



Microwins

**Go Small, Build Momentum, and
Tackle the Goals That Actually
Matter in Life**

Daron K. Roberts

WILEY



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*This book is dedicated to the Donut Council, a collection
of six humans that buoys me with love and laughter.*







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A Story

Two couples bought property not too far from each other. One of the men had just turned 30. He and his wife had always dreamed of having a second property. The couple boasted high-paying jobs, had quickly scaled their career ladders, and with extra cash on hand, they decided to buy 20 acres in the mountains. With a newborn on the way, they thought it would be nice to have a place where they could retreat to and get away from the bustle of the big city.

The second man was more than twice the age of the younger man. He and his wife had always dreamed of a place to build their final home. Although they didn't live too far from the mountains, they rarely took the time to enjoy them. Sure, they took a hike here and there, but they spent most of their time at home on their small parcel of land. Having meticulously saved their money for decades, they were finally ready to enjoy the serenity of the mountains they could see out of their window. So, they purchased a plot of 20 acres that bordered the younger couple's property.

On one particular day, the two men encountered each other on the gravel road that led to their new purchases.

One drove a beat up pickup truck and the other drove a shiny new Jeep that he'd rented at the airport. As the two trucks neared each other, the two drivers slowed to a stop.

"Looks like we're neighbors," said the young man to the other as he rolled down his window. "My name is Jim. I just flew in to check out the property. My wife and I live in New York."

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Jim. I'm Franklin, but everybody around here calls me Frank. My wife and I live not too far from here. Just about 30 minutes to the east."

"It's good to meet you as well, neighbor. I'm curious, what are your plans for the place?"

"Well," said Frank, "my wife has had her eyes on this place since we were newlyweds and we finally saved enough to get it. When I was young like you, I promised her I'd build a cabin for the two of us up here. Gosh, that seems like ages ago. Now, it's time for me to deliver on the promise."

"Well, I know she'll appreciate that. I hope this doesn't come off the wrong way, but you got anybody to help you?"

Frank looked over his glasses. "Do I look like the kind of man who needs help?"

Jim's eyes widened. "I didn't mean it that way. I just meant that it seems like you have a lot of work and could use some help."

The old man chuckled. "Well, as a teenage boy I used to help my uncle build houses in these mountains when all of the city folk decided that one house wasn't good enough for 'em."

As Jim looked away, Frank continued, “We’ll just have to see if I can still remember some of what I learned 45 years ago. And how about you?”

“Well, we’ve always wanted to have somewhere we could go to get out of the city for a while and this part of the country is perfect. I just hired a construction company to break ground so hopefully we’ll be able to enjoy the place next summer.”

“Sounds like a plan,” Frank nodded. “I’m going to come up here every day and do a little bit of work a day at a time.”

“How long is that going to take you?” asked Jim.

Frank looked up at the treetops and appeared to be working the math in his head.

“That’s a good question, Jim. To tell ya the truth, I don’t know. I guess it’ll take me as long as it takes me.”

“Well,” said the young man, “good luck on the build. It was a pleasure to meet you.”

“You, too,” said Frank. “I guess I’ll see you next summer.



A year passed. And the two men saw each other again on the gravel road of their first encounter. Just as before, the young man was just coming back from his property and was headed back to the airport.

“Well, look who it is! Howdy, future neighbor. It’s been a while,” said the old man.

“I just drove by your cabin. It looks great,” said Jim. “How in the world did you get that done in such a short period of time by yourself?”

Frank chuckled and answered with a question. “I thought you were hiring some builders to put up *your* house?”

“I did, and I can’t tell you how many things went wrong. The first builder pulled out at the last minute, and so I had to hire a second contractor. The second contractor couldn’t get the materials that he needed, or so he claimed, and so we waited and waited until we finally fired him, too. And now, I’m just hoping we can be done with this thing by next year.”

“That’s a shame,” Frank said. “It’s hard to find good help these days.”

“You never answered my question,” said Jim. “Who helped you build the cabin?”

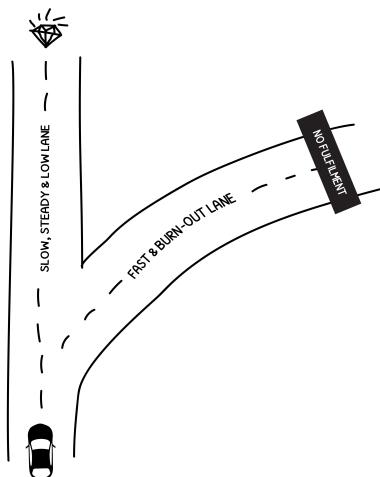
The old man got out of his pickup truck, walked over to the young man and leaned into his window.

