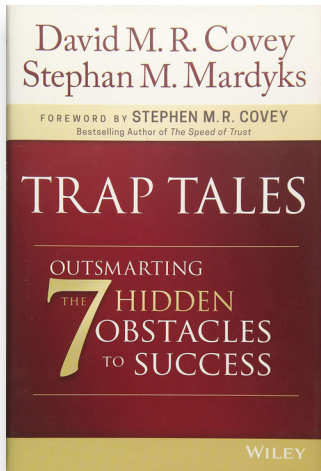


# EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARIES

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## Trap Tales

### THE SUMMARY

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### Trapology

In chess, the term *trap* refers to a move intended to tempt the opponent to play a losing move and get stuck. If you can spot the traps in advance, there's no problem. If you can't, you will most likely lose the game.

Traps, by definition, are not easy to detect, especially in the opening stage of the game. You can learn about traps the hard way, through trial and error. But it is better to learn from someone who already knows how to spot and escape them. Learning just a few simple tactics can save a player from disaster.

Studying how to spot, avoid, or get out of traps will give you a key tactical advantage, not only in chess, but in life as well. Up to this point, you may have viewed your challenges as just *problems*. Instead, I want you to start viewing challenges as *traps*.

What I am suggesting is that when we learn of the traps people around us have fallen into, we should really study what forces are at play. We can live vicariously through their experience and try to understand exactly how they got trapped, why they can't seem to escape, or if they do, how they managed it. If we do this right, we can avoid the pain and misery of making the same mistakes.

I think there's wisdom in looking outside the box, learning to think for yourself and not just taking life as it comes at you, wave of crisis after wave of crisis, with momentary lulls in between. We need to learn to

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navigate intelligently so we aren't dragged helplessly under the riptides life brings our way. We each get to write our own story, be the author of our own destiny. Don't be a victim of your circumstance.

Why do you think so many people fall into the same traps over and over again? How can they see their friends and family fall into them, and then follow them right along? Once they realize they are trapped, why can they never seem to get unstuck?

It's because they are following a conventional approach that may contain a strain of truth but can never be enough. We can't keep doing the same things and expect different results. We need new thinking to get us to a new place. To truly avoid and escape the traps in our lives we need to look for the unconventional, and sometimes the counterintuitive. I'm talking about breakthroughs, not incremental improvements. Breakthroughs only occur when you have a break "with" the standard approach.

A lot of the traps we fall into today are not new and many of them are as old as time. You can read about them in the most revered books of scripture, the most ancient texts. But what's different today is how the modern world has amplified these traps by making them more alluring, seductive, and sticky than ever before.

We need to be more aware if we want to identify the traps of the modern world, and more creative in the approaches we use to escape them, more than we ever were in the past. A framework about how we can think about life's traps can be very useful to help us wrap our brains around our current state in a systematic way. It's impossible to move to our *desired* state (where we want to be) when we aren't aware of our *current* state.

The core message of the Traps Framework is *hope*, meaning the belief that humans can change the trajectory of their lives through wise choices and course corrections. This hope is essential. You can learn to move from the pain you are feeling now to a state where you've escaped the trap and are able to thrive.

There are four steps along the way. The Four-Phase Progression begins with *pain* when feeling the awful reality of the trap. That triggers *recognition* or the realization that you are stuck in a trap. Once you implement and stick with your strategy to get out of the trap, you achieve *success* at which point you are free to progress, prosper, and *thrive* beyond the trap.

Traps are like quicksand. Once we've stepped into this quicksand, it's difficult to get free. We step into this quicksand, or trap, because we are unknowingly seduced, lured in by the promise of a quick-fix solution or by some temporary pleasure. Most traps cause *short-term-itis*, the thinking that the pleasure we get now is worth the pain we will experience later.

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Sound familiar? Don't beat yourself up. Remember that you're not the first one to be caught in quicksand. Traps are meant to trap us! They lie along life's path, disguised as if by leaves and moss. They appear innocent because we aren't equipped with the tools to see them for what they really are—seductive, deceptive, sticky, and limiting. Some of the conventional approaches out there may have some positive effects in the short run, but the traps we face require non-conventional solutions to get us free of them for good. When we're deeply hurt, we don't need a Band-Aid; we need a cure. I like to call it an *epiphany breakthrough*.

