

EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARIES

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THE SUMMARY

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1. The ONE Thing

In one memorable scene in the hit comedy *City Slickers*, Curly, the gritty cowboy played by the late Jack Palance, and city slicker Mitch, played by Billy Crystal, finally connect over a conversation about life. Suddenly, Curly reins his horse to a stop and turns in the saddle to face Mitch.

Curly: Do you know what the secret of life is?

Mitch: No. What?

Curly: This. [He holds up one finger.]

Mitch: Your finger?

Curly: One thing. Just one thing. You stick to that and everything else don't mean sh*t.

Mitch: That's great, but what's the one thing?

Curly: That's what you've got to figure out.

Out of the mouth of a fictional character to our ears comes the secret of success. The ONE Thing is the best approach to getting what you want.

If everyone has the same number of hours in a day, why do some people seem to get so much more done than others? How do they do more, achieve more, earn more, and have more? The answer is they make getting to the heart of things the heart of their approach. They go small.

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“Going small” is ignoring all the things you could do and doing what you should do. It’s recognizing that not all things matter equally and finding the things that matter most. It’s a tighter way to connect what you do with what you want. It’s realizing that extraordinary results are directly determined by how narrow you can make your focus.

2. The Domino Effect

For the world record domino fall on November 13, 2009, a single domino set in motion more than 4,491,863 dominoes, unleashing more than 94,000 joules of energy, which is as much energy as it takes for an average-sized male to do 545 pushups. Each standing domino represents a small amount of potential energy so the more you line up, the more potential energy you’ve accumulated. Line up enough and, with a simple flick, you can start a chain reaction of surprising power.

Domino falls can also topple bigger things. A single domino is capable of bringing down another domino that is actually 50 percent larger. So if the first domino was a mere two inches, the eighth domino would be three feet tall. Imagine if this kept going. The 10th domino would be as tall as NFL quarterback Peyton Manning. By the 18th, your domino would rival the Leaning Tower of Pisa. The 23rd domino would tower over the Eiffel Tower and the 31st domino would loom over Mount Everest by almost 3000 feet. Number 57 would practically bridge the distance between the earth and the moon.

So when you think about success, shoot for the moon. Getting extraordinary results is all about creating a domino effect in your life. Highly successful people know this. So every day they line up their priorities anew, find the lead domino, and whack away at it until it falls.

3. Success Leaves Clues

Proof of the ONE Thing is everywhere. Extraordinary companies always have one product or service they’re most known for or that makes them the most money.

Colonel Sanders started KFC with a single secret chicken recipe. The Adolph Coors Company grew 1,500 percent from 1947 to 1967 with only one product, made in a single brewery. Microprocessors generate the vast majority of Intel’s net revenue. What about Starbucks? I think you know.

The list of businesses that have achieved extraordinary results through the power of the ONE Thing is endless. Sometimes what is made or delivered is also what is sold, sometimes not. Take Google. Their ONE Thing is search, which makes selling advertising, its key source of revenue, possible.

The most successful companies know this and are always asking: “What’s our ONE Thing?” Apple is a study in creating an environment where an extraordinary ONE Thing can exist while transitioning to

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another extraordinary One Thing. From 1998 to 2012, Apple's ONE Thing moved from Macs to iMacs to iTunes to iPods to iPhones, with the iPad already jockeying for the head of the product line. As each new product entered the limelight, the old lines, plus others, continued to be refined while the current ONE Thing created a well-documented halo effect, making the user more likely to adopt the whole Apple product family.

What Curly knew, all successful people know. If today your company doesn't know what its ONE Thing is, then the company's ONE Thing is to find out.

PART 1: THE LIES—THEY MISLEAD AND DERAILED US

The problem is we tend to act on what we believe even when what we believe isn't anything we should. As a result, buying into the ONE Thing becomes difficult because we've unfortunately bought into too many others. More often than not, those "other things" muddle our thinking, misguide our actions, and sidetrack our success.

4. Everything Matters Equally

In the real world of results, things are never equal. Equality is a lie. Understanding this is the basis of all great decisions.

When everything feels urgent and important, everything seems equal. We become active and busy, but this doesn't actually move us any closer to success. Activity is often unrelated to productivity, and busy-ness rarely takes care of business.

To-do lists are a staple of the time-management-and-success industry. But they can tyrannize us with trivial, unimportant stuff that we feel obligated to get done just because it's on our list.

