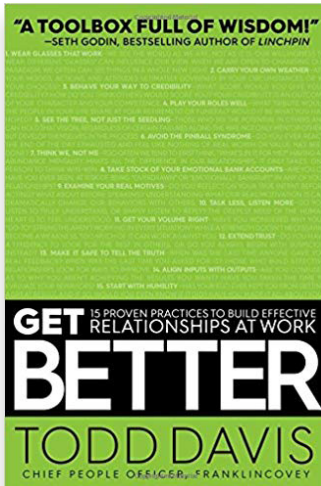


EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARIES

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Get Better THE SUMMARY

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Introduction

One of the famous (if slightly erroneous) conclusions from the philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre's play *No Exit* is that "hell is other people." The premise is that three souls find themselves in the afterlife comprised of a single room with no doors or mirrors. They gradually come to realize that not only are they stuck there forever, but they happen to really irritate the you-know-what out of each other. If you've ever been stuck in a middle seat on a full flight, you may have experienced something similar.

You've probably heard the adage that an organization's greatest assets are its people. I'd like to take that one step further and share that, in my experience, it's the *relationships* between those people that create the culture and, in the end, become an organization's ultimate competitive advantage. In other words, at both the individual and organizational levels, relationships matter. Nearly everything gets better when we focus on strengthening them.

It's important that you approach this book with an open heart and mind, and consider the possibility that the only way to truly get better with others is to begin with yourself. It's been my experience that, by doing so, it will pay benefits in practically every area of your life.

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Practice 1 - Wear Glasses That Work

Have you ever discovered that your version of the supposed truth wasn't so true or complete after all? If you don't wear glasses that work, your "room" may feel like Sartre's hell because you act on incorrect information, you don't get the results you want, and you feel foolish when you recognize your version of the truth is limited and inaccurate.

We view not only ourselves, but those around us, through a set of lenses; and like any lens, they either sharpen or distort reality. I remember putting on that first pair of glasses in second grade and being surprised to see I could see the leaves on the trees a few blocks away! The funny thing was, until that point, I had no idea what I was missing. How we view ourselves and the world around us is called a paradigm.

Stephen Covey: "If you want to make minor changes in your life, work on your behavior. If you want to make significant, quantum breakthroughs, work on your paradigms."

Simply choosing how we see ourselves and others has a cascading effect on what we think, feel, and do. This concept is a foundational principle for making significant changes in our lives. Consider some of the common ways we may inaccurately view ourselves:

- I don't belong.
- I'm too lazy.
- I'm impatient.
- I'll never be good enough.
- I can't change—I am what I am.

We also have some common ways in which we may inaccurately view the world or others:

- Everything is against me.
- Things usually turn out bad.
- My friend is thoughtless.
- My colleague doesn't know what he's doing.
- People can't be trusted.
- My team will never change.

We do a great disservice to ourselves when we wear the limiting lenses that are so often part of human nature. But the good news is that changing one's glasses is a choice, and we all have the power to do so.

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Practice 2 - Carry Your Own Weather

Do you ever find that you're controlled by other people, circumstances, or your own knee-jerk reactions? When you don't carry your own weather, your room may feel like Sartre's hell because life happens to you, being a martyr becomes your brand, and you limit your ability to positively influence others.

I believe we are never without a choice. Of course, that doesn't mean things don't happen outside our control, or that our choices can't be severely limited.

Viktor Frankl said, "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."

At the foundation of carrying your own weather is the ability to pause between stimulus and response. The earliest humans utilized "fight or flight" as a way of reacting to potentially life-threatening situations. Fast-forward to the modern world. For most of us, the challenge of daily survival is no longer the standard. Our stresses now come in different, less life-threatening forms. Yet, external stimuli naturally cause us to react quickly, and sometimes inappropriately.

