk food. And he never goes to bed after 10:00 p.m. But, after a few months, Harry still can't see any signs that all the work is paying off. The key message here is: Big change comes in small steps. Harry's motivation starts to wane. He's tired, and his body aches all over. He misses being able to relax with his wife or drink a beer with friends. Soon, his resolve crumbles and he's back to his old ways as a couch potato. He feels even worse than before because his attempt to change was such a failure. Starting out, Harry had lots of motivation and commitment. So, what went wrong? First of all, Harry had unrealistic expectations. He thought he could change his life and get results overnight. But he had 20 years to settle into his unhealthy habits. Changing them, and seeing results, will take more than a few months. Harry should have begun

more gradually, starting with small, realistic actions that he could actually maintain – like going to the gym once a week. Then he could have added other gradual changes, like adapting his diet, or going to bed an hour earlier. Harry was also missing a clear goal. He wanted to get healthy, sure. But being healthy is a broad concept that means different things to different people. It could mean you want to lose ten kilos, or be able to climb Mount Everest. Harry needed to be very clear about his “why,” and think about what specifically he wanted to achieve, and what that would contribute to his life. The lesson here is that the clearer your goal is, the easier it is to maintain your commitment.

Understanding your personality type will help you identify any weak spots in your approach to problem-solving.

When a crisis hits in your life, what causes you to react the way you do? Why do some people go into problem-solving mode, while others try to hide or run away from their problems? One explanation is that we all belong to different personality types, with different motivations and needs. A model, called the DISC model, argues that there are four main personalities and we all fit into one or two of them. Knowing something about these types and how they behave can give you an insight into why people respond to adversity so differently. The key message here is: Understanding your personality type will help you identify any weak spots in your approach to problem-solving. To consider each type, it helps to assign them a color. The red personality is extroverted and good at confronting problems. Reds aren't scared of conflict, and tend to charge in head-first. Reds are task-oriented and intent on winning. They see anyone, or anything, that gets in their way as an obstacle to their success. And they'll do whatever it takes to get their way, even if it means collateral damage to their relationships. Resilience is one of their greatest strengths. Yellow types, on the other hand, prize their relationships with other people, and crave admiration above all else. They're master conversationalists and great at bringing others along with their dreams and ambitions. The worst kind of setback for a yellow is public humiliation, because it wounds their ego. But, they are naturally optimistic and soon bounce back. They're also good at finding unexpected solutions. Greens are similarly relationship-oriented, but they're introverts to yellow's extroverts. Greens like to form strong communities and tackle problems together. In fact, they put the good of the group above all else. But they can be very sensitive to criticism. The blue type is much less emotional. They see everything as a logical challenge that should be approached sensibly and rationally. Blues are experts at anticipating setbacks and solving problems. But they struggle with chaos and find it hard when things don't follow their carefully laid plans. Blues also fear making mistakes, or being shown up for being careless. Which type do you most relate to? Or perhaps you see yourself in a couple of these examples. There are lots of factors influencing how we behave in life. But it can be a useful starting point to think about how you naturally react to adversity, and what strengths you want to develop in order to respond differently the next time something doesn't go your way.

Build a great support network by using other people's strengths to bolster your

weaknesses.

It's never too late to start living your dreams. Take the example of Swedish media personality Dagny Carlsson, who wrote her first blog post at the age of 100 and made her film debut at 104! Carlsson's story should inspire you to start working toward your goals today. But before you dive in, let's flesh out those DISC personality types with a little more detail. In particular, let's take a look at some of the weaknesses you might struggle with. Knowing what you're bad at, as well as what makes you great, is what will give you the self-knowledge you need to succeed. The key message here is: Build a great support network by using other people's strengths to bolster your weaknesses. Every personality type has weaknesses that stop them from achieving their goals. Reds tend to charge ahead impatiently, without taking the rest of their team with them. The problem? Most worthy challenges require teamwork. In order to be successful, reds must learn to be patient and engage with their colleagues. Yellows are great at bringing others into their visions, but they're less skilled at planning out the details. And they're terrible at taking criticism on board, which means others sometimes just tell them what they want to hear. Yellows could benefit from teaming up with the methodical blues, and focusing on the nuts and bolts of a project instead of emotions. Greens are skilled listeners, but they can be too nice. They have to learn how to voice critique and follow their own path. And they need to develop their adaptability. Red-green partnerships can be very successful. Blues are of course the ultimate planners. But sometimes they get stuck in their perfectionist dreams and resist taking action. To be successful, blues have to learn to just try things out without being scared of making mistakes. Identifying the strengths and weaknesses of your personality type will give you the self-awareness to anticipate potential problems. Even better, it will give you valuable insights about who you're best suited to working with. The ideal team is made up of all sorts of people whose complementary strengths and weaknesses bring out the best in each other.