Instead of a to-do list, you need a success list which is a list that is purposely created around what matters most at any given moment on a given day. Go small. Don't focus on being busy; focus on being productive. Allow what matters most to drive your day.

Learn to say "no." Whether you say "later" or "never," the point is to say "not now" to anything else you could do until you're most important work is done.

We can't fall prey to the notion that everything has to be done; that checking things off our list is what success is all about. If we believe things don't matter equally, we must act accordingly. We can't be trapped in a game of "check off" that never produces a winner. The truth is that things don't matter equally and success is found in doing what matters most. Sometimes it's the first thing you do. Sometimes it's the only thing you do. Regardless, doing the most important thing is always the most important thing.

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5. Multitasking

So, if doing the most important thing is the most important thing, why would anyone try to do anything else at the same time? It's a great question.

Clifford Nass, a professor at Stanford University, researched 262 multi-taskers and determined multi-taskers are suckers for irrelevancy. They were outperformed on every measure. Although they'd convinced themselves and the world they were great at it, the research showed they were lousy at everything.

Multitasking is a lie. It's an effective way to get less done. People can actually do two or more things at once, such as walk and talk, or chew gum and read a map. But what we can't do is focus on two things at once.

The temptation to multi-task comes not because we have too little time to do all the things we need to do, it's that we feel the need to do too many things in the time we have. Multitasking takes a toll. Everyone gets distracted. At home or at work, distractions lead to poor choices, painful mistakes, and unnecessary stress. When you try to do too much at once, you can end up doing nothing well. Distraction undermines results. Figure out what matters most in the moment and give it your undivided attention.

In order to be able to put the principle of The ONE Thing to work, you can't buy into the lie that trying to do two things at once is a good idea. Though multitasking is sometimes possible, it's never possible to do it effectively.

6. A Disciplined Life

There is this pervasive idea that the successful person is the "disciplined person" who leads a "disciplined life." It's a lie. Success is actually a short race. It's a sprint fueled by discipline just long enough for habit to kick in and take over. We don't need more discipline. What we need is the habit of doing it and we need just enough selective discipline to build the habit.

No one actually has the discipline to acquire more than one powerful new habit at a time. Build one significant habit. One at a time. Over time.

Give each habit enough time. Stick with the discipline long enough for it to become routine. Self-help circles tend to preach that it takes 21 days to make a change, but modern science says that habits, on average, take 66 days to form. Once a habit is solidly established, you can either build on that habit or, if appropriate, build another one.

Sustain the discipline long enough on one habit, and not only does it become easier, but so do other things as well. It's why those with the right habits seem to do better than others. They're doing the most important thing regularly and, as a result, everything else is easier.

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You are what you repeatedly do, so achievement isn't an action you take but a habit you forge into your life. You don't have to seek out success. Harness the power of selected discipline to build the right habit, and extraordinary results will find you.

7. Willpower is Always on Will-Call

When we tie our success to our willpower without understanding what that really means, we set ourselves up for failure. The good news is we don't have to.

The old English proverb, "Where there's a will, there's a way" has probably misled as many as it helped. Willpower is a timing issue. *When* you have your will, you get your way. Although character is an essential element of willpower, the key to harnessing it is when you use it.

On any given day, you have a limited supply of willpower, so decide what matters and reserve your willpower for it. Don't spread your willpower too thin. Think of willpower like the power bar on your cell phone. Every morning you start out with a full charge. As the day goes on, every time you draw on it you're using it up. So as your green bar shrinks, so does your resolve, and when it eventually goes red, you're done.

Don't fight your willpower. Build your days around how it works and let it do its part to build your life. Time your tasks. Do what matters most first each day when your willpower is strongest. Maximum strength willpower means maximum success. The food we eat is also a key player in our level of willpower. Never let what matters most be compromised simply because your brain was under-fueled. Eat right and regularly.

8. A Balanced Life

Nothing ever achieves absolute balance. Nothing. No matter how imperceptible it might be, what appears to be a state of balance is something entirely different. It's an act of *balancing*. A "balanced life" is a myth.

Think about two balancing buckets. Separate your work life and personal life into two distinct buckets, not to compartmentalize them, but for counterbalancing. Counterbalance your work bucket by viewing work as involving a skill or knowledge that must be mastered. This will cause you to give disproportionate time to your ONE Thing and will throw the rest of your work day, week, month, and year continually out of balance. Your work life is divided into two distinct areas—what matters most and everything else. You will have to take what matters to the extremes and be okay with what happens to the rest. Professional success requires it.

