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THE FLINCH

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by Julien Smith

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The Domino Project

Published by Do You Zoom, Inc.

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This is the first edition. If you'd like to suggest a riff for a future edition, please visit our website.

Smith, Julien, 1979

Flinch / Smith

p. cm.

ISBN: 978-1-936719-22-8

Cover photo: Luca Pierro PHOTOGRAPHY/Getty Images

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INTRODUCTION

There's this place near my house—a boxing gym called Hard Knox. Any day you want, you can go there, sit down, and watch people fight.

The sign above the door says “VIP ENTRANCE,” because anyone who enters can be a champion. But to become one, you have to learn how to get hit.

In a fight, there is a fundamental difference between boxers and everyone else. The guys who have trained are different. If you hit them, they don't flinch. It takes practice to get there, but if you want to fight, you have no choice. It's the only way to win.

This is a book about being a champion, and what it takes to get there. It's about decisions, and how to know when you're making the right ones. It's also about you: the current, present you; the potential, future you; and the one, single difference between them.

It's about an instinct—the flinch—and why mastering it is vital.

This book is about how to stop flinching. It's about facing pain.

flinch: /flinCH/ - verb (used without object)

- 1. to draw back or shrink, as from what is dangerous, difficult, or unpleasant.*
- 2. to shrink under pain; wince.*

THE OPPONENT

Quitting smoking. Losing weight. Starting a business. Getting a date.

For anything you want to do, finding out how is easy. Do the research and make it happen—or so any book would have you believe. Yet every day, you smoke, gain weight, and stay at your old job. Every day, you do the exact opposite of what you plan to do. Why?

This is the Information Age. The steps to achieving any goal are easy to search for, come up with, write down on a napkin, and follow. But you're still not doing it. Part of the movie is missing. A page is torn out of the book. There's a big X in the equation. Do you know what it is?

The X is the flinch.

The flinch is your real opponent, and information won't help you fight it. It's behind every unhappy marriage, every hidden vice, and every unfulfilled life. Behind the flinch is pain avoidance, and dealing with pain demands strength you may not think you have.

The flinch is why the lazy actor never gets discovered—because she never really sweats to make it happen. It's why the monolithic company gets wiped out by a lean startup—because the big company culture avoids the hard questions. It's the reason you make the wrong decision, even though you may know what the right one is.

Behind every act you're unable to do, fear of the flinch is there, like a puppet

master, steering you off course.

Facing the flinch is hard. It means seeing the lies you tell yourself, facing the fear behind them, and handling the pain that your journey demands—all without hesitation.

The flinch is the moment when every doubt you've ever had comes back and hits you, hard. It's when your whole body feels tense. It's an instinct that tells you to run. It's a moment of tension that happens in the body and the brain, and it stops everything cold.

When coming across something they know will make them flinch, most people have been trained to refuse the challenge and turn back. It's a reaction that brings up old memories and haunts you with them. It tightens your chest and makes you want to run. It does whatever it must do to prevent you from moving forward. If the flinch works, you can't do the work that matters because the fear it creates is too strong.

Individuals have flinches, but so do organizations and cultures. They can invoke a fear of a certain kind of person, a kind of racism or xenophobia, or a fear of new technology or outside influences.

Whatever form it takes, the flinch is there to support the status quo. It whispers in your ear so you'll dismiss a good idea that requires a lot of change. It stops you from seeing an up-and-coming competitor as a threat. It's the reason most modern movies are remakes and most successful books are sequels. It hides under the guise of the hard-headed boss, the skeptical publisher, or the cautious friend.

But the problem with the flinch is that it's based in a brain that wants to protect you. It sees shadows as threats and creates blind spots. It's endemic to cultures that embrace the old, even though the old might not work anymore. Both individuals and groups must develop systems to handle the flinch, or they'll always fall prey to outside forces.

Everywhere your flinch avoidance hides, you have to find it, and face it. You need to take back control and stop the flinch, like the boxer in the ring, because

you have a job to do—you have a fight you need to win.

For most of your life or your business's existence, the flinch has been there, guiding you. As you discovered your world and learned best practices from others, the flinch was learning too. It pushes you to judge some ideas as good and others as bad, guiding your behavior over time, until your decisions became streamlined.

Whatever you avoided, whatever you and authorities considered a threat, became a blind spot—it became something that could make you flinch.

The flinch has a complex history. It appears whether you want it to or not. Every day, you make decisions based on it. But you may not think much about it at all. But this is exactly what the flinch wants.

Facing the flinch is hard internal labor that comes with no up-front promise of reward. But one day, your world will change, maybe drastically, and it will do so without warning. On that day, you won't be prepared—unless you've fought the flinch before.

Do this work now, and your future self will thank you.

Finding the flinch reveals a secret passage, hiding in plain sight. It's why some people know how to sell, and others can't—because they see the flinch in others. It's why you can't quit your job or be the person you want to be—you can't see the flinch in yourself. The flinch is why you don't do the work that matters, and why you won't make the hard decisions. It's why your organization isn't competing. It's why you don't lead the life you want.

Take this time to learn about it. It won't take long. Once you see it, it will be visible to you forever.

A LITTLE BACKGROUND

Before the bicycle helmet, the seat belt, and the bulletproof vest, there was the flinch.

The flinch is like the Moro reflex, which protects infants from falling. Flinching guards you from the unexpected. It protects your eyes and neck. It's one of the few instincts you're born with, and keep, all your life.

In any accident, the most lacerated, damaged parts of a victim's body are the hands. This is because the flinch is your personal goalie. It protects you from a bear, a bully, or a baseball. Anytime it's needed, the flinch surfaces, using your hands to protect essential body parts from damage.

Car crashes. Bike accidents. Explosions. In moments like these, you need the flinch. It's why you survive the unexpected. If you've ever been jumped, you know this. Human beings need the flinch to live.

Or do they? In your daily life, you might never experience anything dangerous at all. Your life is safe—but you're flinching anyway. You don't flinch at bears, because there are none. But you do flinch at the prospect of speaking publicly or joining a gym. You flinch at the doctor's office. You even flinch for sitcom characters. Anytime there's potential change, there's a flinch, whether it's a threat or not.

You think the flinch is natural, and part of your life, which it is. But have you ever asked yourself why your stomach tenses up and you can't watch imaginary characters on a television screen do awkward, embarrassing things? You should.

YOUR DEFECTIVE ALARM SYSTEM

Sitcoms are bad, but they're not dangerous. Neither is most of what makes you flinch. So you need to stop defending yourself. Focus your energy on the fight that matters.

Your world has a safety net. You aren't in freefall, and you never will be. You treat mistakes as final, but they almost never are. Pain and scars are a part of the path, but so is getting back up, and getting up is easier than ever.

So you don't feel like you're in danger? Look at it this way. Early man's

lifespan was about 35 years. If you got injured, you were done. No modern medicine, so each encounter meant blood loss, infection, or death. You can't relate to this. Your lifespan is double that. Science and technology mean you can survive almost anything. It may be expensive to do so, but that's still a significant improvement over death from an infected cut.

But despite this safety net, your flinch is still there, in the back of your brain—still a goalie, but a goalie for things that are nowhere near as dangerous as they used to be.

Think of a bear. You see it, and you react, instantly. You know how to deal because your brain is built to help you survive it: you run, jump, fight, or hide. But that's not the world you're in, so instead, flinching happens at job interviews or when you're asking a girl to the prom. Those things get magnified. Your privileged-world problems become the bear, and you treat them that way.

What these encounters have in common with bears is that they're changes in the status quo. This used to mean danger, so that's how your flinch reflex sees them. It attempts to stop the changes from happening, using the same fight-or-flight mechanism it always has.

So your heart starts beating fast. Your palms get moist. Time distorts. Not for bears, but for hard conversations and quitting your job. But that reaction is backwards. You don't need adrenaline to get through those things—you just need to do them. Crossing these obstacles will put the flinch in its place.

Your flinch has become your worst enemy. It should be a summoning, a challenge to push forward. Instead, the challenge is getting refused.

Listen: new does not mean bears anymore. The world is changing faster than ever. Now, new means business. If you refuse to face the flinch, it means the fear is choking you.

A LIST OF YOUR TRUE FEARS

Somewhere in the world, a lion wakes up every morning not knowing what it's going to eat. Every day, it finds food. The lion isn't worried—it just does what it

needs to do.

Somewhere else, in a zoo, a caged lion sits around every day and waits for a zookeeper. The lion is comfortable. It gets to relax. It's not worried much, either.

Both of these animals are lions. Only one is a king.

You're dropped into a forest—alone—at night. Can you survive? Sure. Do you stop caring about your 401k? Definitely. Within 48 hours, you're left with the flinches that help you survive.

Everything but what's useful for survival drops away. The flinch is an ally again. This is what we're looking for—reprogramming.

Let's make a list of the fears you were born with: falling; abandonment; loud noises.... Yeah, that's about it. You were born with these fears because you need them to survive. These fears kept you safe.

The rest are just ghost stories that the flinch has taken over. They're signposts. Look for them. They point the way toward barriers you need to pass, to doors you need to open.

BUILDING THE PATTERN

Go to a playground aghtplaygrond watch kids play sometime. What do you see? No fear, and no flinch.

Some kids aren't afraid of scars. They take risks naturally. They don't worry about pain; they just deal with it. Watch kids fall down and you'll see fearlessness in action. They land, it hurts, and they cry. Then, like lots of other kids on the planet, they get up and go back to playing.

There are other kids, though. They sit on the sidelines. They watch others. They're careful. If you have kids, you can watch your own and see how they behave. You could probably also label yourself. Cautious? Adventurous? Nervous? Bold? Which were you?

If you watch the playground over an afternoon, you'll see some kids making a lot of mistakes, getting hurt, and learning a lot. They use trial and error—the basic way you learned to walk, jump, and ride a bike. The process of trial and error is inherent to life. It's simple, and it works if what you want is to understand your environment.

This curiosity is why kids touch burners. They want to know how things work. They're interested, and they're not spoiled by the flinch. They just do it. They test their environment, and stop when it hurts. The scars they get are medals they've won, not deformities they need to hide. They use the scars and the pain to understand how their world works—to grow and get more confident. For a while, these kids think they can do anything.

The kids who don't fall down—how do they learn? Watch: he'll want to touch the burner; he might even go for it, but when his parents say no, he stops cold. He takes their word for it. So in the end, there were no consequences, and nothing was really learned at all. It's as if the warning were read in a book; it's secondhand, like a bit of wisdom being passed down from one generation to the next. But no personal stories come from it—no lessons, and no scars. Over time, as these kids learn more, they get more careful. Instead of climbing trees, they watch other kids climb. They decide it isn't such a good idea.

Here's the thing: the lessons you learn best are those you get burned by. Without the scar, there's no evidence or strong memory. The event didn't actually happen or imprint itself on your brain—you just trusted those who know better. Adults know what's safe, so you listen. Over a lifetime, those who listen too much build a habit of trust and conformity. Unfortunately, as time goes on, that habit becomes unbreakable.

This is dangerous.

Usually, this process starts slowly, and with good intent. Maybe, when you were a kid, your parents didn't want you to get dirty, or you didn't like heights. Avoiding dirt or heights built a pattern of pain avoidance, which added to the habit of flinching. Your parents' fears became your fears, their lives became your life. They flinched for some things, so you began to do the same.

But behind every undiscovered flinch is a lesson. If you do everything your parents' way, you'll never discover the truth. You'll never discover the edge. You'll never get the lessons you need.

TESTING YOUR LIMITS

Some things need to happen the hard way—but not all. You don't need to throw yourself into a fire to know it's bad. But most lessons aren't like this. They aren't fatal, and they'll make you stronger, not weaker. You should seek them out.

Forget secondhand learning. It leaves no scars. It doesn't provide the basic understanding that sits in the body as well as in the brain. There's no trace of its passing. It might as well have been a dream.

Firsthand knowledge, however, is visceral, painful, and necessary. It uses the conscious and the unconscious to process the lesson, and it uses all your senses. When you fall down, your whole motor system is involved. You can't learn this from books. It just doesn't work, because you didn't really fall. You need to feel it in your gut—and on your scraped hands and shins—for the lesson to take effect.

But if you're surrounded by padding, scar-free learning is all you have left. It defines who you are. It limits you, but those limits aren't actually yours—they're the limits of the men and women who came before you. But other people's limits will no longer do.

Outdated university degrees, old-boy networks, retirement packages—these things won't save you anymore. The world has changed. Your map needs to change with it.

You can't settle for reaching other people's limits. You have to reach yours.

If you don't test yourself, you don't actually grow to your own limits. For you to map out this new world, you need to test it, and test what you're capable of inside it. You need to make mistakes, resist the flinch, and feel the lessons that

come with this process.