Thankfully, we have more than just the reactive part of our brain to work with. As human beings, we share the unique trait of self-awareness—the ability to see and evaluate our own thoughts. It gives us the capability to pause, step back, and see ourselves along with the paradigms we adopt and use. In effect, it gives us the freedom to proactively choose our response.

Carrying one's weather can express itself in many ways from the simple choice to keep a pleasant or professional disposition, to not allowing the events around us to spin the needle of our moral compass. But at the heart of it is always a choice, and that power can never be surrendered unless we allow it.

Practice 3 - Behave Your Way to Credibility

Have you ever tried to talk your way out of a problem you've behaved yourself into? When you don't behave your way to credibility, your room may feel like Sartre's hell because you're frustrated that people judge you on your behavior, not your good intentions. You're irritated because you feel you must prove yourself to others and over time, no one trusts you or has confidence in you.

Without a high degree of character and competence, people aren't going to trust you. You might think of me as someone who's thoughtful and considerate (character), but you might have reservations when I offer to pack your parachute for your first skydiving lesson (competence). Chances are you'd probably want to know just how much experience and/or training I'd had in parachute packing (none). In the same way, you might be hesitant if you learned the person who

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had packed your parachute was just acquitted of a manslaughter charge on a technicality. (When we feel something about someone's character is off, it will likely cause concern.) Now, this example is obviously a bit extreme, but without high character and high competence, credibility can't flourish.

Credibility isn't earned overnight. Taking the long-term view means you are willing to pay the price to earn it regardless of the time and effort involved.

Building credibility often means adapting to new situations and people. Your old boss may value communication, preset agendas, and to collaborate on decisions. Your new boss may give you an end result to shoot for and doesn't care how you get there. He wants to hear about roadblocks, not receive updates. This ability to observe and re-orient oneself is often referred to as situational awareness.

Once you've damaged your reputation with someone, the way back can be difficult, and it certainly won't happen overnight. If you've damaged or lost credibility with someone, or if you need to build additional character and competence, begin the process of behaving your way back to credibility today.

Practice 4 - Play Your Roles Well

Have you ever found that success in one area of your life comes at the expense of another area? When you don't play your roles well, your room may feel like Sartre's hell because you constantly feel out of balance and guilty; you may neglect an important role for so long that you cause severe relationship damage and you fear that life is ultimately unrewarding.

When I say "play" your roles, I don't mean you perform them or fake it, using a written script. Playing a role well means expressing your most authentic and deepest value system through what you do and say. To get better at playing your roles well, you need to first identify them, then determine the real contribution you want to make in each one.

When you consider the roles you currently play at work and home, pay attention to how many you take on. Some of my most important roles are father, son, grandfather, leader, spouse, community volunteer. Other examples of roles are soccer coach, hospice volunteer, artist, world traveler.

Unfortunately, we wildly overestimate our ability to effectively focus on several things at once. The only thing that comes from working on too many roles at the same time is mediocrity. For instance, I can work on a critical email in my role as project leader while I pretend to listen to an employee on the phone as she pours out her heart to me, but who am I kidding? When I try to multitask, neither role gets my full attention or authenticity.

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You get to choose which roles need the most attention at any given time. It's not about spending equal time in each role, but it is about regularly keeping your most important roles top of mind and ensuring you have an overall balance in the long run. Some roles stay with you for a lifetime, others change over time. When the roles we play slip out of congruence with who we are, then it's worth making a change. The number-one regret of people at the end of their lives: *I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me.*

Practice 5 - See the Tree, Not Just the Seedling

With people, do you often conclude that "what you see is what you get"?

When you see just the seedling and not the tree, your room may feel like Sartre's hell because your limiting beliefs become reality. Growth is stunted in yourself and others and you constantly look elsewhere for talent that might be right in front of you.