Counterbalance your personal life bucket by acknowledging that your life actually has multiple areas and that each requires a minimum of attention for you to feel that you "have a life." Drop any one and you will feel the effects. This requires constant awareness. You must never go too long or too far

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without counterbalancing them so that they are all active areas of your life. Your personal life requires it. Start leading a counterbalanced life. Let the right things take precedence when they should and get to the rest when you can.

9. Big is Bad

A big opportunity is better than a small one, but a small problem is better than a big one. Sometimes you want the biggest present under the tree and sometimes you want the smallest. Big and bad are no more tied together than small and good.

When we connect big with bad, we trigger shrinking thinking. Lowering our trajectory feels safe. Staying where we are feels prudent. But the opposite is true. When big is believed to be bad, small thinking rules the day and big never sees the light of it.

Avoid incremental thinking that simply asks, “What do I do next?” Ask bigger questions. A good rule of thumb is to double down everywhere in your life. If your goal is ten, ask the question: “How can I reach twenty?” Set a goal so far above what you want that you’ll be building a plan that practically guarantees your original goal.

Big thoughts go nowhere without bold action. Once you’ve asked a big question, pause to imagine what life looks like with the answer. If you still can’t imagine it, go study people who have already achieved it. What are the models, systems, habits, and relationships of other people who have found the answer? As much as we’d like to believe we’re all different, what consistently works for others will almost always work for us.

Don’t let small thinking cut your life down to size. Don’t be afraid to fail. Think big, aim high, act bold. See just how big you can blow up your life.

PART 2: THE TRUTH—THE SIMPLE PATH TO PRODUCTIVITY

I learned that success comes down to being appropriate in the moments of your life. If you can honestly say, “This is where I’m meant to be right now, doing exactly what I’m doing,” then all the amazing possibilities for your life become possible.

10. The Focusing Question

Great questions are the path to great answers. The Focusing Question is a great question designed to find a great answer. It will help you find the first domino for your job, your business, or any other area in which you want to achieve extraordinary results.

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The Focusing Question is a double-duty question. It comes in big picture and small focus. One is about finding the right direction in life and the other is about finding the right action.

The Big-Picture Question: *“What’s my ONE Thing?”* Use it to develop a vision for your life and the direction for your career or company as it is your strategic compass. It keeps your relationships with friends, family, and colleagues in perspective and your daily actions on track.

The Small-Focus Question: *“What’s my ONE Thing right now?”* Use this when you first wake up and throughout the day. It keeps you focused on your most important work and, whenever you need it, helps you find the first domino in any activity. The small-focus question prepares you for the most productive workweek possible. It’s effective in your personal life too—keeping you attentive to your most important immediate needs, as well as those of the most important people in your life.

Extraordinary results come from asking the Focusing Question. It’s how you’ll plot your course through life and business, and how you’ll make the best progress on your most important work. Whether you seek answers big or small, asking the Focusing Question is the ultimate success habit for your life.

11. The Success Habit

You know about habits. They can be hard to break and hard to create. We are unknowingly acquiring new ones all the time. When we start and continue a way of thinking or a way of acting over a long enough period we’ve created a new habit. The choice we face is whether or not we want to form habits that get us what we from life. If we do, then the Focusing Question is the most powerful success habit we can have.

For me, the Focusing Question is a way of life. Whenever the outcome absolutely matters, I ask it. I ask it when I wake up and start my day. I ask it when I get to work, and again when I get home.

“What’s the ONE Thing I can do such that by doing it everything else will be easier or unnecessary?” When I know the answer, I continue to ask it until I can see the connections and all my dominoes are lined up.

Your first step is to understand the concept of the ONE Thing, then to believe it can make a difference in your life. If you don’t understand and believe, you won’t take action. When you ask yourself the Focusing Question, your direction will become clear. Your work will be more productive and your personal life more rewarding. Put up a sign at work that says, *“Until my ONE Thing is done—everything else is a distraction.”*

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12. The Path to Great Answers

It's really a simple process: you ask a great question, and then you seek out a great answer. As simple as two steps, it's the ultimate Success Habit.