Kids naturally begin this way. It's why their world is always growing. They find hurdles, jump them, and get stronger. When they see they made it, they move on to bigger hurdles. If they fall down, they try again later. It's a basic cycle. It's how kids figure out they can eventually change the world, found a startup, or build a house—by experimenting, learning, suffering, and growing. It's a process. But for that growth to continue, they need to avoid listening too closely to what they're told. They need to stay open-minded.

But there's a problem: as you learn, you're also falling down and getting scars. The pain repels you. You flinch so much that you start fearing and predicting pain. You combine it with the lessons you learned from other people. Finally, you start to protect yourself from things that haven't even happened.

At the end of this path, you go on the defensive. You give up on hurdles. Your world starts getting smaller, instead of bigger. You don't adapt to what comes at you. You stop following your curiosity and you start being safe.

From the inside, this feels like getting wise, but it isn't. Avoiding the flinch withers you, like an old tree that breaks instead of bending in a storm. Unfortunately, this is where most adults end up.

But there's an antidote. You can make your world get bigger again. The instinct you have is the seed—you just have to cultivate it.

The anxiety of the flinch is almost always worse than the pain itself. You've forgotten that. You need to learn it again. You need more scars. You need to live.

THE FORGE

Here's something you probably already know: the world is a furnace of constant, unrelenting pressure. Either you're crushed by it or it makes you into a diamond. Either you're burned by it, or it forges you into unbreakable steel.

However the world transforms you, it usually does it slowly, so you don't notice.

You watch yourself the whole time, and you always think of this person as being you. But over the years, you change—so much, perhaps, that you don't get recognized by old friends anymore. You, yourself, don't see it either. You feel the same as you always have.

Ask yourself this: would your childhood self be proud of you, or embarrassed?

The world is a 6-billion-person final exam with little to no class time before it. You walk into the room, you're given a pencil, and you're told to take the test. Worse, the piece of paper you get is blank.

But passing the test—or not—isn't an accident. The test is largely about your flinch response; it's a challenge in which you are either beaten down and back away, or you hunker down and withstand it.

Whatever decision you make reinforces what you'll do next time. Then, whatever your habit is, you teach it to others. You convince them it's important. This is how strong fears can spread, creating diseased cultures inside of families, companies, or whole countries.

So, be careful what lessons you avoid and whom you listen to. Decide carefully what's dangerous.

Decide on your own.

BETWEEN YOU AND THE FIGHT

All this is easy to agree with in theory, easy to say yes to right now. But now is not your problem. Change is easy in principle but hard in practice.

The flinch is a chasm, with a rope bridge attached to either side. Your body does not want you to cross. You cannot look down. Every muscle is fighting against you. You feel it viscerally, in your head and your stomach. It halts you in your path. Your brain cannot force you through.

As you cross, you'll want to scream, cry out, and quit, because it isn't a natural

place to be. It feels dangerous, and you can't be there for long. The flinch amplifies everything—failure, success, joy, or pain. If you quit, you'll justify it later by saying you worked hard and it was “good enough,” but you'll be wrong. You'll have quit.

Remember: no one has a problem with the first mile of a journey. Even an infant could do fine for a while. But it isn't the start that matters. It's the finish line.

Look at the finish line now. It's far and it seems impossible. Maybe it's up in the clouds, and the journey is treacherous, or the mountain is too high. You imagine that you weren't meant for this. You think you're not strong enough. In a sense, you're right. You're quitting before the pain even sets in. You're quitting out of fear of the flinch.

What you're missing is that the path itself changes you. You're weak because you haven't stepped on the path. When you do, a process will begin. As you climb the mountain, you'll get stronger. Your plastic brain will be shaped by the path. You might think this path isn't for you, but it is—you'll just change along the way. The path itself will toughen you up for the end.

Right now, you just need to start.
ileo start

HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT

Want a real, visceral example of what the flinch feels like? Try this.

When you're at home and have five minutes, go to your bathroom, walk up to your shower, and turn on the cold water. Wait a second; then test it to make sure it's as cold as possible.

Do you see what's coming?

If you do, you should tense up immediately. You should feel it in your chest. You might start laughing to release the tension—and you haven't even stepped inside. *You're predicting a flinch that hasn't happened yet.* You're already anxious about

it—about something that hasn't happened and won't kill you—anxious about something that barely hurts at all.

Ok, do it. Now is the time to step in the shower.

As the cold water hits you, you might shout or squirm. But the discomfort lasts only a second. You quickly get used to it. You get comfortable with cold, instead of trying to avoid it. You put yourself in the path of the shower to speed up the adjustment process.

Remember your reaction. You can use this method for everything.

A moment before, the flinch seems so uncomfortable that you might talk yourself out of this. You convince yourself that it's pointless, but it isn't; it's training. You need to build a habit of seeing the flinch and going forward, not rationalizing your fear and stepping away.

Start doing the opposite of your habits. It builds up your tolerance to the flinch and its power.

Have you done the homework assignment? Good. Keep doing it, every morning, for the rest of the week.

Oh, and if you don't act—no matter the reason—let's be clear: you're flinching. This exercise has no consequences, physical or social. If you refuse to do it, ask yourself why.

Because the exercise is stupid, or pointless?

How will you know unless you've tried?

YOUR WORLD AS A CORRIDOR

Straight-A student. Straight to college. Straight to work. Straight up the corporate ladder. Straight to the suburbs.

Damn, you've been scared straight.

Is this you? Corridors lead you from bed, to breakfast, to your car, to work, and then home. You have a cubicle you come to every day. You go to the same lunch place. You watch the same shows. You like the same food.

They could replace you with a small, predictable robot. And one day soon, they probably will.

Flinch avoidance means your everyday world becomes a corridor. Everything is on auto-pilot. Sure, you can live without being awake. There's more options available now than ever, but our habits are so ingrained that we don't explore at all. You're stuck in a hallway with a flinch behind every door. You can't turn corners or get surprised, so you just keep moving forward, in the same direction, until you die.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "Do not go where the path may lead; go instead where there is no path and leave a trail."

Consider this: in your corridor, every flinch is a door you can open with a new scar and lesson behind it, the same way a kid learns by touching the burner. It's an experiment—an attempt at something new. Not all experiments hurt, but all of them are valuable—and if you don't open doors, you'll never get the scars or learn the lessons. Open doors mean expanded options. The flinch will block you, but once the door is open, the threat vanishes. A new path appears.

Opening new doors means confronting a possibility of getting lost. Lost feels like failure, something that might leave a scar or be embarrassing. So the flinch starts its work, and pushes you back into the familiar to distract you. Before you can stop it, you're back in the corridor.

But every door, every unmarked place on the map, is also a dare. It means the territory is unexplored—sometimes dangerous or painful— but also a challenge. It's why so many want to see the Antarctic, or space, but so few actually do it, because you don't know what you'll find there. It both frightens and compels you, even though there could be anything, even death.

But there's a secret here, too: getting lost is not fatal. Almost every time, it will make your world bigger. You can look at the edges of your map, the places you were unsure about. Old explorers even had a phrase for it: "Here be dragons."

Most people look at the map and see danger. They stay home. Do you?

Now, frontiers have changed. Those who explore find things in themselves just as often as in the outside world. They find their own dragons, like Saint George did. They face the flinch and conquer them. Their maps become clearer.

You need to clear up your map, too.

You need find your dragons, look them in the eye, and destroy them.

GREAT STORIES WITHOUT FLINCHES

Guess what: there are none. If Luke Skywalker hadn't faced the flinch, there wouldn't have been a *Star Wars*. If Socrates hadn't faced it, most of Western philosophy never would have happened. Harry Potter without the flinch is just a sad kid in a basement.

"I saw her across the room at the dance, and she was very pretty. I was afraid. But I told myself I could do it, I went over there, and talked to her. We've been married 50 years." That, just then, was the flinch. Did you catch it? Every great relationship story has one.

Behind every moment of courage was a man or woman who faced a difficult internal struggle. When they face it, it becomes an amazing story. They become legends. But if they turn away from the flinch, their stories are unexceptional. They're like everyone else. They vanish.

Do you think that your great story is an exception to the rule? That you will get to the garden of delight without suffering as those who have passed before you? It never happens that way, because without those challenges, you have no resolve.

Samurai and their modern counterpart, kendo practitioners, say that fights are won internally, even before the killing blow is landed. They face an internal struggle before they ever face the enemy. So will you. Stop shying away from it.

FIGHTING THE FLINCH

The fear of the flinch gets built over time, by parents, schools, and careful friends. Based on what it sees outside, it builds an impenetrable fortress. It sits there, like an alarm system, watching for dangerous behavior, and warning you when it happens.

Unfortunately, it's often wrong.

Sometimes, it feels like the flinch has a voice. "You're not going to stick to this diet. You never do." "You're not going to get this job, because you're not really qualified, are you?"

It uses your own voice against you. It uses your judgment—but decides based on an outdated biological imperative. It's a construct with no scar tissue. So you avoid the flinch whether there are consequences or not.

Listen to it and you'll get nowhere. You'll never get hurt. You'll never learn.

You might even be holding back right now—holding back in fear of the flinch. You might be persuading yourself that reading this isn't important. Make no mistake; you need to keep going.

Fact: You can just watch yourself flinch. Act anyway. Forget the internal voice and go forward. Just deal with the consequences as they come. This is rarely fatal, and often, it doesn't hurt at all.

Anytime you flinch, you'll hear the voice or feel the sting of judgment. But despite how strong the feeling is, no lightning strikes you down. No floods, locusts, or first-born deaths. Nothing actually happens at all.

The truth is that judgment and fear will never stop, but they don't actually do anything. There are no negative consequences for breaking the habit of

flinching. Nothing will actually happen if you stop being afraid. You're free.

LEARN ITS SECRETS

The fear of the flinch has been growing your whole life. It's made by every authority figure you know, so you've learned to obey it. It's natural. Its tactics work like a perfectly adapted animal inside you.

So how do you know when the fear means something, and when it's just pointless? How do you know when the flinch is protecting you?

There's a process for it. Here it is:

First, find a safe place to decide from. If you feel threatened by the man next to you on the subway, move away first. From this vantage point, a better decision can safely emerge. So your relationships, health, debt, everything—make sure none of them feel dangerous, because they are easy reasons to flinch. The less these situations provoke you, the more you can focus.

Then, once you're ready, listen to yourself. When you're facing the flinch, you use words like "stupid," "safe," "pointless," or anything else that is soft, judgmental, and blurry. The flinch thrives on making risks look worse than they are. So look for those words, act anyway, and judge from hindsight instead.

You'll know you've opened the right door when you feel a strong, irresistible impulse to do *something else, anything else*. This usually means that you're right at the threshold of something important, and you need to pay attention and keep going—*now a s<*.

FIND THE CURE

The kid who wants to take over the world is still inside you. He wants to come out again. She wants to learn and grow. He wants to do something amazing.

Unfortunately, you don't follow through. Still flinching.

When you feel the flinch, you can shut it up by talking out loud. Ask a clear, strong question: “What are you afraid of?” Say it whenever you’re avoiding the flinch; then force yourself to answer. Or just call it out: “Flinching.”

Verbalize your excuse. It’s often ridiculous, paranoid, or obsessive-compulsive. You sound like a drowning sailor when, in fact, you aren’t even near the water.

Calm down and move forward.

HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT, PART 2

You need more training. Let’s take this further.

Ready? Go to the kitchen and grab a mug you don’t like. Mug in hand, go to a place in your house with a hard floor. Hold the mug in front of you, in your outstretched hand. Say goodbye to it.

Now, drop the cup.

Whatever rationalization you’re using right now is a weak spot for you. Flag it. You’ll see it again and again.

Drop the damn cup.

Did you do it? If so, you’ll notice one thing: breaking your programming requires a single moment of strength.

Now, clean up the mess. That wasn’t so bad, was it?

If this was too easy, because a cup is simple to replace, try something harder, like your Blackberry. The strength you gain by letting go is more important than any object you own.

THE PARADOX

If you don't flinch, you probably don't even know why. You think it's natural to go rock-climbing, do parkour, or meet new people all the time. You assume everyone is like you, but you're wrong.

If you're flinching all the time, you think that's natural, too. You think everyone is like you. The flinch is so innate you don't consider it a problem. But it is, and you're stuck with it unless you start to resist it.

The ability to withstand the flinch comes with the knowledge that the future will be better than the past. You believe that you can come through challenges and be just as good as you were before them. The more positive you are, the easier it is for you to believe this. You move forward and accept tough situations, so no matter the breakup, the job loss, or the injury, you believe you'll recover and end up fine. If you believe this, you're right.