“Well, you decided to outsource your project and I decided to do it on my own. So every day I just did a little here and a little there. I laid the foundation one day. I did a little framing the next. And bit by bit I kept tinkering with the place until I got it done. You were making a house and I was building a home.”

Jim looked at the man in disbelief.

“As my daddy would say whenever he’d start smoking a brisket, ‘Low and slow, that, my friend, is the only way to go.’”

LOW AND SLOW IS
THE ONLY WAY TO GO.





Introduction

The Christmas tree was still standing and my wife was readying our home for a New Year's Eve party the day I was fired. We had been in Cleveland for 304 days. To be exact our home was located on a little plot of suburbia in Berea, a seven-minute drive to the Cleveland Browns practice facility. With three young children at the pre-K level, we didn't choose homes based on school districts, the only criterion that mattered was proximity to the practice facility. Period. As a coach in the National Football League, I spent most of my days (and nights) inside of a dimly lit meeting room tucked away on the second floor watching clips of football plays.

Play.

Rewind.

Play.

Rewind.

Play.

Rewind.

Pause . . .

Rewind.

I was looking for any tip, the hastened departure a receiver took as he left the huddle, when the ball was coming his way. Or the subtle head nod a quarterback gave before he heaved a deep throw. I would rewatch a single play for one hour, to detect anything (and I mean anything) that could give our defensive players a slight edge. The average margin of victory in the NFL hovers about four points. Four points. That's a field goal and an extra point. Two safeties. It's a razor-thin margin that lies between win and loss.

Let me rewind the story just a bit to give you more context. We had just lost to Mike Tomlin and the Pittsburgh Steelers at Heinz Field in the final game of the regular season. It was December 2013. To be honest, this far removed from that time in my life, I don't remember much about that particular game. I vaguely remember the Steelers being up 14–0 at halftime (I'm sure some of you will Google this; let me know if I am wrong). I remember a few players (and some coaches) looking like they were ready to hit the fast-forward button and get to the offseason. I remember wondering if any of my three kids had slept through their respective naps during the game.

I can tell you what I vividly remember, however, and it is the text message I received just before midnight. Sitting at my computer "breaking down" that day's game, I was readying myself for our postgame meetings the following morning. Fans see games and postgame press conferences. As a coach, you meander through a series of meetings. Pre-practice meetings. Post-practice meetings. All coaches meetings. Defensive coaches meetings. Defensive backs

meetings. The gauntlet never ends. Although the season was over, we still had to analyze the game and then begin the long process of grading each player as we went into the offseason. Grading the players would influence who we drafted and signed in free agency. One season was ending but another was just starting.

Or so I thought . . .

The text message simply read: *8 AM staff meeting with the owner.*

Damn it.

I looked at the clock. It was 11:46 p.m. We were 14 minutes away from the start of Black Monday.¹

My first thought: *We can't be getting fired tomorrow, can we?*

My second thought: *Wait, this is the NFL.*

The entire staff had just arrived in Cleveland. The team's new owner, Jimmy Haslam, had scrapped the coaching staff and front office and handpicked our head coach, Rob Chudzinski. Most of the assistant coaches were on three-year guaranteed contracts. Some of us had four-year deals.

There is a cringe-inducing cliché that you've probably heard before: "NFL stands for "Not for Long." Well, it's true. In what may be the shortest termination in the history of firings, owner Jimmy Haslam sat at the end of a long oak table and informed us that he'd fired our head coach, Rob Chudzinski, the previous night.

Damn, he was already fired when I got the text.

That was it. No HR professionals entered the room and checked on our mental health or reassured us that we still had health insurance. Nope, we were done. I remember driving home, walking into the kitchen, and the look on my wife's face screaming, *That's why I never unpack most of the moving boxes!*

Instead she asked, "You okay?" She didn't have to ask what happened. This was my seventh year as a coach. We'd been fired twice. We had frequent hauling miles with U-Haul. From Kansas City to Detroit to Morgantown to Cleveland, we'd crisscrossed the country chasing the next job. More pay. A better title. A bigger office.

"So what do you think is the next stop?"

I shrugged. I was still thinking about what would be the next landing spot. I walked to the refrigerator, yanked a carton of eggs, flipped on the stove, and started scrambling. When I first felt the tug on my hoodie, I ignored it. Then I looked down into the quizzical eyes of my three-year old, Dylan.

He looked at the skillet, he looked at me, he looked back at the skillet.

"You eat breakfast?"

The inflection in his voice was somewhere between the interrogative and declarative. I was unsure whether he was telling me to eat my breakfast or asking me if I ate breakfast. And in one of the lowlights of my fathering career, I ignored the kid and kept scrambling.² But Dylan was persistent.

He wobbled into the living room for a few minutes, came back and said, “You . . .,” pointing a chubby finger in my direction, “you eat breakfast?”

Now, it was clear he was asking a question. I started to answer him, but instead turned to my wife. “Honey, what is he talking about?”