The best question is big and specific. It's *big*, because you're after extraordinary results and *specific* to give you something to aim at and to leave no wiggle room about whether you hit the mark.

The challenge of asking a Great Question is that, once you've asked it, you're now faced with finding a Great Answer. Answers come in three categories: doable, stretch, and possibility.

The easiest answer you can seek is the one that's already within reach of your knowledge, skills, and experience. With this type of solution you probably already know how to do it and won't have to change much to get it. Think of this as "doable" and the most likely to be achieved.

The next level up is a "stretch" answer. While this is still within your reach, it can be at the farthest end of your range. Doing it can be iffy, since you might have to extend yourself to the very limits of your current abilities. Think of this as potentially achievable and probable, depending on your effort.

High achievers understand these first two routes but reject them, unwilling to settle for ordinary when extraordinary is possible. Extraordinary results require a Great Answer. Since your answer will be original, you'll probably have to reinvent yourself in some way to implement it. Don't be surprised if along the way to sizable success you change in the process, but don't let that stop you.

PART 3: EXTRAORDINARY RESULTS—UNLOCKING THE POSSIBILITIES WITHIN YOU

There is a natural rhythm to our lives that becomes a simple formula for implementing the ONE Thing and achieving extraordinary results: purpose, priority, and productivity.

13. Live with Purpose

Happiness happens on the way to fulfillment. We all want to be happy, but seeking it isn't the best way to find it. The surest path to achieving lasting happiness happens when you make your life about something bigger, when you bring meaning and purpose to your everyday actions.

Discover your Big Why—your purpose—by asking yourself what drives you. What's the thing that gets you up in the morning and keeps you going when you're tired and worn down? Your "Big Why" is why you're excited with your life. It's why you're doing what you're doing.

Our purpose sets our priority and our priority determines the productivity our actions produce. "Purpose" may sound heavy, but it doesn't have to be. Think of it as simply the ONE Thing you want your life to be about more than any other. Try writing down something you'd like to accomplish and then describe how you'd do it.

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Who we are and where we want to go determines what we do and what we accomplish. The prescription for extraordinary results is knowing what matters to you and taking daily doses of actions in alignment with it.

Pick a direction, start marching down that path, and see how you like it. Time brings clarity, and if you find you don't like it, you can always change your mind. It's your life.

14. Live by Priority

When each day begins, we each have a choice. We can ask, "What shall I do?" or "What should I do?" Without direction, without purpose, what you "shall do" will always lead you somewhere. But when you're going somewhere on purpose, there will always be something you "should do" that will get you where you *must* go.

The truth about success is that our ability to achieve extraordinary results in the future lies in stringing together powerful moments, one after the other. What you do in any given moment determines what you experience in the next. Your "present now" and all "future nows" are undeniably determined by the priority you live in the moment. Live with purpose and you know where you want to go. Live by priority and you'll know what to do to get there. When your life is on purpose, living by priority takes precedence.

You may have many "priorities," but dig deep and you'll discover there is always one that matters most, your top priority. Your most important priority is the ONE Thing you can do right now that will help you achieve what matters most to you.

You begin by knowing your future goal. Write your goals down and keep them close. Identifying the steps you need to accomplish along the way keeps your thinking clear while you uncover the right priority you need to accomplish right now. Once you know what to do, the only thing left is to go from knowing to doing.

15. Live for Productivity

We are always doing something—working, playing, eating, sleeping, standing, sitting, or breathing. If we're alive, we're doing something. Every minute of the day, the question is never will we be doing something, but rather what that something is we'll be doing.

Sometimes what we do doesn't matter, but sometimes it does. When it does, what we do defines our life more than anything else. In the end, putting together a life of extraordinary results simply comes down to getting the most out of what you do, when what you do matters.

Extraordinary results become possible when where you want to go is completely aligned with what you do today. Tap into your purpose and allow that clarity to dictate your priorities. With your priorities clear, the only logical course is to go to work.

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The best way to make your ONE Thing happen is to make regular appointments with yourself. Go to your calendar and block off all the time you need to accomplish your ONE Thing. Block time early in the day, and block big chunks of no less than four hours! Then protect your time block at all costs. Time blocking works only when your mantra is “Nothing and no one has permission to distract me from my ONE Thing.” Unfortunately, your resolve won’t keep the world from trying, so be creative when you can be and firm when you must. Your time block is the most important meeting of your day, so whatever it takes to protect it is what you have to do.