If you don't have faith, you believe that every potential threat could be the end of you. You aren't sure about how to handle challenges, because you question your ability to overcome them. If you believe this, you're right, too.

This is a chicken-and-egg scenario, or in our case, an action-and-faith scenario. You don't know which one came first and made someone confident, but you can be sure of one thing—there is only one side of the equation you can control. You can't make yourself feel positive, but you can choose how to act, and if you choose right, it builds your confidence. Over time, this process becomes a positive cycle. It builds on itself, just as kids in the playground gain confidence as they climb higher and higher on the monkey bars. Next thing you know, your whole way of thinking has turned around.

HOW TO GET HURT

In a fight, a good opponent watches for patterns and is waiting for you to flinch. It is the point at which he can hit the hardest.

In rugby, I was told, "Show me a guy who flinches and I'll show you a guy who gets injured."

In mountain biking, they say the best way to get hurt is to brake. Riding fast

helps.

All of life is like this. You're only as strong as your weakest moments. Learn to reinforce those weak spots before they cut you down.

HOW NOT TO BE BORING

You don't know anyone at the party, so you don't want to go. You don't like cottage cheese, so you haven't eaten it in years. This is your choice, of course, but don't kid yourself: it's also the flinch.

Your personality is not set in stone. You may think a morning coffee is the most enjoyable thing in the world, but it's really just a habit. Thirty days without it, and you would be fine. You think you have a soul mate, but in fact you could have had any number of spouses. You would have evolved differently, but been just as happy.

Krishnamurti, a great Indian sage, once said: "You can take a piece of wood that you brought back from your garden, and each day present it with a flower. At the end of a month you will adore it, and the idea of not giving it an offering will be a sin." In other words, everything that you are used to, once done long enough, starts to seem natural, even though it might not be.

The flinch doesn't want you to change. Its agenda is to keep you in status quo. It believes your identity is what's kept you alive and stable, and that settling is better than dead. But it's a trap, because almost none of the risks modern man takes are fatal at all.

Every time you give in, you actually make the wrong path easier to follow. But every time you go the right way, you get stronger. Eventually, the new habit becomes automatic. Bingo.

You can change what you want about yourself at any time. You see yourself as someone who can't write or play an instrument, who gives in to temptation or makes bad decisions, but that's really not you. It's not ingrained. It's not your personality. Your personality is something else, something deeper than just preferences, and these details on the surface, you can change anytime you like.

If it is useful to do so, you must abandon your identity and start again. Sometimes, it's the only way.

HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT, PART 3

Perform this experiment whether you like it or not. Agree now, before reading the next sentence.

You are going to speak to the next stranger you come across.

Whether he looks interesting or not, whether you are attracted to or repelled by him, or whether you can think of anything to say—none of these things matter. Strike up a conversation, even if it's just for 15 seconds. Look the person in the eye as you do so. Smile.

Do this to test your ability to force yourself through discomfort.

As you perform this exercise, one of two things will happen. First, you may just start a conversation quickly. "Excuse me, which direction is this subway going?" You'll notice that the faster you do this, the easier it is. That's the trick—pass through the flinch quickly.

If you find it easy, try the exercise again with someone else.

What happens when you get to someone you cannot talk to—that you don't want to talk to, or you intend to talk to but can't? The feeling is actually quite primal—you feel that you *want* to talk to the person in front of you, but you literally *cannot*—as if a force is stopping you.

As this happens, watch carefully as your failure walks away from you. Don't hide from it. Observe the missed opportunity as it walks away and leaves you alone with your inadequacy. Don't turn away. Feel the anxiety in your chest as you watch the opportunity vanish, forever.

What the flinch just did to you, it will do to your whole life, until you stop it.

IN TIMES OF STRESS

In times of stress, whatever pattern you're used to taking emerges. If you're used to running, you run. If you're used to getting defensive, the same thing happens. It's how you act under pressure. For ancient man, this tendency, too, was a protective mechanism that worked well for escaping bears. Reverting to workable patterns means faster decision making, which during a real threat is the difference between life and death.

But this reversion is also why an argument with your spouse can feel like a fight with your parents—because it is. Going back to your old pattern of arguing is easy, so you do it over and over again, the way water always flows in the same path down a mountain. In your brain, the grooves are already deeply embedded, so the behaviors are automatic. They're corridors.

Most of your flinches don't protect you from fire, bears, or death. Reverting to a fight-or-flight response, even when physical threats aren't present, isn't useful. This response defends you pointlessly, raising your blood pressure and cortisol levels for no reason, and maybe taking years off your life. It also prevents you from learning what's necessary to adapt.

So you need to start recognizing your fight-or-flight response. This is the real challenge—what you'll spend most of your time on—because it is such a strong instinct. Every alternative you develop is highly valuable because it opens your options dramatically.

Thankfully, you can train yourself into new patterns, and you're not the first to do so. New patterns can include learning things that are better adapted to certain situations, and will happen automatically when you're put under duress, whether that's martial arts or new ways of communicating with your spouse. The training isn't about fighting at all, but something more important: pattern-breaking.

The first step is to stop seeing everything as a threat. You can't. You won't will this to happen—it requires wider exposure. If you've been punched in the face, you won't worry as much about a mugger, for example. If you face the flinch in meditation, you don't worry about a long line at the bank. Build your base of

confidence by having a vaster set of experiences to call upon, and you'll realize you can handle more than you used to. Doing the uncomfortable is key. It widens your circle of comfort.

Second, rework the pattern of threat response. Learn habits that move you out of a fight-or-flight choice and into another pattern that's more effective.

Start with the one below. It should help.

USE THE FLINCH

Flinching cannot be eliminated. This is a basic fact.

No matter how strong you are, a butterfly in your field of vision will always startle you. This is biologically programmed. So flinching cannot be undone, but it can be transformed. Fighters train for years to learn. Here's how it's done.

In a state of fear, most people put their hands up to defend themselves. They back away—this is the flight response. But the real trick is to do what the professionals do. They use the speed of the flinch—they use its intensity—to their advantage.

Law enforcement officers, professional fighters, and members of the military—all of them learn systems that leverage the flinch. They use it to react faster than their opponents even realize. Instead of flinching back, they flinch forward—toward their opponent, and toward the threat.

When you flinch forward, you're using the speed of your instincts, but you don't back off. Instead, you move forward so fast—without thinking—that your opponent can't react. You use your upraised hands as weapons instead of shields. You use your fear to gain an advantage.

Imagine using this tactic against the schoolyard bully. Or the marketplace.

Train yourself to flinch forward, and your world changes radically. You respond to challenges by pushing ahead instead of shrinking back. You become bigger

instead of smaller; you're more stable and more confident. Your world becomes a series of obstacles to overcome, instead of attacks you have to defend yourself from.

You go on offense instead of defense. You can change the world again, instead of protecting yourself from it.

USING YOUR ENVIRONMENT

An acrobat isn't born walking on his hands. The process for learning is slow, and only later does it become effortless.

Flinching forward, like walking on your hands, is a test of your environment. Learning to balance means falling, and when the acrobat does it, he sees what's dangerous and what isn't—after the fact. As he gets better, he starts to understand the method. If his environment pushes back by making him fall, he begins to understand his limits. As he practices, he gains ground and makes his world bigger. Eventually, he's doing handstands naturally.

Most people look at walking on their hands and think: "I can't do that," but they're wrong. You can use this same process to get anywhere you want to go. Those who learned did it by flinching forward—through the initial reaction and once, and then again and again, until it became second nature. You can do this with anything.

Flinch forward in nature, at home, in your workplace, anywhere. Try whatever you like or find interesting. Climb trees, eat new food, or learn to dance. All are provocations to the status quo that you use as stepping stones to larger explorations.

Start with small threats in safe environments. They'll build confidence for your larger jumps.

Eventually, you'll get used to it. You'll find yourself flinching forward toward everything, as a habit. It will be part of your process, the same way an acrobat can try a new move or a dancer can learn choreography.

Then, you're ready for any flinch. Then, you can get in the ring.

THE RING

It's time you found out what you are made of.

It's time you made the world flinch, not the other way around.

Fact: Those who face the flinch make a difference. The rest do not.

Those who leave the corridors find new frontiers, avenues for growth and happiness that most never encounter, while the rest will be left in old deserts, like vultures picking on scraps.

Facing the flinch, and being willing to get the scars that come with it, is the only thing that divides your present from your future. Those who fight it are easily identified—you can see the fire in their eyes and the determination that practically courses through them. Their determination is like an aura; it can be felt just by being near them.

Those who are unwilling to face the flinch are obvious, too. Their eyes are dead. Their voices sound defeated. They have defensive body language. They're all talk. They see obstacles as assailants instead of adversaries. Their flinch is the elephant in the room, and they don't want to hear about it.

Any fight you want to win, a habit of pushing past the flinch can make it happen. Once you have adjusted to the pressure, once you learn to flinch forward, you have the resolve to pass through the impassible. In fact, it becomes certain that you will—it's only a matter of time.

Then, you need to decide what to fight for.

GET IN THE RING

Ready? Let's begin.

You say you want to be successful. You see yourself as a future Richard Branson, an Oprah, or a Bill Gates—someone the world will remember. Someone you can be proud of, who does work they love and changes the world.

You think you're working hard. You think all you need is your lucky break.

Wrong. You haven't done what's necessary at all.

You haven't made the sacrifices. You haven't put in the time. You haven't faced the flinch. You haven't learned the lessons and you don't have the scars. Not for the fights that matter.

Look, there's a fight happening right now—quite a few, actually. You can turn on the TV and watch them on any channel. World hunger, AIDS, the next billion-dollar business, evenpansiness, in your own family—they're all there. You watch these fights all the time, but are you actually fighting right now?

Most people rarely get in the ring for what matters. Instead, the fight gets fought by other people, elsewhere. Everyone talks about it like they want to be involved, but it's just talk.

The truth is that they can't handle the pressure. They're not in the ring because they aren't ready to do what's necessary to win.

Most people don't actually want to face the flinch; they just want to be in a movie about it. They want the glory, not the suffering. They don't want scars because they like being soft. They don't want to be humiliated; they want respect—they just don't want to *earn* it. They want the keys handed to them. But it doesn't work that way.

If you choose the ring, you're already better than most. Why? Because you chose to fight. You're a contender, and almost no one can say that about themselves.

The ring is different for everyone, but wherever yours is, it's where real risk

happens and where the spoils are huge. It's where the fight is won, yes—but it's also where can you lose everything. Inside, you'll face pain again and again with no promise of reward, but it doesn't matter, because in the ring, you'll know you can make a difference.

Stepping into the ring means you can call yourself a contender, maybe even a champion. It's where kings are made and where those who enter are forged, like weapons. Rich or poor, smart or slow, anyone can go, any time—no matter where or who they are.

Welcome to the ring. Enter those who dare, and let them share the spoils. Only they have earned it.

Will you win? The ring offers no promises. But one thing's for sure: unless you get in the ring today, you don't even stand a damn chance.

Decide what really matters, and get in the ring for it—*now*.

Today, right now, eliminate all excuses from your vocabulary. Refuse to mince words or actions. Refuse a scar-free life.

Choose the flinch. Choose what matters. Get in the ring.

CLEAR THE PATH

The ring is different for everyone, but it's always made of places, people, and projects that are worth the flinch. Habits obscure it.

Open your eyes. Block all escape routes. Eliminate all noise.

The common will capture your attention as long as it's allowed in the room. Whatever you are used to, whether cigarettes, shopping, or Twitter, must be eliminated in the quest to get into the ring. You must make a sacrifice on the altar of greatness and perform acts that others will not.

If you aren't willing to sacrifice your comfort, you don't have what it takes.

Set fire to your old self. It's not needed here. It's too busy shopping, gossiping about others, and watching days go by and asking why you haven't gotten as far as you'd like. This old self will die and be forgotten by all but family, and replaced by someone who makes a difference.

Your new self is not like that. Your new self is the Great Chicago Fire—overwhelming, overpowering, and destroying everything that isn't necessary.

HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT, PART 4

Take a moment to breathe.

If you've gotten this far, you should appreciate the strength you've built. You should be more confident, more determined, and maybe even more outgoing. All of these are good things and more. Keep going.

The next homework assignment is simple. The next time someone asks for a volunteer, for anything whatsoever, say yes.

If a panhandler asks for change, give him the largest bill you have. If someone needs help moving out of his house, offer immediately. If you see an advertisement for a kids' help line, call the number from your phone. Do it as soon as you feel the flinch.

Don't wait until you can talk yourself out of it—you're already too good at that. Instead, act before your self-talk overpowers you. Get yourself into a position where you can no longer back out. Your old self would back away here—instead, burn your bridge so you can no longer retreat.