## **TRAP 1: The Relationship Trap**

The Traps Framework is a new perspective, a new way to think about your problems. The Relationship Trap is a pattern that traps a lot of people. The relationship trap applies to anyone in a relationship, whether you are married or partners or otherwise. It applies whether you have children or not. It's a pattern that people fall into when they are married but live as if they are single. In other words, they become married singles.

Married singles means you live together but your lives are not integrated. You operate as if you are living by yourself. When two people come into a marriage they bring two very different value systems, two ways of thinking about the way things should be. Most couples fail to realize the significant differences that exist, and thus they fail to establish a plan for how they will operate in their marriage. They unknowingly set a pattern for disagreements and contention.

When couples operate as married singles they do so for three reasons. We believe our upbringing is superior to that of our spouse's. We think that the way things were done in our childhood home is the right way to operate. Anything that runs counter to our experience is seen as different, weird, or just plain wrong. This applies to both the big and small things. We make all of these judgments unconsciously, and become annoyed at the differences in our spouse or partner.

We fail to shift our mindset from *me* to *we*. Too many couples are running track instead of playing football. They haven't made the transition in marriage from an individual sport to a team sport. When we shift from thinking only about ourselves, to including concern for our partner, we abandon our individual practices for the benefit of the team. Most couples don't spend enough time thinking like a team in their marriage.

We are unwilling to change, or we only agree to change if our partner changes first. Changing our behavior patterns is very difficult. Some people would rather die than change. When we wait for our spouse or partner to change first, we are often in for a long wait. The lack of movement in one partner makes the other partner feel justified in not changing either. When our partner attempts to change, our conscience is pricked to reciprocate in kind. The best way to encourage change in your partner is to change first yourself.

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The Conventional Approach to marital differences is to agree to disagree and find other areas where we are more compatible. This approach acknowledges that we can't change others, and suggests that since we all come from different backgrounds and perspectives, we just need to accept those differences. We focus on things both partners agree upon, minimize or altogether ignore the differences.

If we can't create a mutual perspective on important issues, then we are likely to have a superficial marriage at best. When the difficulties and storms descend upon us, as they inevitably will, that relationship will not be able to stand.

The mistake most couples make is not getting on the same page and making a plan for how they are going to operate as a family. They don't discuss their differences in order to come up with solutions. They don't take time to visualize and write their own family story. It's easier to just repeat what you've seen modeled. As a result, you end up having two people in a marriage who operate with two different mindsets like singles.

The Epiphany Breakthrough to marital differences involves adjusting our mindset from a *me* paradigm to a *we* paradigm. We begin to look at our relationship as a team instead of as independent individuals. Together you create a shared vision for your relationship/marriage and agree upon a pathway to get there.

## **TRAP 2: The Money Trap**

Debt is one of the most pernicious traps people fall prey to. They don't realize it as such, and therefore don't take the necessary precautions. They don't recognize the warning signs.

There are three primary reasons why people fall into the debt trap. First, we have a "money myopia," which causes us to live in the now. If we do not think about the future, we lack the self and family discipline to forgo unnecessary expenses, which incur debt. Credit card companies want us to become indebted and dependent and they don't want us to pay our balances off.

Second, we fall into competitive consumption and try to "keep up with the Joneses." We get caught up in the acquisition of *stuff*. Then we have to protect our stuff, fix our stuff when it breaks down, and buy new stuff when it doesn't work anymore or goes out of style.

Third, we are in denial. We believe in the status quo, and we believe the worst-case scenarios don't apply to us; they only happen to other people. We fall into the debt trap because we fail to anticipate the unexpected such as a housing bubble or a layoff, or we pretend we didn't see it coming. Debt is your deadly enemy; debt is quicksand. One of the biggest problems in accumulating debt is the interest we pay on it.

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The Conventional Approach is to set a budget, be disciplined, and exercise restraint, but budgeting alone is not enough to help people escape debt. People can exercise restraint in the short run, but are rarely successful in the long run.