“When was the last time that you had breakfast with Dylan?” I rummaged through my memory bank for the last breakfast I had enjoyed with my son. Not only could I not locate a breakfast, I couldn’t remember the last time I had shared a meal with him. The irony jolted me: *I was spending all of my time with other people’s sons and my firstborn didn’t know that I ate breakfast.*

Meanwhile, my phone was ablaze. Calls and texts were pouring in from around the league.

Just saw the news. Craziness, bro. Keep ya head up.

You good?

Don’t sweat it. I got you if you need a landing spot.

I swiped through the text messages. I scoured ESPN for who else was getting fired and predictions on who would land where. But the only thing I could think about was that simple question: You eat breakfast?

What I understand now, that I didn’t appreciate in 2013, is that if things aren’t going right at home, no quantity of work success can compensate you for the loss. Titles and promotions make for poor traveling companions. Work-life balance is a myth. The scales will never be even. They are in different weight classes. Your work is what you do but your life is who you are.

I had confused my identity with my profession and fractures were showing in the foundation of my home.

That night, I took out a stack of hot pink Post-It notes and wrote one sentence:

Eat donuts w/ DK Saturday.

I went into our bathroom and placed the sticky in the middle of our mirror. Every time I brushed my teeth or washed my hands, those five words stared back at me. I could hear my mind rationalizing my way out of the commitment.

You can do it next week.

Just focus on where you're going to coach next.

*He doesn't understand now, but he'll get it when
he's older.*

Because our head coach had been fired but “technically” the rest of the staff was still under contract, I still had to show up to work every day.³ So every morning that week, while I brushed my teeth and combed my hair, I stared at those five words.

Saturday finally arrived.

I walked into Dylan’s room early that morning.

“You wanna go get some donuts?”

“Donuts?” he asked.

“Yep, donuts. Just you and me. Wanna go?”

“Yes, sir!” he screeched as he ran toward the door.

“Wait! You need shoes, buddy, and your coat.”

After straitjacketing him into all of the clothing that a three-year old needs to survive a January outing in Ohio, we pulled into the donut shop, made our order and sat down.

That was a decade ago but what still sticks with me to this day is how the shared meal felt like an out-of-body experience. Even during the “offseason,” I rarely had/took the time to sit down with my son in a non-hurried state. It took a job termination for me to recognize how much he needed me, not just to “be around” but to be present.

“Mama, we got donuts!” Dylan yelled as he presented the box of donut holes to my wife.

“That’s great honey! I’m sure Daddy will take you again.”

The Microwins System

Microwins are small units of victory that chip away at big goals. If you’re looking for a complicated system of personal growth, then this is not the right book for you. A stroll through the self-help section of your local bookstore will uncover a pile of manuals, treatises, and how-to books that are much more involved than this system.

My wife and I have five rambunctious children. There are chess meetings. Basketball practices. Reading lessons. Gymnastics meets. On finally getting home after a series of suburban pickups and layovers, I joke with my kids, “Thanks for riding and I hope you’ll give me a five-star rating in the app!”

I can't accommodate any system that is more complicated than our pickup/drop-off schedule. Although the microwins system is simple in practice, the work that precedes your adoption of it will require diving into crevices of your mindset that you may feel reluctant to explore.

I get it. This is hard work. It would be much easier to revert back to whatever system you're using now (assuming that you have one). This is the part of the book where I am going to encourage you to *keep going*. I'll encourage you in other places as well (along with providing some insights on *how* to keep going) but for now, I want you to approach this text with an air of openness. Quiet the judgmental voices in your head. Turn your cellphone on "airplane mode" (or completely off). Let's invest the time and energy into our beings that we deserve.

Small ≠ Insignificant

Our world is obsessed with size.

How much capital did you raise?

How many followers do you have?

How many likes did you get?

These numbers make for good happy hour small talk. Your next door neighbor may high-five you in the driveway. But no one is there to celebrate with you when you write your first draft. Or get that first rejection. Or receive the first follow on your account.

These “firsts” are the building blocks of your success story. Yet, to the casual observer they’re insignificant and unsexy. That’s perfectly fine. Let the world trivialize our microwins.

We are a confetti-driven world attracted to the gathering of crowds. The Microwins System challenges the notion that bigger is better. We embrace and celebrate small units of victory. Why? Because our road to fulfillment and joy runs through checkpoints that don’t show up on maps. But it’s the small work, the stuff that no one cares to see, that will catapult you to your final destination.

Let me give you an example. When I wrote my first book, my publisher assigned an editor to my project. She tasked me with writing 7,500 words per month. During our first meeting, I listened to her instructions, did some quick math in my head and jotted in my notebook: write 250 words.