Flinch-breaking is all about eliminating the pointless, cowardly, and habitual, and choosing the useful instead. Useful cannot be discovered in the abstract. It has to actually happen.

BEHIND DOOR NUMBER 1

Behind every flinch is a fear or an anxiety—sometimes rational, sometimes not. Without the fear, there is no flinch. But wiping out the fear isn't what's important—facing it is. It shows you that you can handle the pressure and challenge of a new environment, putting the fear in its place—as an advisor, not a captain.

Sometimes what's behind the flinch hurts—like when you have “the talk” in your relationship. It might lead to a breakup, or big changes that you find uncomfortable. That's fine—you should probably have the talk anyway, even if it makes you squirm to do so. Other times, what's behind the flinch doesn't hurt, like when you have stage fright. You get on stage, do your acting or public speaking, and everything goes fine. The anxiety was just about the possibility of public embarrassment. No big deal.

Both of those flinches need to be faced. Whether there is pain behind the flinch doesn't matter. The only thing that does is the habit of crossing difficult internal terrain simply because it is tough to do. Judging the flinch beforehand, asking whether it's going to hurt or not, isn't the point. You can only judge from experience.

THE UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTH

This pressure you feel—this flinch you encounter every day—there is no end to it. After you deal with one, another will come your way. The pressure increases as you go on. Whatever tension you can handle, the ring will provide just a little bit more than that.

Adjust to it. You will never be entirely comfortable. This is the truth behind the champion—he is always fighting something. To do otherwise is to settle.

Success works as a cycle—growth and contraction, balancing and unbalancing—all while you're encountering hurdles that get higher and higher overflid higher time. Before jumping a hurdle, you have to balance, then unbalance, which is the jump itself. Then you repeat for the next hurdle. This is what happens when you learn to walk as well. It's natural, and the uncomfortable part is necessary for progress.

This means that if you're heading the right way, the pressure will never entirely disappear. If it does, you're on the wrong path. You're in the corridor. It's that simple. You need to find a door again. You need a bigger fight.

A SURE-FIRE PATH TO FAILURE

At this point in most books, the authors promise you that if you do what they say, you're sure to succeed.

In this case, you're sure to fail. To be rejected. To discover wrong paths. To see what humiliation is like, firsthand.

You're sure to live.

And then yes, maybe, you might reach your goals.

Would you have it any other way?

JOIN US

Everyone in the ring feels alone. You want to change your company's culture, but it seems like no one will support you. No one wants to talk to you at a party, or so you believe, so you don't talk to anyone. No matter what the flinch is, you need to face it on your own. It can be lonely. This is a hard truth.

From the outside looking in, everyone looks like a conformist. But really, no one is; they're just waiting for another person to speak up.

The question is, why isn't it you? Do you feel like you'll be judged, or ostracized? Do you think you'll be ignored and humiliated? Do you feel impotent? The truth is likely quite different.

Everyone wants progress but very few want to lead. So a whole group waits for the first hand to go up before their hands go up, too. Suddenly, a vote goes from

a unanimous NO to a unanimous YES. All it took was one voice of dissent—and suddenly, everything changed.

The secret to overcoming the flinch is that everyone wants you to succeed. People are looking for proof that you can be amazing so that they can be amazing, too. The Web is so great because you can see others being truly themselves, and succeeding at it. This diminishes the power of the consensus. The pressure diminishes. You can be who you like. Getting in the ring becomes easier because you have supporters.

So if you see no one like you, no one who agrees, don't worry. There are actually hundreds of people like you, and they're waiting for a leader. That person is you.

Stop flinching. Speak up. Join us.

100 KINDS

There are a million ways to avoid the flinch, a million ways to do wrong by yourself in evading it. There are a hundred names for those people and behaviors: lazy, avoidant, cynical, arrogant, and anything in between. All of these names convey attitudes that encourage you to avoid seeing what is right in front of you, all in a different way, and each of the people who has one of these attitudes defends it.

In contrast, there is only one way to do it right and to see the truth. It is to look at these ways of acting in yourself or others and cross through their verbal defenses, as I defend not to believe them at all.

Every person has his own way of being avoidant and overly confident. It's impossible to name all the ways people do this. But the solution is always the same: ruthless yet compassionate honesty in the face of all the lies you tell yourself.

The flinch will keep you avoidant your whole life if you let it. You will see nothing of the magic or serendipity or incredible experiences that others have if you keep your blinders on. For this reason, taking them off may be the single most important challenge you ever face.

There are enough viewers. There are enough cheerleaders. There are enough coaches and enough commentators. What there isn't enough of are players.

Do not put this down and return to your normal life.

Fight. Don't flinch.

Don't ever be afraid again.

ABOUT ELLA

Ella is a friend with an amazing story.

When Ella was four years old, she was happily cooking in the kitchen with her mother. Then, in an instant, everything changed.

Ella was curious about what was on the stove, and she reached up. By accident, she put her elbow in the pot, which was full of boiling water. It hurt her, so she pulled back, dragging the pot off the stove and pouring the water on top of her.

Ella had third-degree burns on over 30 percent of her body. Surgery needed to be done, with doctors cutting into her body again and again so she wouldn't lose mobility from all the scars.

Now, there's an intensity in Ella's eyes that you don't see in a lot of people. She's unashamedly political. She faces life with a courage that few people can understand. She didn't flinch about the life in front of her. She embraced it.

But this isn't about her story at all. It's about you.

Here's what happened next. Ella started doing fire performance. She embraced the thing that hurt her. She figured out how to use torches and alcohol to light parts of herself on fire as part of a show. She did this on stages all across Canada.

Think about it for a second. The girl who got burned at the age of four, with

scars all over her body, turned fire into her weapon. It sounds like a movie.

But there are people like this. They're different. They've made a choice about where they want to go. Life teaches them lessons the rest of us don't have a chance to learn. They take paths that others don't.

You know what else? You can be one of them, if you want.

THE FLINCH, A CHECKLIST

1. Challenge yourself by doing things that hurt, on purpose. Have a willpower practice, such as very hard exercise, meditation, endurance, or cold showers. Choose something that makes your brain scream with how hard it is, and try to tolerate it. The goal isn't just to get used to it. It's to understand that pain is something you can survive.

2. Remember things that are easy to forget. Upgrade your current relationships. Create un-birthdays for your friends and our friend stick to them. Go through old text messages to rekindle dormant friendships. It can be awkward, but that's the point. You will make an impact by choosing to do what makes others nervous.

3. Read more. Not just current blog posts and tweets and Facebook updates online, but other sources that take more consideration than blog posts or news. Find thorough and in-depth analyses of subjects you find interesting, or irreverent stuff that makes you feel alive. Read things you disagree with. Read things that are too difficult for you to understand, and then overcome your discomfort by pushing yourself to understand them.

4. Get some scars by working with your hands. Try to understand how things in your world work, like your car, your stereo system, or even your kitchen. Have a garden or a dog to help you stay grounded in the real world.

5. Turn your mobile phone off for a few hours each day. Having nothing to do while you're waiting for a bus can be boring, but it's only when you're bored that the scary thoughts come to the surface. Use a dumb phone on the weekends

to prevent yourself from checking your messages.

6. Find new friends who make you feel uncomfortable, either because they have done more than you or because they have done nothing that you have. Meet tattoo artists or homeless people, millionaires or best-selling authors. Host dinner parties for them. Serve them bizarre food. Why the hell not?

7. Renegotiate your work. If you achieve X, then will your employer do Y? Ask beforehand and deliver, or if you can't get permission, go for it anyway and ask for forgiveness. Create a new job title for yourself; then carve out the job.

8. Start dressing as if you had a very important job or meeting, or as if you were twenty years old again and thought you were the coolest person on Earth. What would you do differently? How would people treat you once you did?

9. Imagine that you have to leave a legacy, and everyone in the world will see the work you've done. Volunteer. Create something that lasts and that can exist outside of you, something that makes people wonder and gasp. Build a support structure for others. Devote some of your time or money to it.

10. Make something amazing, something that's terrifying to you. Stay uncomfortable. Fight the flinch wherever you see it. Leave no stone unturned.

HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT, PART 5

Congratulations. Almost no one knows their flinch this well, sees it as often, and fights it as often as you.

You know yourself better, and because of that, you know your world better. You can grow now without limit. You are a conqueror and a champion. But there's one more thing.

Fear of the flinch is still spreading. It's like a disease, traveling throughout society, through media and word of mouth. It's everywhere, and it infects everyone differently. It's why parents refuse to vaccinate their kids, and why neighbors and family members don't talk to each other anymore.

They want safety. But you now know that safe is anything but.

We can't fix this alone. For this to make a difference, it needs to be a movement. The flinch is a virus, so learning about it needs to be a virus, too.

So your final assignment is to give this bong give took to another person. Maybe choose the person who needs it most. Or choose a stranger. Choose the person who you think will really get it, or the person who's already in the ring and needs some help.

It doesn't matter where the book goes. But you need to abandon it. Forget your fear of loss. You've learned what you need to know—now, give someone else the chance to do the same.

That's why we made this book free.

So send it out. Spread it. Or tell us your story — stories@theflinch.com — and we'll do something cool with the best ones.

Go ahead. Do it right now.

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ABOUT THE DOMINO PROJECT

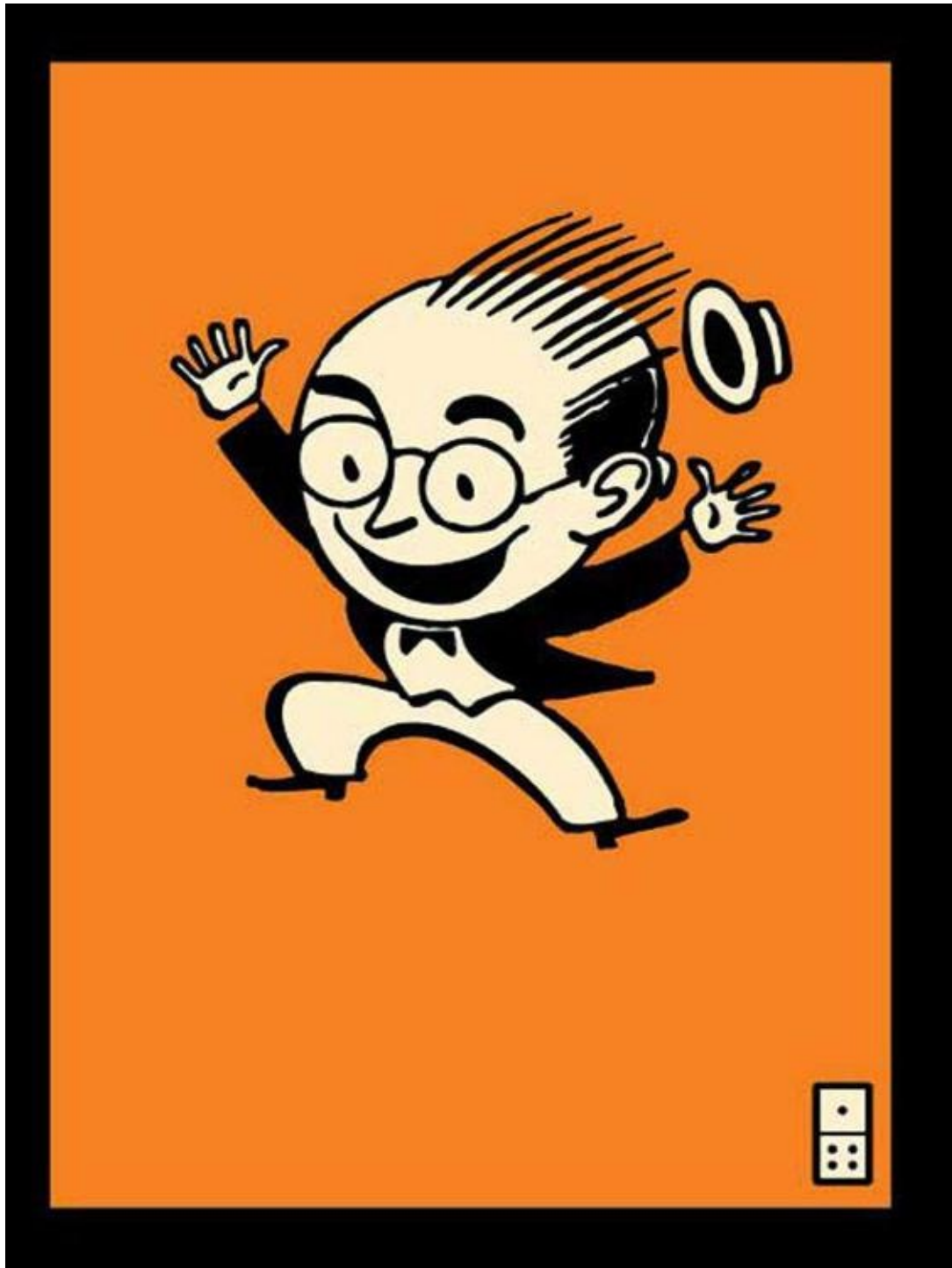
What happens when a publisher has a tight, direct connection with readers, is able to produce intellectual property that spreads, and can do both quickly and at low cost? A new kind of publishing, the brainchild of Seth Godin, and powered by Amazon.