Success isn't about what your life looks like on Instagram.

Everyone wants to be successful. But what does that really mean? In the old days, a successful career was defined as staying with the same company and rising slowly through the ranks, having a nice house, and enjoying an early retirement. Today, success is much harder to pinpoint - and achieve. You don't just need to make money, you need to have your dream job. And a soulmate. And keep fit. And go on fabulous holidays. And change the world. And, of course, it all needs to be captured in beautiful technicolor on social media. We've created a world where we're constantly trying to send out a perfect image, no matter what our lives are really like. The key message here is: Success isn't about what your life looks like on Instagram. Unsurprisingly, the quest for the perfect life hasn't brought about huge increases in happiness; in fact, it's made people more dissatisfied. When the author was named a top public speaker, he couldn't enjoy his victory because he lamented the fact he hadn't been ranked even higher! We need to be able to enjoy our lives and celebrate our achievements in order to feel like all the hard work is worth it. Otherwise, we get stuck on a constant treadmill chasing after goals that become more and more unobtainable. So, shut down your computer and get off Instagram for a minute. The time has come to ask: What does success mean to you? Get really specific. If success is making a difference, then ask yourself how, and to whom? And how will you know when you've done enough? If success is having money,

ask yourself how much is enough? And how will having that money change your life? Explore what success feels like to you, not what it looks like to other people. After all, people will judge you no matter what you do. But none of that matters, because no one else is living your life. Finally, make sure to celebrate all the successes – big and small – that have brought you to this point. Take out a piece of paper, and jot down 100 accomplishments that you're proud of. Things like passing your driver's test, or becoming sober, or learning to make a damn good peach pie. Keep on writing, through your bashfulness, and put that list somewhere you can see it.

Stay the course to achieve your dreams.

Imagine for a minute a pilot flying a passenger plane from Miami to New York. She starts off perfectly, it's all going well. But then, a minor error: almost imperceptibly, her steering drifts the plane off course by one degree. In the moment, the mistake is hardly noticed, and yet, the impact is huge. After a few hours, the plane has veered so far off its flight path that the passengers have to land not at JFK airport, but in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean! When you're pursuing your dreams for success, it's easy to start off strong and then very subtly drift off course until you've lost your way entirely. After all, change is hard. And the pull of familiar comforts is strong. In order to stay on track, you're going to need to cultivate persistence and adaptability. The key message here is: Stay the course to achieve your dreams. When you dream big, an inevitable gap opens between your ideal life and your current reality. It can be discouraging, especially when you can't yet see any results for your efforts. To stay on course, you need to nurture an attitude of stubborn persistence: keep reminding yourself why your goal is important, and reward yourself for your efforts. Make sure you surround yourself with the right people, or co-pilots. People who believe in you and your goal, who support you in seeing what's possible, and who keep you accountable. Consider the story of one woman who was so determined to stop smoking she roped in her whole company to help. Her boss suggested she stick a big red cross on her door for every day she didn't smoke. That simple practice became a daily reward, and a way to stay publicly accountable. Another key quality of successful people is adaptability. Netflix started as a company that mailed people DVDs. Luckily, they were responsive to changes in the market, and were able to pioneer the streaming service that has made them a market leader today. But, imagine if they'd just stubbornly clung to their first idea! You, too, will encounter change as you pursue your goals. When it comes, be receptive to new information and willing to update your approach. By being persistent but adaptable you'll chart your own way to a new life – one that is in line with your goals and dreams.

Final summary

The key message in these blinks: Your life is 100 percent your own responsibility. Bad things might happen to you, but you control how you react to them. So face your fears and confront problems head-on. You can achieve your dreams as long as you're willing to take small, persistent actions. Keep your motivation up by defining your personal goals and becoming clear about what success means to you. Actionable advice: Put your problems in perspective. Sometimes we can be so highly strung that even being stuck in a traffic jam can start to feel like the end of the world. But if you consider the obstacles and setbacks you've encountered in the course of your life, you'll realize that being caught up in traffic is the least of your worries. Create a list of all the setbacks you've had, and rank them in order of how serious they were. Keep the list at hand to remind

you how resilient you are, and put your other problems in perspective.