When we look at a person's potential—whether it's a co-worker, direct report, friend, partner, or child—it requires us to see past the "seed" and envision the mighty tree it can become. Seeing potential in others is a paradigm that recognizes growth as an organic principle. It doesn't happen overnight; it's a function of growth over time. After years of watching and helping others grow in their careers and relationships, I have come to believe that people are fundamentally resourceful, capable, and whole—a view that stands in stark contrast with the notion that people are broken, incapable, or need to be fixed.

Seeing potential in others isn't just about *hoping* people will succeed. It's believing they have unlimited talents, abilities, and opportunities for growth. It's also understanding that the road to success is paved with failure which means that growing is an ongoing process that may take a lifetime. When we take a long-term view, we see that failure can be a moment of instruction and reflection and can serve to increase the likelihood of success.

Let's face it, the fact that you're reading a book like this one says that you care about the relationships around you. I don't know if your inner fire is burning brightly. What I do know is that there is power in seeing potential in others and, at that moment of contact—when one flame lights another—both end up shining a little brighter.

Practice 6 - Avoid the Pinball Syndrome

Do you ever reach the end of the day and feel as though nothing of real value has been accomplished? When you don't avoid the pinball syndrome, your room may feel like Sartre's hell because you don't realize where you've ended up until it's too late. You're so busy fighting fires, you spend no time on preventing them and you need to beat the pinball game but so often end up feeling like the ball.

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Think back to the last time you played a pinball game. Lights flash, bells ding, bumpers thump, and the ball clacks and rolls across wood and metal tracks. It's a very visceral experience, and it's easy for the sights and sounds to drown out one's senses and demand complete attention.

The truth is that with practically every worthwhile job or career, we can all get caught up in the pinball syndrome. Think of a pinball machine as a metaphor for all the urgent things that demand our attention throughout the day. While we may not feel like we're playing a game, *per se*, when accomplishing such tasks, we might feel attracted to (or even seduced by) the rapid pace and focus that's required to get them done. Add a small endorphin rush as we check off the next item on our to-do list, and it's easy to see how the urgent can feel gratifying, even addictive at times. The challenge is that some of the urgencies might also be important, but the allure of the game gives everything equal weight. As a result, we can end up spending time and energy on the less important.

In the workplace, urgencies tend to be easy to identify like picking up the phone, answering a text, or clicking an email. But the tendency to confuse what's urgent with what's important can have long-standing consequences.

Practice 7 - Think We, Not Me

Do you only see your ability to win or succeed when it comes at the expense of others, or do you take care of everyone else at your own expense? When you don't "think we, not me," your room may feel like Sartre's hell because you live with the fear that there's never enough, perhaps resenting others around you when they succeed. You achieve short-term wins at the expense of genuine long-term successes and people want to exit *your* room as fast as they can because they don't want to live or work with a martyr.

The challenge is to demonstrate high courage and high consideration equally across *all* relationships. When we strive to balance both equally, we pave the way to interdependence and mutually beneficial outcomes in all relationships.

Lose - Win (high consideration, low courage)

- I lack the courage to express or ask for what I need.
- I'm often intimidated—I give in easily.
- I'm motivated by acceptance from others.

Lose - Lose (low consideration, low courage).

- If I'm going to lose, so are you.
- I'm willing to be hurt, as long as you are too.
- I give up on what's really important.

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Win - Lose (high courage, low consideration)

- I use position, power, credentials, possessions, personality to get my way.
- I put down others so I look better.
- I compete rather than collaborate.
- I'm going to win and you're going to lose.

Win - Win (high courage and high consideration)

- We work together until we find a solution that benefits both of us.
- I value your needs and desires equally to my own.
- I collaborate rather than compete.
- I balance courage and consideration when communicating.
- I can disagree respectfully.

In my experience, the long-term impact of any outcome other than win-win will sooner or later be headed toward lose-lose. There's tremendous power in thinking *we*, not *me*. Not only are we more likely to achieve the results we want, but we strengthen relationships along the way.