The Epiphany Breakthrough makes eliminating debt fun, interesting, and motivating by turning it into a game. Involve family members in creating a scoreboard to display in your home. Make a game out of reversing debt and creating a flourishing saving plan. When we make a game out of debt elimination, we can capture the interest and hearts of our family members so that they, too, will change their behaviors, uniting everyone involved in a common effort and goal.

Money can be your tool or your taskmaster. When people are deeply in debt, money becomes their master. Their choices are limited, their options are reduced, and they find themselves living in bondage. When people allow money to work for them through the power of compound interest, their money is multiplied and unleashed. It gives them leverage.

We need to be motivated and enthused by progress toward our strategic financial goals, such as our return on investments, our contributions to our children's educational funds, the growth of our retirement funds, and our savings and emergency back-up plan to compensate for loss of income and other potential disasters.

## **TRAP 3: The Focus Trap**

The third trap is the Focus Trap, and its main danger is *being mired in the thick of thin things*. Thin things are the nonessentials in life. They pull at our attention but don't contribute to our purpose. Being caught in *the thick of thin things* suggests that we—like most people—become absorbed in the superficial, trivial things of life.

Most people are obsessed with getting everything done, executing their to-do list, being in the activity loop. They're caught on the treadmill of life, being constantly *on*, so much so that they haven't distinguished between what's important and what's not. They haven't considered what matters most, or asked themselves to identify their top priorities.

When we haven't given serious thought and reflection to what we value most, both important and trivial things get lumped together. In reality, trivial matters end up getting most of our attention, because truly important pursuits require us to be proactive. The things that matter most often require action, to step outside of our normal routine and create space in our schedule so that we can focus. Otherwise, we may become overwhelmed by the minutiae of everyday life and other people's agendas.

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There are three reasons why we get mired in the thick of thin things. One is that we have too much coming at us. We can't take everything in, and we don't filter what merits our energy, time, and attention. It's simply too much!

The second is that we are perpetually connected to the Internet and the electronic world and most of this world consists of very thin things. There is never a time when we can't be reached by email or text, and the expectation and impulse to respond immediately is completely out of control.

Finally, we lack patience and expect things to happen on our timeframe which is *immediately*, if not sooner. We fail to recognize, or we forget, that the best things in life, such as relationships, take time and are not instantaneous.

The Conventional Approach to the Focus Trap doesn't attempt to address the reality that we live in information overload, overscheduled and overcommitted to far too many thin things. This approach doesn't question or filter the information coming at us. The Conventional Approach tries to manage it all. This approach says "yes" to everything and "no" to nothing. You can do and have it all. There are no tradeoffs that need to be made.

This approach also suggests we can manage everything coming at us by learning to become a better juggler, but it doesn't attempt to reduce the number of balls we have in the air. Rather, it suggests that we should develop the skills to juggle all the balls we have in the air (a metaphor for everything in our life).

The Epiphany Breakthrough occurs when we realize that we can't do it all. We have to filter out the unimportant, detach from the minutiae, and learn to say "no" more often so that we can say "yes" to the things we value most.

Each week we need to start with a clean slate and then strategically add what is most important to our calendar, while confidently ignoring and detaching ourselves from the trivial and unimportant things that try to distract us. When we view our life and work from the context that 10 percent is important and 90 percent is unimportant, we can begin to realize how mired in minutiae we may have become. Most of the things that occupy our minds and consume our days are truly unimportant.

## **TRAP 4: The Change Trap**

When we talk about change, we need to talk about what keeps us from making it. Procrastination is *the killer of growth and transformation*.

We all have a tendency to put off things that we aren't comfortable doing. We have an even harder time changing our behaviors long-term. We come up with all kinds of reasons to avoid change.

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When we put off or avoid the changes we need to make in our life, our growth stagnates and our progress stalls. We become stuck. This is why procrastination is the *killer* of growth and transformation.

Change is difficult. It can be painful and uncomfortable to change in meaningful ways. It's easier to stay with the familiar and comfortable. As you may know, it takes 21 days to change a habit. Good habits require us to be proactive and take initiative, whereas bad habits usually don't require much resourcefulness from us. That's why it takes so long to change bad habits.