The Domino Project is named after the domino effect—one powerful idea spreads down the line, pushing from person to person. The Project represents a fundamental shift in the way books (and digital media based on books) have always been published. Eventually consisting of a small cadre of stellar authors, this is a publishing house organized around a new distribution channel, one that wasn't even a fantasy when most publishers began.

We are reinventing what it means to be a publisher, and along the way, spreading ideas that we're proud to spread.

Here are excerpts of our some of our books:

z/body>



If you're stuck at the starting line, you don't need more time or permission. You don't need to wait for a boss's okay or to be told to push the button; you just need to poke.

Poke the Box is a manifesto by bestselling author Seth Godin that just might make you uncomfortable. It's a call to action about the initiative you're taking—in your job or in your life. Godin knows that one of our scarcest resources is the spark of initiative in most organizations (and most careers)—the person with the guts to say, “I want to start stuff.”

Poke the Box just may be the kick in the pants you need to shake up your life.

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Excerpt from Poke the Box

The initiator

Annie Downs works at the Mocha Club, a nonprofit based in Nashville that raises money for the developing world by working with touring musicians.

Last year, she called her boss and said something she had never said before. “I’ve got an idea, and I’m going to start working on it tomorrow. It won’t take a lot of time and it won’t cost a lot of money, and I think it’s going to work.”

With those two sentences, Annie changed her life. And scashe changed her organization and the people it serves.

You’re probably wondering what her idea was. You might even be curious about how she pulled it off.

That is the wrong question.

The change was in her posture. The change was that for the first time in this job, Annie wasn’t waiting for instructions, working through a to-do list, or reacting to incoming tasks. *She wasn’t handed initiative, she took it.*

Annie crossed a bridge that day. She became someone who starts something, someone who initiates, someone who is prepared to fail along the way if it helps her make a difference.

Your turn

Imagine that the world had no middlemen, no publishers, no bosses, no HR folks, no one telling you what you couldn't do.

If you lived in that world, what would you do?

Go. Do that.

* * *

In China, there's a factory that can make the same widgets your company makes—for a tenth of the price.

Down the street, there's a restaurant busy stealing your menu and your wine list, but charging 20 percent less than you can charge.

The last travel agent has left the room. Magazine publishers gave up all their growth to bloggers. Wikipedia didn't have to grab the reins of authority from the *Encyclopedia Britannica*; contributors just showed up and did the work. *Britannica* staffers sat and watched.

The intermediaries and agenda setters and investors are less important than they have ever been before. Last year, sixty-seven Web startups in San Francisco and New York were funded for what it costs Silicon Valley to fund a third of that number.

So, if money and access and organizational might aren't the foundation of the connected economy, what is?

Initiative.

This is a manifesto about starting.

Starting a project, making a ruckus, taking what feels like a risk.

Not just “I’m starting to think about it,” or “We’re going to meet on this,” or even “I filed a patent application....”

No, starting.

Going beyond the point of no return.

Leaping.

Committing.

Making something happen.

The seventh imperative

- The first imperative is to be aware—aware of the market, of opportunities, of who you are.
 - The second imperative is to be educated, so you can understand what’s around you.
- moheight=
- The third imperative is to be connected, so you can be trusted as you engage.
 - The fourth imperative is to be consistent, so the system knows what to expect.
 - The fifth imperative is to build an asset, so you have something to sell.
 - The sixth imperative is to be productive, so you can be well-priced.

But you can do all of these things and still fail. A job is not enough. A factory is not enough. A trade is not enough. It used to be, but no longer.

The world is changing too fast. Without the spark of initiative, you have no choice but to simply react to the world. Without the ability to instigate and experiment, you are stuck, adrift, waiting to be shoved.

I can find a thousand books and a million memos about the first six imperatives. They were drilled into you in countless moments in school, and plenty of graduate schools and bosses are delighted to help you with them. But when it comes to the seventh imperative, it seems as though you're on your own.

The seventh imperative is frightening and thus easy to overlook or ignore. The seventh imperative is to have the guts and the heart and the passion to ship.

The difference of go

The simple thing that separates successful individuals from those who languish is the very thing that separates exciting and growing organizations from those that stagnate and die.

The winners have turned initiative into a passion and a practice. Go ahead, make a list. Make a list of the people and organizations you admire. My guess is the seventh imperative is what sets them apart.

The challenge, it turns out, isn't in perfecting your ability to know when to start and when to stand by. The challenge is getting into the habit of starting.

Craig Venter and Dr. Frankenstein

The man who sequenced the human genome has figured out how to use a computer to completely design the genetic code of an organism. He and his team can mess with the genes almost as easily as you can edit an essay in Word.

And yet.

And yet once the strand of code is generated and turned into organic matter in a petri dish, it just lies there. It's not alive.

The motive force—the spark that brings it to life—is missing. Ventner still needs to insert some organic tissue, something living, something alive, to transform the project into more than an inert mass of genes.

Surprisingly, that's precisely your opportunity.

Not to buy a petri dish and a bunch of organic materials. No, the opportunity is bigger than that—it's to see that all around you are platforms, opportunities, and entire organizations that will come to life once you are drithe you arven enough and brave enough to contribute the initiative they are missing.

The buzzer box

When my cousin was born, my uncle (who has a Ph.D. from MIT) built a buzzer box. It was a heavy metal contraption, with a thick black cord that plugged into the wall. It looked like something from a nuclear power plant, not a kid's toy, but that didn't dissuade him from tossing it into the crib.

The box had two switches, some lights, and a few other controls on it. Flip one switch and a light goes on. Flip both switches and a buzzer sounds. All terrifying, of course, unless you are a kid.

A kid sees the buzzer box and starts poking it. *If I do this, that happens!*

Mathematicians call this a function. Put in one variable, get a result. Call and response.

Life is a buzzer box. Poke it.

View this Book:

<http://www.amazon.com/Poke-the-Box-ebook/dp/B004J4XG00/>

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Could you be getting in your way of producing great work? Have you started a project but never finished? Would you like to do work that matters, but don't know where to start?

The answer is *Do the Work*, a manifesto by bestselling author Steven Pressfield, that will show you that it's not about better ideas, it's about actually doing the work.

Do the Work is a weapon against Resistance – a tool that will help you take action and successfully ship projects out the door.

“There is an enemy. There is an intelligent, active, malign force working against us. Step one is to recognize this. This recognition alone is enormously powerful. It saved my life, and it will save yours.”

Do the Work may be just what you need to get out of your own way.

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Excerpt from Do the Work

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About This Book

This book is designed to coach you through a project (a book, a ballet, a new business venture, a philanthropic enterprise) from conception to finished product, seeing it from the point of view of Resistance.

We'll hit every predictable Resistance Point along the way—those junctures where fear, self-sabotage, procrastination, self-doubt, and all those other demons we're all so familiar with can be counted upon to strike.

Where butts need to be kicked, we shall kick them.
Where kinder, gentler methods are called for, we'll get
out the kid gloves.

One note: This document is articulated for the most part in the lexicon of a writer—i.e., the model used is that of conceiving and constructing plays, novels, or screenplays. But the principles can be applied with equal effectiveness to any form of creative endeavor, including such seemingly far-afield enterprises as the acquisition of physical fitness, the recovery from a broken heart, or the pursuit of any objective—emotional, intellectual, or spiritual—that involves moving from a lower or less conscious plane to a higher one.

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ORIENTATION ENEMIES AND ALLIES

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Our Enemies

The following is a list of the forces arrayed against us as artists and entrepreneurs:

1. Resistance (i.e., fear, self-doubt, procrastination, addiction, distraction, timidity, ego and narcissism, self-loathing, perfectionism, etc.)
2. Rational thought
3. Friends and family

Resistance

What exactly is this monster? The following few chapters from *The War of Art* will bring us up to speed:

Resistance's Greatest Hits

The following is a list, in no particular order, of those activities that most commonly elicit Resistance:

1. The pursuit of any calling in writing, painting, music, film, dance, or any creative art, however marginal or unconventional.
2. The launching of any entrepreneurial venture or enterprise, for profit or otherwise.
3. Any diet or health regimen.

4. Any program of spiritual advancement.
5. Any activity whose aim is the acquisition of chiseled abdominals.
6. Any course or program designed to overcome an unwholesome habit or addiction.
7. Education of every kind.
8. Any act of political, moral, or ethical courage, including the decision to change for the better some unworthy pattern of thought or conduct in ourselves.
9. The undertaking of any enterprise or endeavor whose aim is to help others.
10. Any act that entails commitment of the heart—the decision to get married, to have a child, to weather a rocky patch in a relationship.
11. The taking of any principled stand in the face of adversity.

In other words, any act that rejects immediate gratification in favor of long-term growth, health, or integrity.

Or, expressed another way, any act that derives from our higher nature instead of our lower. Any of these acts will elicit Resistance.

Now: what are the characteristics of Resistance?

Resistance Is Invisible

Resistance cannot be seen, heard, touched, or smelled. But it can be felt. We experience it as an energy field radiating from a work-in-potential.

Resistance is a repelling force. It's negative. Its aim is to shove us away, distract us, prevent us from doing our work.

Resistance Is Insidious

Resistance will tell you anything to keep you from doing your work. It will perjure, fabricate, falsify; seduce, bully, cajole. Resistance is protean. It will assume any form, if that's what it takes to deceive you.

Resistance will reason with you like a lawyer or jam a nine-millimeter in your face like a stickup man.

Resistance has no conscience. It will pledge anything to get a deal, then double-cross you as soon as your back is turned. If you take Resistance at its word, you deserve everything you get.

Resistance is always lying and always full of shit.

Resistance Is Impersonal

Resistance is not out to get you personally. It doesn't know who you are and doesn't care. Resistance is a force of nature. It acts objectively.

Though it feels malevolent, Resistance in fact operates with the indifference of rain and transits the heavens by the same laws as stars. When we marshal our forces to combat Resistance, we must remember this.

Resistance Is Infallible

Like a magnetized needle floating on a surface of oil, Resistance will unfailingly point to true North—meaning that calling or action it most wants to stop us from doing.

We can use this.

We can use it as a compass.

We can navigate by Resistance, letting it guide us to that calling or purpose that we must follow before all others.

Rule of thumb: The more important a call or action is to our soul's evolution, the more Resistance we will feel toward pursuing it.

Resistance Is Universal

We're wrong if we think we're the only ones struggling with Resistance. Everyone who has a body experiences Resistance.

Resistance Never Sleeps

Henry Fonda was still throwing up before each stage performance, even when he was seventy-five.

In other words, fear doesn't go away. The warrior and the artist live by the same code of necessity, which dictates that the battle must be fought anew every day.

Resistance Plays for Keeps

Resistance's goal is not to wound or disable.

Resistance aims to kill.

Its target is the epicenter of our being: our genius, our soul, the unique and priceless gift we were put on this earth to give and that no one else has but us. Resistance means business.

When we fight it, we are in a war to the death.

Rational Thought

Next to Resistance, rational thought is the artist or entrepreneur's worst enemy.

Bad things happen when we employ rational thought, because rational thought comes from the ego.

Instead, we want to work from the Self, that is, from instinct and intuition, from the unconscious.

Homer began both *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* with a prayer to the Muse. The Greeks' greatest poet understood that genius did not reside within his fallible, mortal self—but came to him instead from some source that he could neither command nor control, only invoke.

When an artist says “Trust the soup,” she means let go of the need to control (which we can't do anyway) and put your faith instead in the Source, the Mystery, the Quantum Soup.

The deeper the source we work from, the better our stuff will be—and the more transformative it will be for us and for those we share it with.

Friends and Family

The problem with friends and family is that they know us *as we are*. They are invested in maintaining us as we are.

The last thing we want is to remain as we are.

If you're reading this book, it's because you sense inside you a second self, an unlived you.

With some exceptions (God bless them), friends and family are the enemy of this unmanifested you, this unborn self, this future being.

Prepare yourself to make new friends. They will
appear, trust me.