The people who achieve extraordinary results don’t achieve them by working more hours. They achieve them by getting more done in the hours they work.

16. The Three Commitments

Achieving extraordinary results through time blocking requires three commitments.

First, you must adopt the mindset of someone seeking mastery. Mastery is a commitment to becoming your best, so to achieve extraordinary results you must embrace the extraordinary effort it represents. View mastery as a path you go down instead of a destination you arrive at.

Second, you must continually seek the very best ways of doing things. Nothing is more futile than doing your best using an approach that can’t deliver results equal to your efforts. When you’ve done the best you can do but are certain the results aren’t the best they can be, look for better models and systems, the ways that can take you farther. Then adopt new thinking, new skills, and new relationships to help you put them into action. Become purposeful during your time block, and unlock your potential.

Third, you must be willing to be held accountable to doing everything you can to achieve your ONE Thing. Taking complete ownership of your outcomes by holding no one but yourself responsible for them is the most powerful thing you can do to drive your success. Accountability is most likely the most important of the three commitments.

If you live those three commitments, you give yourself a fighting chance to experience extraordinary. When you time block your most important priority, protect your time block, and then work your time block as effectively as possible, you’ll be as productive as you can be. You’ll be living in the power of The ONE Thing. Now you just have to avoid getting hijacked.

17. The Four Thieves

There are four “thieves” that can hold you up and rob you of your productivity. They are the inability to say “no,” the fear of chaos, poor health habits, and an environment that doesn’t support your goals. Since there’s no one standing by to protect you, it’s up to you to stop these thieves in their tracks.

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Start saying "no." Always remember that when you say yes to something, you're saying no to everything else. It's the essence of keeping a commitment. Start turning down other requests outright or by saying, "No, for now" to distractions so that nothing distracts you from getting to your top priority. Learning how to say "no" can and will liberate you.

Accept chaos. Recognize that pursuing your ONE Thing moves other things to the back burner. Loose ends can feel like snares, creating tangles in your path. This kind of chaos is unavoidable. Make peace with it. Learn to deal with it.

Manage your energy. Don't sacrifice your health by trying to take on too much. Your body is an amazing machine, but repairs can be costly. It's important to manage your energy so you can do what you must do, achieve what you want to achieve, and live the life you want to live.

Take ownership of your environment. Make sure that the people around you and your physical surroundings support your goals. The right people and environment will support your efforts to get to your ONE Thing. When they are both in alignment with your ONE Thing, they will supply the optimism and physical lift you need to make your ONE Thing happen.

18. The Journey

"One step at a time" may be trite, but it's still true. No matter the objective, no matter the destination, the journey to anything you want always starts with a single step. That step is call the ONE Thing.

At any moment in time there can be only ONE Thing, and when that ONE Thing is in line with your purpose and sits atop your priorities, it will be the most productive thing you can do to launch you toward the best you can be.

Actions build on actions. Habits build on habits. Success builds on success. The right domino knocks down another and another and another. So whenever you want extraordinary results, look for the levered action that will start a domino run for you.

Big lives ride the powerful wave of chain reactions and are built sequentially, which means when you're aiming for success you can't just skip to the end. Extraordinary doesn't work like that. The knowledge and momentum that build as you live the ONE Thing each day, each week, each month, and each year are what will give you the ability to build an extraordinary life.

But this doesn't just happen. You have to make it happen. Success is an inside job. All success in life starts with you. You know what to do. You know how to do it. Your next step is simple. You are the first domino.

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Putting The ONE Thing to Work

So what now? You've read the book. You get it. You're ready to experience extraordinary results in your life. So, what do you do? How do you tap into The ONE Thing in the most powerful way?

The ONE Thing forces you to think big, work things through to create a list, prioritize that list so that a geometric progression can happen, and then hammer away on the ONE Thing that starts your domino run.

So be prepared to live a new life! Remember that the secret to extraordinary results is to ask a very big and specific question that leads you to one very small and tightly focused answer.

If you try to do everything, you could wind up with nothing. If you try to do just ONE Thing, the right ONE Thing, you could wind up with everything you ever wanted. The ONE Thing is real. If you put it to work, it will work.

Don't delay. Ask yourself the question, "What's the ONE Thing I can do right now to start using The ONE Thing in my life such that by doing it everything else will be easier or unnecessary? Then make doing the answer your first ONE Thing!"