I knew that if I allowed my mind to dwell on the 7,500, then I’d probably think my way into writing zero words. But 7,500 words in one month works out to 250 words a day. Could I have set the microwin for 300 words? Sure. Could I crank out 300 words a day? Hell, yeah.

How about 500 words? Absolutely.⁴

What about 1,000 words? Okay, now we’re pushing it.

I set my microwin for 250 words and six days a week, from 4:30 to 6:30 a.m., I pulled up to the Strange Brew Coffee Shop opened up my laptop and typed away. Sometimes it would take me two hours to hit 250, and other times I was done in 20 minutes. Regardless, I stood up,

ordered a refill of bad coffee and congratulated myself. Then, I closed my laptop and left.

But, Daron, if you hit your microwin in 20 minutes, why not keep writing?

250 words was the microwin. I choose to reject the notion of “doing more” or “one last rep” or “hustle hard.” He who wins a rat race is still a rat. I’m convinced this hustlenista culture is the main driver behind our anxiety-ridden, self-doubting ethos. We judge our growth against the measuring stick of other’s progress.

It’s past time to shift the focus back to where it belongs, on us.

So today, we are going to cheat. That’s right. We’re stacking the deck in our favor. We’re rigging the game. Instead of zero-one outcomes, we’re playing in the gray. No longer will our days be defined by success and failure. We’ll rest easier at night knowing that we chipped away at the goals that matter the most, and then we’ll wake up and do it again. And again. And again.

When I was coaching in the NFL, I learned the value of committing a laser focus to the smallest details. Those endless nights spent in musty film rooms taught me that monumental things masquerade as menial. This playbook will bring us back to the basics, to the building blocks of success.

The Playbook

As you dive into this playbook, you will uncover and discard the mindsets that hold you back in three phases of life: work, family, and health. This trinity is the command center of our purpose and being. Once that overhaul is complete, you will reconfigure your self-talk to focus on the next small breakthrough. The next small victory. That barely recognizable check mark in the win column that will feed into an avalanche of success.

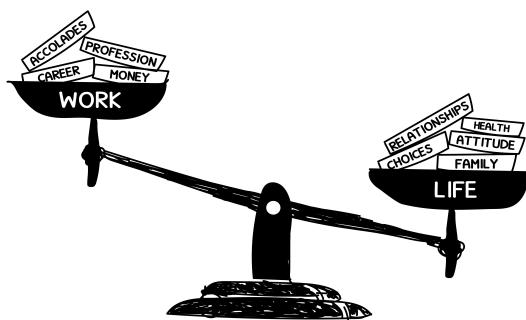
This book is divided into three sections: *Mindset*, *Mechanics* and *Momentum*. In *Mindset* we will lay the mental groundwork for implementing the system. In *Mechanics*, we'll dive into the *how* of the system. And in *Momentum*, we'll focus on sustaining positive movement over an extended period of time.

Much of the anxiety we combat on a daily basis is a direct result of being overwhelmed by lofty goals, diminishing time, and compounding responsibilities. This anxiety can give way to burnout and a lack of purpose. I am not here to complicate your life. The goal is to give you a framework that will focus your efforts on the stuff that really counts.

So, have fun with this book. Channel your inner second grader and doodle in the margins. Don't treat it like something you checked out from the library.⁵ Mark in it. Scribble. Disagree with me in the margins. Write notes of encouragement to yourself. Star things that inspire you.

And together, let's reimagine what it means to be successful and reclaim the spark we need to live the life we deserve.

YOUR WORK IS WHAT YOU DO
BUT YOUR LIFE IS WHO YOU ARE.





PART



Mindset

From my experience coaching athletes and executives, I found that most people prefer to fast-forward straight to the strategy. “Just give me the answer” is a common refrain of people who miss where the real work begins—the mind. In this *Mindset* section, we build a mental framework that will support our persistence and growth in the Microwins System.

Here is a brief summary of the chapters in this part:

Chapter 1: Principle 1: Embrace Your Coffin

Does knowing that you will die affect how you choose to live? Well, it should. With Principle 1, we start the microwins journey by confronting mortality.

Chapter 2: Principle 2: Time Is Made, Not Found

The days are long but the years are short. In Principle 2, we unearth the natural resource that everyone claims is in short supply.

Chapter 3: Principle 3: Wage War Against Your Status Quo

It is time to take up arms. This war to control the narrative of your life is a daily slugfest featuring you versus you. In Principle 3, we train and sharpen our weapons for the fight.

Chapter 4: Principle 4: Wiretap Your Mental Chatter

Did you hear that? The voices in our head are not an aberration. In fact, some of them are real enough to cause permanent damage to our psyches. In this chapter how to tap in and tune out the self-destructive stories that we tell ourselves and engineer a new soundtrack to our story.

Chapter 5: Principle 5: Go Small to Get Home

This final principle primes us for life in the slow and steady lane.