We are tempted to postpone change for as long as we can to a more convenient or appealing time, perhaps once we've finished a certain phase of life. Even when people know they need to change, they look for all kinds of rationalizations to delay those changes until eventually circumstances force them to do so.

As perfectionists, we often live by the mantra. "If I can't be perfect, I might as well not even try." This is damaging mainly because it directly conflicts with the way we learn by trying and experimenting, or falling and getting back up again, just like a toddler learning to walk. This is how we grow and develop in life. But perfectionism gives no allowance for mistakes or for trial and error.

It's unrealistic to expect we'll accomplish anything significant without many failures prior to experiencing success. We witness this kind of self-punishing behavior all the time in people who refuse to change a behavior or habit because it will make them look bad.

In the Conventional Approach to change, people change only when circumstances force them, when their pain has passed a certain threshold of tolerance or when they have reached rock bottom. When we make changes because of the *force of circumstances* rather than the *force of conscience*, there is a tendency to slip back into old behavior patterns once the pain is lessened to any degree or to rely on sheer willpower to sustain change, which is not a long-term solution.

The Epiphany Breakthrough is the realization that it's better to change courageously when your conscience enlightens you, instead of changing when circumstances force you to. Our conscience is like an internal GPS. It helps us know where we are, where we're heading, and the best way to get there. By proactively choosing to change now, we avoid the negative fallout of missed opportunities and bad habits run amok.

Should you wait to watch your cholesterol until you have a heart attack and need triple bypass surgery, or should you follow a healthy eating and exercise regime to prevent this situation altogether? Trusting your conscience requires a leap of faith, because you are making the changes in your life before it is blatantly clear that you need to change. In life we have two choices. Either we act on things or let things act upon us. When we procrastinate on the changes we know we need to make, we are in essence saying, *Life, act upon me*. Conversely, when we act upon the challenges we feel inspired to make, we are saying, *Life, I'm acting on you*.

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## **TRAP 5: The Learning Trap**

There are several reasons why we fall into the Learning Trap. First, when we make mistakes, we don't take accountability for our choices. Second, we hide our mistakes and rewrite our biographies instead of owning up to them.

If we are able to hide our mistakes from others, we've succeeded in maintaining a particular image. We have a persona that we try to project to others. It becomes damaged and tainted when others see our flaws. We instinctively try to protect this image. But if we hide our mistakes, we can't learn from them.

We also fall into the Learning Trap when we see our mistakes as character defects, rather than part of the learning journey. When we repeatedly make the same mistakes over and over again, it becomes hard to visualize ourselves in a different light. We begin to feel our mistakes, especially our repeated mistakes, define us as tainted and imperfect.

But this is an inaccurate way for us to define ourselves. We are not merely the sum of our past choices but are infinitely more capable with limitless possibilities ahead of us. The past, even the most recent past, is history.

The third reason our approach to making mistakes allows us to fall into the Learning Trap involves trying to project an image to the outside world which includes our family, friends, work associates, neighbors, and so on. This is often referred to as our "public persona."

It's almost as if preserving our positive self-image is hardwired into our brains. I think that's why spinning mistakes or pushing the blame onto someone else is such a common, instinctive reaction. If we publicly reveal our struggles, or worse, make mistakes, we fear that we won't be held in high esteem by others.

Social pressure to portray a positive though often unrealistic self-image is high. When we don't live up to that ideal standard, we lose faith in ourselves. There's a risk to admitting and owning up to our mistakes; we become ordinary. We all like to think of ourselves as being above the cut, one of a kind, unique in some special way. If we are forced to admit that we aren't all that anymore, then we feel just plain average, and no one likes to feel that way.

The Conventional Approach to learning from our mistakes tells us if you aren't good at it, try something else. If you can't get the desired results quickly, do something that yields better results before someone notices you failing.

The Epiphany Breakthrough for the Learning Trap requires taking stock of the process, not just the results. The effort is equally important as the actual results. We must rejoice and celebrate the journey, the effort, and the process as much as the end results. Mistakes are instructive. Learn from them instead of hiding them.



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## **TRAP 6: The Career Trap**

Today, more than ever, people settle for a career that doesn't motivate or inspire them. Their hearts and minds are not engaged. They don't enjoy their work but they have become too financially dependent on their income to ever leave it.