Practice 8 - Take Stock of Your Emotional Bank Accounts

Are you at risk of being overdrawn or even bankrupt in any of your relationships? When you don't take stock of your Emotional Bank Accounts, your room may feel like Sartre's hell because you're confused as to why someone doesn't appreciate your attempts to be helpful. Recovering from a mistake takes longer than it should and you inadvertently lose the trust of important relationships around you.

Most of us pay a good deal of attention to our financial bank accounts—the deposits and withdrawals, the interest and penalties, the opening and closing balances on our statements. The idea is fairly straightforward: we deposit funds in order to build up a reservoir from which our various future expenses are withdrawn.

When it comes to our relationships, we engage in similar kinds of transactions, either making deposits or withdrawals in what we at Franklin Covey call the *Emotional Bank Account (EBA)*. When the balance is high, so is the resulting level of trust. When the balance is low, relationships suffer.

Here are the six best practices for building a strong, high EBA balance:

1. Never deposit to withdraw.
2. Know the other person's currency.
3. Communicate your own currency.
4. Avoid counterfeit deposits.
5. Make small, consistent deposits over time.
6. Right wrongs.

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By applying the six best practices for building Emotional Bank Accounts, we not only begin to develop habits out of the meaningful deposits we make to others, but we build the kind of security and trust that can weather the mistakes of unintentional withdrawals.

Practice 9 - Examine Your Real Motives

Are your motives aligned with your values and actions? Do you even know what your underlying motives are? When you don't examine your real motives, your room may feel like Sartre's hell because you get hijacked by unconscious behaviors that lead to ineffective outcomes. You may think you're fooling others when you're not, as your motives speak louder than your words or actions and you start to lose sight of your values and who you really want to be.

Motives are the underlying reasons for the actions you take and the words you say. There are healthy and unhealthy motives. No one can tell you what your motives are. They may try, but you are the only one who can know your reasons for doing what you do. A healthy motive is any motive that uplifts the human condition in ourselves and others. An unhealthy motive is any motive that degrades the human condition in ourselves and others.

Consider the difference between an unhealthy motive—to one-up it—versus a healthy motive—to “one-plus” it. Walt Disney was highly motivated by quality, constantly challenging his artists and imagineers to consider what was possible, then take it further: to one-plus it.

Contrast that with a team where each person is vying to highlight his or her own contributions. We've all been around people who feel the need to one-up each other in a scramble to be king of the hill for a project or an accomplishment.

When you understand your motives, you can declare your intent. This provides a safe environment for everyone, allowing the other people to know what's really going on. It creates transparency and stability. It can anchor everyone involved in the motive so they know what to look for, recognize, understand and acknowledge. There's power in understanding our motives and being intentional about them as we work to develop our relationships with others.

Practice 10 - Talk Less, Listen More

Do you listen to others with the intent to reply or to understand? When you don't talk less and listen more, your room may feel like Sartre's hell because you rarely get to the heart of an issue, if at all. You lose the opportunity to be influenced by others and, in turn, have greater influence yourself and you alienate people who might otherwise respect and confide in you.

It's important to note that while there are several skills to listening well, none of them are as important as having the right attitude while listening. If you're good at this skill but aren't sincerely

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interested in understanding the other person, you'll fail. In contrast, if you don't get the skill right, but your intentions are sincere, people will feel your genuine concern and often give you the benefit of a doubt.

Please understand that talking less and listening more is not the same as agreeing with people. You may ultimately disagree with what a person is saying or feeling, but while you're listening, you're not imposing your views on the person. You're not trying to figure out how to get him or her to see it your way. Instead, you're suspending your opinions long enough to really step into that individual's world and try to understand it from his or her point of view. This approach sounds simple, but it's one of the most difficult mindsets to master, especially if you're diametrically opposed to that person's point of view or emotionally involved.

Once you have the attitude of really listening, it's time to apply the skill. Essentially, it's the ability to reflect back to the people what they are saying and what they are feeling. But when it's done earnestly and authentically, it creates magic. It brings the speaker to a greater awareness of what he or she is feeling, it brings the listener into a rare state of empathy, and it creates a trust and rapport in the relationship that can't be matched.