Our Allies

Enough for now about the antagonists arrayed against us. Let's consider the champions on our side:

1. Stupidity
2. Stubbornness
3. Blind faith
4. Passion

5. Assistance (the opposite of Resistance)
6. Friends and family

Stay Stupid

The three dumbest guys I can think of: Charles Lindbergh, Steve Jobs, Winston Churchill. Why? Because any smart person who understood how impossibly arduous were the tasks they had set themselves would have pulled the plug before he even began.

Ignorance and arrogance are the artist and entrepreneur's indispensable allies. She must be clueless enough to have no idea how difficult her enterprise is going to be—and cocky enough to believe she can pull it off anyway.

How do we achieve this state of mind? By staying stupid. By not allowing ourselves to think.

A child has no trouble believing the unbelievable, nor
does the genius or the madman. It's only you and I, with
our big brains and our tiny hearts, who doubt and
overthink and hesitate.

Don't think. Act.

We can always revise and revisit once we've acted. But we can accomplish nothing until we act.

Be Stubborn

Once we commit to action, the worst thing we can do

is to stop.

What will keep us from stopping? Plain old stubbornness.

I like the idea of stubbornness because it's less lofty than "tenacity" or "perseverance." We don't have to be heroes to be stubborn. We can just be pains in the butt.

When we're stubborn, there's no quit in us. We're mean. We're mulish. We're ornery.

We're in till the finish.

We will sink our junkyard-dog teeth into Resistance's ass and not let go, no matter how hard he kicks.

Blind Faith

Is there a spiritual element to creativity? Hell, yes.

Our mightiest ally (our indispensable ally) is belief in something we cannot see, hear, touch, taste, or feel.

Resistance wants to rattle that faith. Resistance wants to destroy it.

There's an exercise that Patricia Ryan Madson describes in her wonderful book, *Improv Wisdom*. (Ms. Madson taught improvisational theater at Stanford to standing-room only classes for twenty years.) Here's the exercise:

Imagine a box with a lid. Hold the box in your hand. Now open it.

What's inside?

It might be a frog, a silk scarf, a gold coin of Persia. But here's the trick: no matter how many times you open the box, there is always something in it.

Ask me my religion. That's it.

I believe with unshakeable faith that there will always
be something in the box.

Passion

Picasso painted with passion, Mozart composed with it. A child plays with it all day long.

You may think that you've lost your passion, or that you can't identify it, or that you have so much of it, it threatens to overwhelm you. None of these is true.

Fear saps passion.

When we conquer our fears, we discover a boundless, bottomless, inexhaustible well of passion.

Assistance

We'll come back to this later. Suffice it to say for now that as Resistance is the shadow, its opposite—Assistance—is the sun.

Friends and Family

When art and inspiration and success and fame and money have come and gone, who still loves us—and whom do we love?

Only two things will remain with us across the river:
our inhering genius and the hearts we love.

In other words, what we do and whom we do it for.

But enough theory. In the next chapter we'll start our novel, kick off our new business, launch our philanthropic enterprise.

First question: When is the best time to start?

View this Book:

<http://www.amazon.com/Do-the-Work-ebook/dp/B004PGO25O/>

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Redefining the classic essay, this modern edition of Ralph Waldo Emerson's most famous work, *Self-Reliance*, includes self-reflections from both historical and contemporary luminaries. With quotes from the likes of Henry Ford and

Helen Keller to modern-day thought leaders like Jesse Dylan, Steve Pressfield, and Milton Glaser, we're reminded of the relevance of Emerson's powerful words today.

Emerson's words are timeless. Persuasive and convincing, he challenges readers to define their own sense of accomplishment and asks them to measure themselves against their own standards, not those of society. This famous orator has utter faith in individualism and doesn't invoke beyond what is humanly possible, he just believes deeply that each of us is capable of greatness. He asks us to define that greatness for ourselves and to be true to ourselves. At times harsh, at times comforting, Emerson's words guide the reader to challenge his own beliefs and sense of self.

Self-Reliance is a great reminder about the potential within us all and that life is what you make of it.

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Excerpt from Self-Reliance

I read the other day some verses written by an eminent painter which were original and not conventional. The soul always hears an admonition in such lines, let the subject be what it may. The sentiment they instill is of more value than any thought they may contain. To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men, that is genius. Speak your latent conviction, and it shall be the universal sense; for the inmost in due time becomes the outmost, and our first thought is rendered back to us by the trumpets of the Last Judgment. Familiar as the voice of the mind is to each, the highest merit we ascribe to Moses, conPlato, and Milton is, that they set at naught books and traditions, and spoke not what men but what they thought. A man should learn to detect and watch that gleam of light which flashes across his mind from within, more than the lustre of the firmament of bards and sages. Yet he dismisses without notice his thought, because it is his. In every work of genius we recognize our own rejected thoughts: they come back to us with a certain alienated majesty. Great works of art have no more affecting lesson for us than this. They teach us to abide by our spontaneous impression with good-humored inflexibility then most when the whole cry of voices is on the other side. Else, tomorrow a stranger will say with masterly good sense precisely what we have thought and felt all the time, and we shall be forced to take with shame our own opinion from another.

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There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide

I remember – in exacting detail – the precise moment when I reached this point in my education (it's coincidental that it actually took place in a classroom). After that moment I became a completely different person, confident in myself and my actions, more willing to accept the downs as well as the ups that I encountered throughout the day, and far more certain that the thoughts I was thinking were important. "That teacher at the front of the room knows a lot of things," I thought, "but he doesn't know what I know, and that's my value."

Colin Wright

There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better, for worse, as his portion; that though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given to him to till. The power which resides in him is new in nature, and none but he knows what that is which he can do, nor does he know until he has tried. Not for nothing one face, one character, one fact, makes much impression on him, and another none. This sculpture in the memory is not without preestablished harmony. The eye was placed where one ray should fall, that it might testify of that particular ray. We but half express ourselves, and are ashamed of that divine idea which each of us represents. It may be safely trusted as proportionate and of good issues, so it be faithfully imparted, but God will not have his work made manifest by cowards. A man is relieved and gay when he has put his heart into his work and done his best; but what he has said or done otherwise, shall give him no peace. It is a deliverance which does not deliver. In the attempt his genius deserts him; no muse befriends; no invention, no hope.

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Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string.

If you think you can do it, or you think you can't do it, you are right.

Henry Ford

Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string. Accept the place the divine providence has found for you, the society of your contemporaries, the connection of events. Great men have always done so, and confided themselves childlike to the genius of their age, betraying their perception that the absolutely trustworthy was seated at their heart, working through their hands, predominating in all their being. And we are now men, and must accept in the highest measure the same transcendent destiny; and not minors and invalids in a protected corner, not cowards fleeing before a revolution, but guides, redeemers, and benefactors, obeying the Almighty effort, and advancing on Chaos and the Dark.

What pretty oracles nature yields us on this text, in the face and behavior of children, babes, and even brutes! That divided and rebel mind, that distrust of a sentiment because our arithmetic has computed the strength and means opposed to our purpose, these have not. Their mind being whole, their eye is as yet unconquered, and when we look in their faces, we are disconcerted. Infancy conforms to nobody: all conform to it, so that one babe commonly makes four or five out of the adults who prattle and play to it. So God has armed youth and puberty and manhood no less with its own piquancy and charm, and made it enviable and gracious and its claims not to be put by, if it will stand by itself. Do not think the youth has no force, because he cannot speak to you and me. Hark! in the next room his voice is sufficiently clear and emphatic. It seems he knows how to speak.

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These are the voices which we hear in solitude, but they grow faint and inaudible as we enter into the world. Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members.

My favorite movie of all times is *The Matrix*. I like the movie not only for the amazing special effects and action scenes, but for its insight in human condition. I believe we live in the Matrix. I believe the Matrix is very real. We may not be the unconscious batteries living in the delusion of the programs created by the machines, but we live in the delusion of the rules and belief systems created by our parents, teachers, colleagues, bosses, and society designed to control us. It's a delusion because we're not living the life according to our true self. We're not listening to our inner voices because we're taught our own voices are wrong and inappropriate. So we live the life of others, a program created by others, because of the fear of being wrong and outcast.

My mission in life is to listen to my own voice as much as possible and follow my instincts. Whenever I do this, I always feel good about myself eventually and I get the glimpse of the freedom of being outside the Matrix. It's a hard thing to do, but it's worth it every time. I never lose when I trust myself.

Ji Lee

View this Book:

<http://www.amazon.com/Self-Reliance-ebook/dp/B004X80U1E/>

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“One of the best hours you’ll ever spend will be reading Derek Sivers’s new book...*Anything You Want.*” – *Forbes*

Best known for creating CD Baby, the most popular music site for independent artists, founder Derek Sivers chronicles his “accidental” success and failures into this concise and inspiring book on how to create a multi-million dollar company by following your passion. In *Anything You Want*, Sivers details his journey and the lessons learned along the way of creating CD Baby and building a business close to his heart. “[Sivers is] one of the last music-business folk heroes,” says *Esquire* magazine. His less-scripted approach to business is refreshing and will educate readers to feel empowered to follow their own dreams. Aspiring entrepreneurs and others trying to make their own way will be particularly comforted by Sivers straight talk and transparency — a reminder that anything you want is within your reach.

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Excerpt from Anything You Want

Ten years of experience in one hour

From 1998 to 2008, I had this wild experience of starting a little hobby, accidentally growing it into a big business, and then selling it for \$22 million. So now people want to hear my thoughts.

People ask me about that experience, so I tell stories about how it went for me. Many of them are about all the things I did wrong. I made some horrible mistakes.

People ask my advice on how to approach situations in their lives or businesses, so I explain how I approach things. But my approach is just one way, and I could argue against it as well.

I'm not really suggesting that anyone should be like me. I'm pretty unusual, so what works for me might not work for others. But enough people thought that my stories and the philosophies I developed from this experience were worth

sharing, so here we are.

This is most of what I learned in ten years, compacted into something you can read in an hour.

I hope you find these ideas useful for your own life or business. I also hope you disagree with some of them. Then I hope you email me to tell me about your different point of view, because that's my favorite part of all.

(I'm a student, not a guru.)

What's your compass?

Most people don't know why they're doing what they're doing. They imitate others, go with the flow, and follow paths without making their own.

They spend decades in pursuit of something that someone convinced them they should want, without realizing that it won't make them happy.

Don't be on your deathbed someday, having squandered your one chance at life, full of regret because you pursued little distractions instead of big dreams.

You need to know your personal philosophy of what makes you happy and what's worth doing.

In the following stories, you'll notice some common themes. These are my philosophies from the ten years I spent starting and growing a small business.

- Business is not about money. It's about making dreams come true for others and for yourself.

- Making a company is a great way to improve the world while improving yourself.
- When you make a company, you make a utopia. It's where you design your perfect world.
- Never do anything just for the money.
- Don't pursue business just for your own gain. Only answer the calls for help.
- Success comes from persistently improving and inventing, not from persistently promoting what's not working.
- Your business plan is moot. You don't know what people really want until you start doing it.
- Starting with no money is an advantage. You don't need money to start helping people.
- You can't please everyone, so proudly exclude people.
- Make yourself unnecessary to the running of your business.
- The real point of doing anything is to be happy, so do only what makes you happy.

What do these statements mean? What's the context? How are you supposed to apply them to your own situation?

Well... I don't love talking about myself, but for the lessons to make sense, I have to tell you my tale.

Just selling my CD

This story begins in 1997. I was a professional musician, age 27. I was making a full-time living just playing music—playing lots of gigs around the U.S. and Europe, producing people’s records, playing on people’s records, and running a little recording studio. I was even the musician and MC for a circus.

My bank account was always low, but never empty. I made enough money to buy a house in Woodstock, New York. I was living a musician’s dream.

I made a CD of my music, and sold 1500 copies at my concerts. I wanted to sell it online, but there were no businesses that would sell independent music online. Not one. I called up the big online record stores and they all told me the same thing: the only way I could get my CD into their online stores was through a major distributor.

Music distribution was an awful racket. Getting a distribution deal was as hard as getting a record deal. Distributors were notorious for taking thousands of CDs, and paying you a year later, if ever. Record labels with deep pockets would buy expensive promotional placement, and the rest of us would just sit in the bin. If you didn’t sell well in the first few months, you were kicked out of the system.

It’s not that distributors were evil. It was just an awful system, and I wanted nothing to do with it.

So when the big online record stores told me they couldn’t sell my CD directly, I thought, “Ah, screw it. I’ll just set up my own online store. How hard could it be?”

But it was hard! In 1997, PayPal didn’t exist, so I had to get a credit card merchant account, which cost \$1000 in setup fees and took three months of paperwork. The bank even had to send an inspector out to my location to make sure I was a valid business. Then I had to figure out how to build a shopping cart. I didn’t know any programming, but I copied some examples from a programming book, with lots of trial and error.