Disengagement occurs when our work environment is uninspiring and doesn't engage our best self; thus we settle for a loss of passion and inspiration. Then fear kicks in. Fear that if we change our career we will have to start all over again. Fear we are too old to try something new. Fear we will run out of money. Fear we won't have the skills, education, or know-how to do what we really love.

While most of us rely upon the income from our professional work to support us and our families, we need to avoid being too dependent upon it. The money we receive from our work is important but it shouldn't ever become the main reason for working.

If we become too dependent on a job, we start to become risk-averse and overcautious. We start to worry about how we might offend our boss if we offer ideas or suggestions that go against the company culture. Why do we do this? It's often because we are afraid to lose our job! When we play it safe, our company isn't getting our best self. It gets our compliant self—the one that doesn't want to rock the boat or challenge the status quo—and that self is not the self we want to have at work.

People often settle into a career comfort zone as a short-term job turns into a long-term stay. They find themselves spending their entire career at a job they didn't aspire to, but somehow they settled, got comfortable, and stayed. John Lennon said, "Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans."

The Conventional Approach to finding our careers suggests you focus on doing what you love and trust that everything will work out in the end. The problem with this approach is it taps only into what we are passionate about. It doesn't tap into our competencies. The passion aspect of our job is important, but provides too narrow a perspective if it's the only consideration.

The Epiphany Breakthrough leads us to do professional work that encompasses the four dimensions of a successful career: finances, ideas, passion, and purpose. When we have a job that engages all four dimensions, our entire self comes to work. The problem with a lot of professional work is that it only taps into one or two aspects of a successful career.

Your life is yours to live. You are the architect of your destiny. Will you choose a profession where all four career dimensions are respected and valued? Do you want your gifts and talents to be utilized and unleashed, or will you continue to settle for less?

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## TRAP 7: The Purpose Trap

The main characteristic of the Purpose Trap is *accumulation*, which is the ultimate lie we don't discover until the end. It's a universal trap that most people don't even realize exists, until they reach the end of their lives. They wonder why no one ever said anything about it. You might call it the best kept secret in the world.

When death is approaching, everything becomes crystal clear. What may have seemed important earlier in your life completely disappears, and in its place your true priorities emerge. Your relationships and your experiences are the only things you take with you from life. Everything else falls by the wayside including money, possessions, honors, accolades, properties, and toys. At the end, they are all meaningless. You can't take them with you. So why are we so deceived?

First, we have an accumulation mentality. We are conditioned and marketed to believe that the purpose of life is to accumulate more stuff. We see people with more material abundance than us and we begin to think that life is about accumulating.

Second, we are in continual pursuit of happiness. We believe that once we acquire the next thing, we will be happy.

Third, we get caught up in competitive consumption. We view acquisitions as a measuring stick for success. Whoever has the most stuff wins! The more we have, the more successful we must be.

There isn't anything wrong with possessions that serve a purpose, but throughout our lives we tend to accumulate excess stuff that demands our attention. That's a problem, because stuff tends to break down. We have to spend a lot of time maintaining and taking care of it. When we spend more time on stuff, we spend less time on the things that matter most. So, one way to spend more time with those we love is to consistently and systematically eliminate the excess stuff we accumulate.

Whether you assess your belongings and then keep one-half or one-third isn't the point. What's relevant is that you do an inventory check of your possessions at least every year to evaluate what's important and what you can let go of.

The Conventional Approach is to simply expand your capacity to keep and maintain all your belongings. When your possessions outpace your capacity to hold them, simply add more storage space in your house and garage. When they're jam-packed, then you rent a storage unit, or two or three.

The Epiphany Breakthrough reveals that true happiness does not come from possessions, but comes from serving others, making meaningful contributions, and building lasting relationships. Possessions play a supporting role; they don't precede relationships in importance.

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You are in bondage not by owning things but by having things literally own you, from a time and maintenance standpoint. With this awareness in mind, sort through and simplify your possessions, asking if they are aligned with and serving your purpose. It's not a question of whether something is useful or has monetary or status value, but rather, whether it's necessary and essential in furthering your priorities and goals.

Purpose. Meaning. Contribution. These are the things that make us feel fulfilled and complete.