Practice 11 - Get Your Volume Right

Have you ever had one of your go-to strengths stop working for you? When you don't get your volume right, your room may feel like Sartre's hell because you're not sure why people respond negatively to your strengths, and it shakes your confidence. People misinterpret your intentions because they can't see past the noise and then they start to avoid you. "Strengths overkill" may limit your career and credibility.

We all have natural strengths. Whether as talents we were born with or skills we developed over time, our strengths are often our go-to way for getting things done. They've become so ingrained in our behavior, we often don't think about how we're using them or the impact they're having on others.

I'd like you to imagine that using your strengths is like a musician performing on stage. For the music to have the intended effect, it requires the right volume as well as the right venue.

Think of your strengths like the knob on an amplifier. As you turn it to a higher setting, you're rewarded with more volume. It reminds me of the time I needed to borrow my son's car. When I turned the key, the stereo roared to life. It was so loud, it practically committed assault on my eardrums.

Our strengths often function in the same way. We grow accustomed to using them at a certain level. Then, without even realizing it, we often rely on those strengths even more. We turn the knob bit by bit and, unknowingly, make it less likely to achieve the results we really want. Worst of all, we run the risk of damaging relationships along the way.

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In keeping with our analogy, we should also consider the venue in which we're performing. Sometimes getting the volume right means choosing another go-to strength or recognizing that the venue or situation is calling for a different strength altogether—one that may not be as natural to you and may need to be developed.

Practice 12 - Extend Trust

Are you more inclined to initially distrust others than to trust them? When you don't extend trust, your room may feel like Sartre's hell because you lose the passion and engagement of others. You're convinced you need to micromanage everything (losing valuable time) and you limit possibilities and minimize opportunities for great relationships at work and home.

Trust is the ultimate outcome of investing in others. High character and competence are essential for realizing trust. Simply put, when it comes to relationships, trust matters. In fact, it's essential. This practice is not only about trust being a *belief* in someone, it's also about putting that belief into *action*. Trust, to be fully realized, must be extended to others.

From watching and coaching people over the past few decades, I've concluded that the majority of relationship snags are rarely caused by people trusting too much. They're caused by people trusting too little. My experience leads me to believe that the most common reason we mistrust is our past negative experiences. It's usually life's emotional trip-ups that cause us to withhold our trust. Abraham Lincoln said, "If you trust, you will be disappointed occasionally, but if you mistrust, you will be miserable all the time."

So how do you know whether or not you should extend trust? In my experience, the best approach is to always start with a high propensity to trust, then follow it up with three quick assessments. It's a combination of using both your head and your heart.

1. Assess the situation. What are you trusting the person to do?
2. Assess the risk. What happens if the person fails or missteps?
3. Assess the credibility. Do you trust the character and competence of the person?

If the risk is relatively low and the credibility is high, by all means, extend trust. If the risk is high and the credibility is low, you may need to slow down the process or modify your plan.

Practice 13 - Make it Safe to Tell the Truth

When was the last time you received feedback from someone? When you don't make it safe to tell the truth, your room may feel like Sartre's hell because you're unaware of what you don't know. You're likely missing key insights about your impact on others and the chance to change it if necessary. You

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also have less rapport with others, missing out on deep and trusted relationships, and you discover not only that the emperor has no clothes, but that the emperor could be you.

Many of you can relate to this: you have important feedback for someone but are afraid or hesitant to give it because you know the person won't take it well. Some of you, in some circumstances, avoid feedback or are unwilling to receive it because it makes you feel vulnerable. Take an honest moment and ask yourself, "Do I make it safe for others to tell me the truth?"