Finally, though, I had a BUY NOW button on my website! In 1997 this was a big deal.

When I told my musician friends about my BUY NOW button, one friend asked, “Could you sell my CD, too?”

I thought about it for a minute and said, “Sure. No problem.” I just did it as a favor. It took me a couple hours to get him added into my system. I made a separate page for his CD on my band’s website.

Then two other friends asked if I could sell their CDs. Then I started getting calls from strangers saying, “My friend Dave said you could sell my CD?” The calls and emails kept coming. I said yes to all.

Two popular online music leaders announced it to their mailing lists. (Bryan Baker from Gajoob, and David Hooper. Thanks, guys!) Fifty more musicians signed up.

This was meant to be just a favor I was doing for a few friends. Hmmm....

Make a dream come true

Selling my friends’ CDs was starting to take up a lot of my time. I realized I had accidentally started a business. But I didn’t want to start a business! I was already living my dream life as a full-time musician. I didn’t want anything to distract me from that.

So, I thought that by taking an unrealistically utopian approach, I could keep the business from growing too much. Instead of trying to make it big, I was going to make it small. It was the opposite of ambition, so I had to think in a way that was the opposite of ambitious.

I wrote down my utopian dream-come-true distribution deal from my musician's point of view. In a perfect world, my distributor would...

1. Pay me every week Kme my distri.
2. Show me the full name and address of everyone who bought my CD. (Because those are my fans, not the distributor's.)
3. Never kick me out for not selling enough. (Even if I sell only one CD every five years, it'll be there for someone to buy.)
4. Never allow paid placement. (Because it's not fair to those who can't afford it.)

That's it! That was my mission. I liked it. It was a worthy hobby. I named it CD Baby, and put my friends' CDs there.

Those four points were like a mission statement. I wrote them on the site, talked about them at every conference, and made sure everyone I worked with knew them.

The key point is that I wasn't trying to make a big business. I was just daydreaming about how one little thing would look in a perfect world.

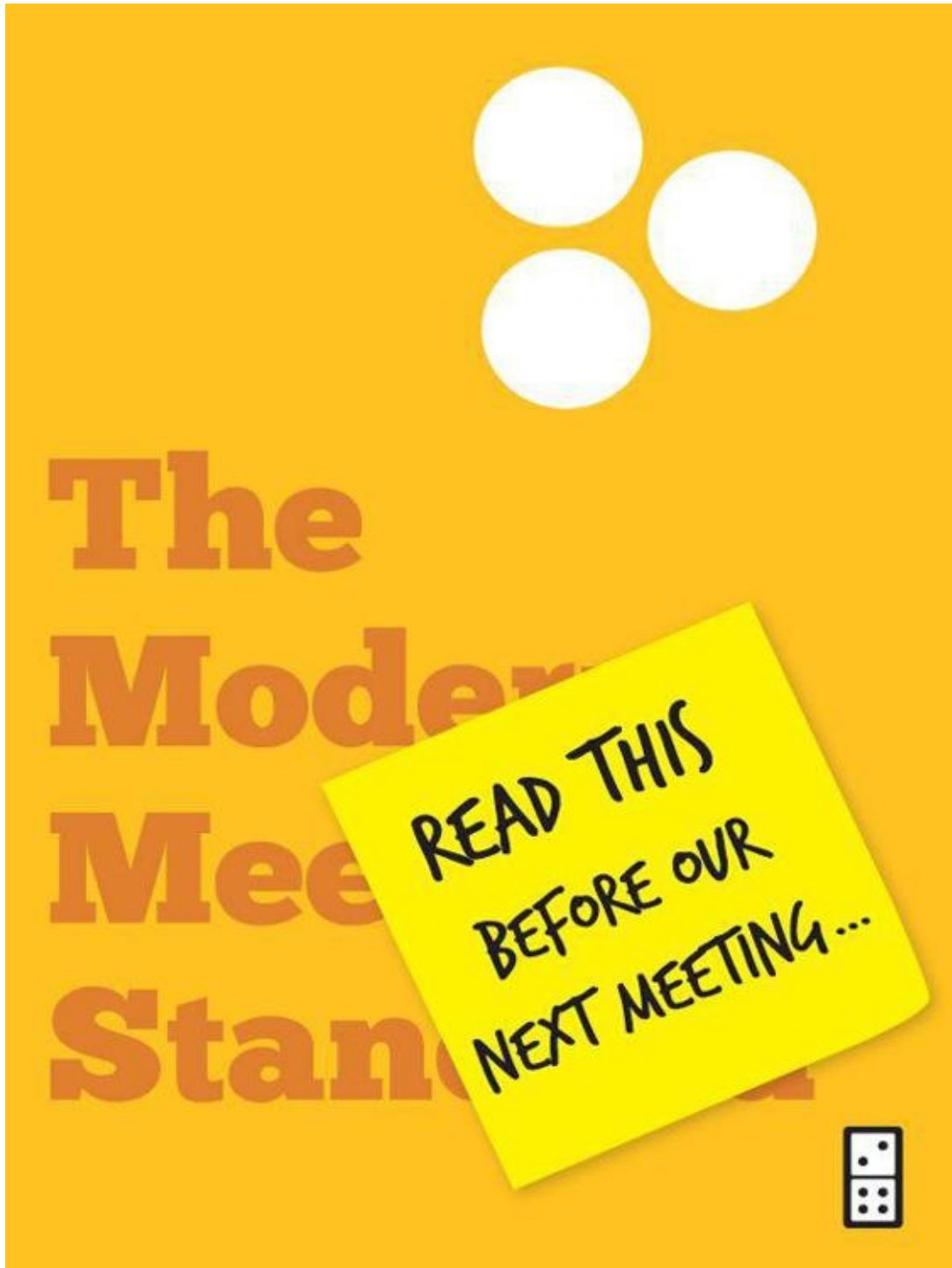
When you make a business, you get to make a little universe where you control all the laws. This is your utopia.

When you make it a dream come true for yourself, it'll be a dream come true for someone else, too.

View this Book:

<http://www.amazon.com/Anything-You-Want-ebook/dp/B00506NRBS/>

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How many times have you dreaded going to a meeting either because you viewed it as a waste of time or because you weren't prepared. Dread no longer: *Read This Before Our Next Meeting* not only explains what's wrong with "the

meeting,” and meeting culture, but suggests how to make meetings more effective, efficient, and worthy of attending. It assesses when it’s necessary to skip the meeting and get right to work. Al Pittampalli shares examples of transforming workplaces by revamping the purpose of the meeting and a company’s meeting culture. This book belongs on the shelf of any employee, employer and company looking to revolutionize what it means to do “work” all day and how to do it. Simply put: Stop wasting time. *Read This Before Our Next Meeting* is the call to action you (or your boss) needs to create the company that does the meaningful work it was created to do.

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Excerpt from Read This Before Our Next Meeting

Someone asked me the other day what I do for a living. I found myself hard-pressed for an answer. If he wanted to know my job title, or what industry I worked in, then all I had to do was to Nme m found mrecite what's on my business card. But he seemed sincere. He honestly wanted to know what I do most of the day, so I was honest, too: What I do for a living is attend meetings. Bad meetings.

I don't know how we've found ourselves in this place.

One mediocre meeting after another quietly corrodes our organization, and every day we allow it to happen. We've become so accustomed to long meetings, boring meetings, meetings lacking a clear purpose, that our curiosity about whether there might be a better alternative has faded into the background.

If we were to wake up for just a moment, we'd realize that two things are undeniable:

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* * *

1. We have too many meetings.

2. We have too many bad meetings.

* * *

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For years, we've been told by meeting experts that we have too many meetings. The experts remind us that if a memo suffices, we shouldn't have the meeting. But to no avail. Without hesitation, day after day, each one of us schedules meetings like the one we're about to attend today and, most certainly, tomorrow. A tragedy of the commons—everyone feels a benefit from calling a meeting, but few of us benefit from attending.

Over time, we've become nonchalant about bad meetings. If an operating room were as sloppily run as our meetings, patients would die. If a restaurant kitchen put as little planning into a meal as we put into our meetings, dinner would never be served.

But if that were the end of it, I wouldn't be writing this manifesto.

No, I'm sharing this with you, on the eve of our meeting because I've noticed something even more shocking than the colossal amount of time we're wasting at our organization. Worse than wasting time, the culture of useless meetings is changing us. It's becoming clear that our meeting culture is changing how we focus, what we focus on, and most important, what decisions we make

Yes. Meetings matter.

In simple organizations, not so much.

In industrial organizations, not so often.

In organizations that don't have to wrestle with change, not at all.

In our organization, though, and in Soug

We work in a business of complex problems. Meetings were the invention created to provide the needed coordination. We need meetings to ensure that intelligent decisions are made and to confirm that our teams are interacting effectively on complex projects.

What we don't need, though, are standard meetings, the mediocre meetings and the meetings that actually and actively cripple our organization.

Our meetings have evolved into something else entirely. We've fallen victim to mediocre meetings, not about coordination but about bureaucratic excuse making and the kabuki dance of company politics. We're now addicted to meetings that insulate us from the work we ought to be doing.

But this new way of thinking is not about blame; it's about opportunity. By changing a single tactic, by isolating and destroying the mediocre meeting, we can revamp the way projects are organized, decisions are made, and work gets done. We can reinvent the meeting and get back to the essential work of creation and coordination if we choose.

But we have to choose it. It's up to us and only us.

What could we do in a world with fewer meetings?

In a world with fewer meetings, we'd have more time for our real work, the work we do that actually propels our organization forward. The work we do that makes a difference to our company, to the customers, or to our shareholders: the programming, designing, selling, writing—the art.

We might finally have time to do what's important, not just what's urgent: mentor a colleague, connect with people in our industry, or practice our presentation to the board.

We'd have more time in the day to spend innovating and initiating new projects, instead of drowning in old ones that never seem to die.

Most of all, in a world where mediocre meetings had disappeared, we'd be forced to make and defend difficult decisions. When these mediocre meetings go away, so does the ability to adopt the easy compromise.

It's to serve this vision that I'm writing this to you. Not just for me, but on behalf of all of us, the entire organization.

The status quo must go. Now.

I have a solution, a plan I'd like to propose, a new standard we have to live by.

View this Book:

<http://www.amazon.com/Read-This-Before-Meeting-ebook/dp/B0057ZER34/>

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Want to learn how to maximize social media? When to do it, what words to use, who to tweet at? Look no further than Zarrella's *Hierarchy of Contagiousness: The Science, Design and Engineering of Contagious Ideas*. Social media master

Dan Zarrella has amassed years of experience helping people negotiate the often mystical place of social media marketing. Now, he has condensed those well-tried ideas into this concise and conversational book. *Zarrella's Hierarchy of Contagiousness* demystifies and deconstructs how social media works, who it benefits and why we all depend upon it to help our good ideas spread.

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Excerpt from Zarrella's Hierarchy of Contagiousness

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If you've read about social media or been to any marketing conferences, you've probably heard tons of advice like "love your customers," "engage in the conversation," "be yourself," and "make friends." I call this "unicorns-and-rainbows advice." Sure, it sounds good and it probably makes you feel all warm and fuzzy. But it's not actually based on anything more substantial than "truthiness" and guesswork.

Unicorns-and-rainbows advice is the modern-day equivalent of folksy superstitions and old wives' tales. Take a couple of time-honored adages repeated *ad nauseum*, add in the unquestioning awe of an unaware audience, and pretty soon you've got an entire industry based on easy-to-agree-with but unsubstantiated ideas.

But there's a problem. Myths aren't real and superstitions often do more harm than good.

After centuries of superstition in medicine, along came real science—hard facts and real data about what works and what doesn't. Medicine moved out of the Dark Ages, and scientists started making progress in the search for the causes of and cures for diseases. Now it's time for social media to move past mythology and into measurable outcomes. One of the most important things about the Web is that nearly every interaction can be measured and observed in aggregates of tens and hundreds of millions. We can gather more qualitative and quantitative data about human behavior than ever before. Yet the future of marketing—the very industry that is trying to push communications, business, and public relations forward—is built on advice that is based only on assumptions, clichés, and truisms.

To the snake-oil salespeople, success in using social media isn't something repeatable. It's not the outcome of a process; it's superstition, guessing, and praying.

Those of us who are part of the social media

To scientists, success in using social media is something you can iterate on, plan for, and learn from. Things that work can be analyzed to produce repeatable, dependable results.

The next time you see or read about or hear someone giving superstitious, feel-good advice about social media, question the person. Ask what data, what science, the advice is based on. Ask the person to prove what he's saying.

And most important, ask yourself: are you a snake-oil salesman or are you a scientist?