Why do we resist feedback? Why don't we have the courage to ask for it in the first place? For most of us, setting ourselves up to receive what we see as criticism is unpleasant at best, and confidence-deflating at worse. So we choose not to create opportunities for what we assume will be negative feedback from others. Feedback from others—whether it's 100 percent accurate or not—brings to the surface something we don't want to admit. Each of us is a work in progress in at least some areas.

Can you remember the last time you received feedback? Do you recall the last time you actually asked someone for it? Ken Blanchard said, "Feedback is the breakfast of champions."

If you recognize that you might not be making it safe for others to tell you the truth, let me offer you four ways to make it safer:

1. Assume good intent.
2. Ask for feedback.
3. Evaluate the feedback.
4. Act on it.

Without exception, the most effective individuals I've worked with are continuously walking the path of self-improvement by making it safe for others to tell them the truth.

Practice 14 - Align Inputs With Outputs

Do you find yourself unable to consistently get or replicate your desired results? When you don't align inputs with outputs, your room may feel like Sartre's hell because regardless of how hard you work, your results stay the same—or get worse. You begin to doubt and second-guess yourself and you see others pass you by.

If you happened to be perusing a systems-theory textbook on the topic of inputs and outputs, you'd read that an input is what you put into a system to fuel a process, and an output is the result you obtain. Input, process, output is the kind of three-variable system a non-engineering person like me can get my head around. It's also a useful framework for diagnosing why we get the results we get.

We can refer to outputs as *lag measures*, the metrics by which we decide if something is successful.

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We can refer to inputs as *lead measures*. So lead measures are actions we take that add up to a lag measure. While many inputs might contribute to the desired output, identifying the right inputs can make all the difference.

For example, a shoe store discovered that the single biggest factor driving customer loyalty was whether the salesperson measured the customer's foot. A national hotel chain learned that when customers checked in under a certain amount of time, they were more likely to say they were satisfied overall.

Here's a five-step process that can help you identify the right input.

1. Describe the output you want.
2. Assess the current reality.
3. Examine the inputs.
4. Pick the "lead measure" inputs you think will most likely achieve the desired result and utilize it.
5. Analyze the result.

Whenever we experience results we're not happy with, there's a strong chance we've misaligned the inputs and outputs.

Practice 15 - Start With Humility

Has your lack of humility ever held you back from getting better? Would you even know if it had? If you don't start with humility, your room may feel like Sartre's hell because your ego keeps you continuously looking for external validation that never satisfies. You're the topic of side conversations (not in a good way) and you miss opportunities to learn because you rarely listen to anybody but yourself.

Take a moment and consider the most humble person you know. Above all other character qualities, humility is foundational. It's like salt as it brings out the best flavor of each character quality required for creating effective relationships. Helen Nielsen, American Television Writer said, "Humility is like underwear; essential, but indecent if it shows."

Dr. David Bobb, author of *Humility: An Unlikely Biography of America's Greatest Virtue* stated, "In reality, humility is strength, not weakness. Humility enables courage and points wisdom in the right direction. It is the backbone of temperance, and it makes love possible."

Those who are humble have a secure sense of self. Their validation doesn't come from something external, but is based on their true nature. To be humble means to shed one's ego, because the authentic self is much greater than looking good, needing to have all the answers, or being recognized by one's peers. As a result, those who have cultivated humility as an attribute have far greater energy to devote to others.

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Humility *isn't* . . .

- Low self-esteem (thinking you're less than others).
- Low courage (not speaking your mind).
- Ongoing self-depreciation.

Humility is what allows me to say, "I'm sorry. I made a mistake." Humility is what prompts me to think, "What's going on with my co-worker today? Do they need my help?" Humility is what invites me to step back and make sure everyone in the room receives credit, not just me. Humility helps me feel happy about someone else's success.

Although this is the last chapter of the book, it's titled "Start With Humility" because every practice I've illustrated benefits from obtaining, cultivating, and being mindful of this foundational attribute. Furthermore, while starting with humility is key, revisiting and recalibrating your humility on a regular basis is equally important.