Ideas Don't Spread Just Because They're Good

In my previous life at a marketing agency, I sat around lots of conference room tables with bright marketers and businesspeople and was part of a very frustrating line of conversation. It all starts when someone says "let's make something go viral."

The conversation isn't frustrating because I don't like things that "go viral." I love contagious ideas and social media campaigns that work. The conversation is frustrating because of what comes next. When you ask what makes an idea go viral, the first response is that "it's good."

The concept that ideas spread simply because they're good is completely false. There are tons of good ideas that go nowhere, and even more bad ideas that spread like wildfire. There are clearly some other characteristics, some other factors, that determine how much an idea or piece of content will spread.

In his 1976 book *The Selfish Gene*, Richard Dawkins coined the word "meme" to mean a "unit of cultural inheritance." His point was that ideas evolve like genes do, and their success is based on their ability to spread, not on the benefit they provide to their hosts.

Marketers interested in making ideas that spread themselves need to understand those contagiousness factors, and this understanding needs to be based on real science, not on guesswork.

Our World Is Made of Memes

If you've ever seen the *Matrix* movies, you'll remember that their world was composed entirely of computer code. Everything people interacted with was built from computerized instructions. Similarly, our world is made of contagious ideas. Everything made by humans—from the chair you're sitting in, to the book you're reading—exists only because someone had the idea to invent it and that idea caught on, spreading from person to person.

The history of human culture is the history of memes. Politics, religion, wars, literature, and art are all built from building blocks of ideas that succeed in replicating themselves because of their ability to reproduce. Not because they're "good."

Social Media Provide Petri Dishes for Ideas [hes20;

Biological evolution occurs when there is a population of varied organisms and there is competition for scarce resources. Consider fruit flies; each individual fruit fly is a little different from the rest and they're all competing for a limited amount of food.

Remember the game called "telephone"? One person invents a phrase, whispers it into someone's ear, that person whispers it into the next person's ear, and so on, down a line of kids. The one at the end says what she heard, the originator says what he said, and invariably the phrases are different. Folklorists call the continuous remixing of ideas "communal re-creation." Every person who transmits an idea has an opportunity and often a motive to change the idea to fit his own mental framework. Consider a meme like lolcats. The entire point of the genre is to create new variants, and some—like the "cheezburger" variants—have become more successful than others.

Some of the most contagious brands serve as boxes of crayons, not rubber stamps. Brands that provide their users with a vocabulary and tools that allow them to play with and remix their own ideas succeed because these brands step back and let evolution do what it does best. Examples include campaigns like "South Park Yourself," which lets users customize cartoon characters, and the Doritos "You Make It, We Play It" contest, in which contestants created

commercials competing for a Super Bowl spot.

The Variants Best Suited to Selection Pressures Win

In the fruit fly example, the scarce resource is food. Fruit flies with mutations that make them best suited to finding the scarce food are the most successful. For most of human history, the scarce resource constraining the spread of ideas from common person to common person was memory. Until the last few decades, most people did not have the ability to share ideas with a large number of people. That power was reserved for the rich and powerful. Normal people communicated with their voices, and in order to be able to retell an idea or story orally, you have to be able to remember it.

The oral tradition and Homeric poems reflect this limitation. They're composed of clichéd phrases and mnemonic devices. These poems were created hundreds of years before they were ever written down, so they had to be full of memory tricks to ensure that they could be told for generations, passed on through word of mouth.

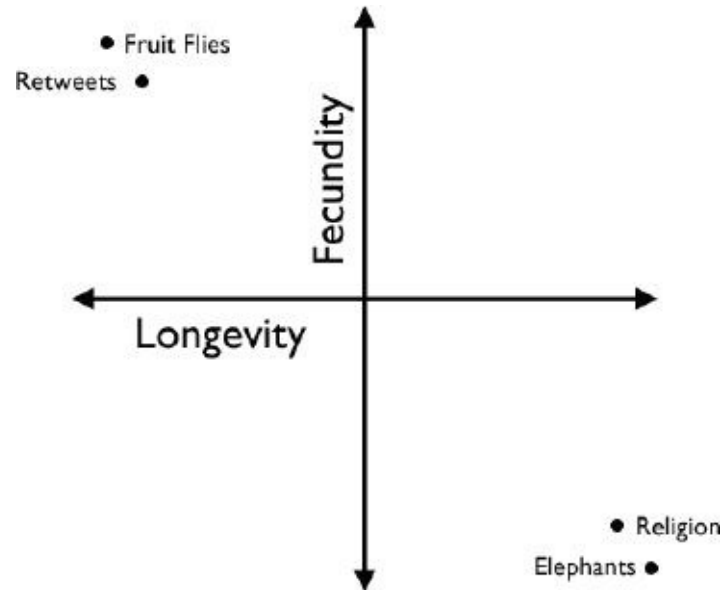
Because of the Web and social media, everyone now has the power to type out his ideas and spread them to millions of people. Memory isn't a big problem anymore. You have to be able only to copy and paste a link, not remember an entire epic poem. The change in the environment has introduced a different selection pressure into the mental landscape: attention. There are now so many ideas floating around the Web, they fight for simple awareness.

Reproductive Strategies: Fecundity vs. Longevity

All biological species in existence have developed some form of reproductive strategy. Reproduction strategies have two elements: fecundity and longevity. Fecundity refers to the number of offspring produced in each generation. Fruit flies can have thousands of children in their lifetimes, whereas elephants have only a few. Longevity is the lifespan of an individual. Fruit flies generally live around thirty days, while elephants live for six [liv] successful years or more.

If we put these two elements on axes in a quadrant graph, elephants and fruit

flies are on opposite sides, but they're both successful. Ideas, too, can be on either side of the chart. If I read and retweet your link, I may think about it for a few minutes, so it won't have a very long lifespan. But it will have high fecundity because I can easily send it to tens of thousands of people on Twitter. On the other side of the graph we find religions. Most religions spread slowly, growing through vertical transmission (parent to child), but once people adopt a religion, they typically follow it for their entire lives.



Zarrella's Hierarchy of Contagiousness

Good science involves the search for and development of unifying principles. For social media science, this means developing a framework for understanding the diffusion of ideas and for optimizing our content for contagiousness.

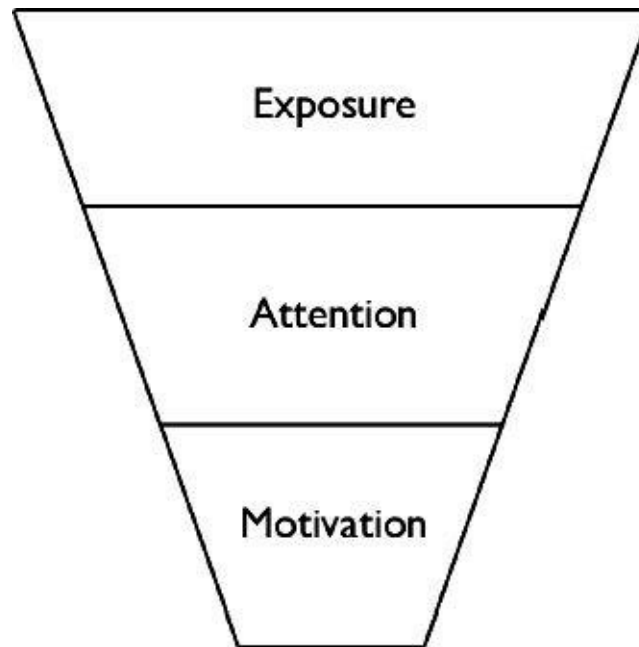
When I began taking martial arts classes a few years ago, my teacher was a big proponent of practical applications and he studied military combat training. He introduced me to the OODA military framework. OODA is an initialism in which the letters stand for the four stages in the combat decision-making process: Observe, Orient, Decide, Act. In every situation, an individual first observes his surroundings and gathers information, then orients this data with his previous experiences. He then decides the best path of action, and finally, he acts.

When I started working alongside a professional sales team, I was exposed to the AIDA concept. It represents the steps in a purchasing decision: Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action. The attention of the customer must be attracted, interest must be raised, desire must be established, and finally, the act of purchasing must be completed.

On the academic side, you're probably familiar with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, the pyramid of human needs, depicted with base physical needs on the bottom and self-actualization at the top.

I developed my framework as a model for the decision-making process that happens before someone spreads an idea. This framework describes the three criteria that must be met before someone will spread an idea in any format:

1. The person must be exposed to your content. This means that the person has to be following you on Twitter, be a fan of your page on Facebook, subscribe to your email list, and so on.
2. The person must become aware of your specific piece of content (the idea you want to spread). He has to read your tweet or open your email message.
3. The person must be motivated by something (generally in the content itself) in order to want to share the idea with his contacts.



Every piece of content, social network, and campaign has a vastly different conversion rate at each step of this process. For you to understand the scales involved, it helps to visualize a hypothetical set of percentages. If you email nine hundred people, and 20 percent of them notice and open the message, and then 10 percent of those readers forward it to a friend, your email message [mailliar was shared eighteen times.

At each step, you can change the numbers in your favor:

1. Increase the number of people exposed to your content. Get more email-list subscribers or Twitter followers.
2. Create attention-grabbing content. Do lots of testing on your subject lines to increase open rates.
3. Include powerful calls to action.

The keys to real science are data and experimentation. I've spent nearly five years conducting research into the why, how, and what of contagious ideas. In

the next three chapters (“Exposure,” “Attention,” and “Motivation”), I’ll present some of my most important findings and describe how you can use them to optimize your ideas for maximum spread at each step of my hierarchy.

First, I’ll explore my key tips for increasing your reach online, including how to get more followers and fans and how to keep them listening to you. Then I’ll analyze my data about attention and explain how to develop awareness-grabbing ideas and campaigns to leverage your audience. In the next chapter, I’ll present my investigations into what motivates people to spread your ideas.

The last chapter of this book will explain how to begin to conduct your own research and fine-tune the scientifically grounded best practices I’ve shown you. My goal is to educate you with real data and arm you with effective methodologies so you can take the science of social media to the next level.

View this Book:

<http://www.amazon.com/Zarrellas-Hierarchy-Contagiousness-Engineering-ebook/dp/B005BP1Y36/>

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End Malaria is more than a book, it's a great cause.

At least \$20 from each copy sold by us goes directly to Malaria No More to send

a mosquito net to a family in need and to support life-saving work in the fight against malaria. Malaria No More, an international advocacy organization, is on a mission to end malaria related deaths by 2015.

In addition to saving lives, buying this book means you can enjoy essays by 62 of American's favorite business authors, including Tom Peters, Nicholas Carr, Pam Slim, and Sir Ken Robinson. Organized into three main sections—Focus, Courage, Resilience—and eight subsections—Tap Your Strengths, Create Freedom, Love & Be Kind, Disrupt Normal, Take Small Steps, Embrace Systems, Get Physical, Collaborate—all essays in *End Malaria* share a desire to inspire readers to look within themselves for solutions to their everyday dilemmas and for motivation to realize their desires.

Editor Michael Bungay Stanier envisioned *End Malaria* as a book that would marry the best writers of the business world to a deserving cause. Michael assembled and edited this collection with a goal to leverage that breadth of expertise these writers represent for an issue of global importance.

At its core, *End Malaria* is about doing great work including the hard work to save lives. All of the writers in this collection and all of the partners involved have waived fees in order to raise the maximum amount of money.

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Excerpt from End Malaria

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FOREWORD

Propped up on my desk is a small poster that's served as a useful reminder as we've put this project together. It says:

Something is different because you've bought this book—two mosquito nets are going to Africa. That means for every book you buy, we get that much closer to our goal of ending malaria.

More than fifty extraordinary writers and thinkers have come together to contribute to this project and to write about what they think is most important to let Great Work flourish in your life and your organization. Great Work is the work you do that has meaning and that you care about and that has an impact—in short, the work that matters.

The essays are organized into three major categories—Focus, Courage, and Resilience—and then eight additional subcategories.

Whether you follow Danielle LaPorte's suggestions on the value of obsession, Brené Brown's ideas on the power of vulnerability, or Josh Linkner's thoughts on an idea schedule (or any of the hundreds of other good ideas that are here), I challenge you to pick one or two...or three...and act on them. Because that's what this book is really about: taking action.

With \$20 from each book going toward the purchase of mosquito nets in Africa, we hope you'll be proud to share this book and campaign with the world. To learn how you can spread this message, visit EndMalariaDay.com.

Michael Bungay Stanier, on behalf of The Domino Project, Malaria No More, and the many people who have contributed to the success of this book, End Malaria.

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THE BUSINESS CASE FOR ENDING MALARIA

End Malaria will strike some as an odd title for a business book. But the number-one lesson in storytelling? Never bury the lead. The purpose of this compilation is to raise funds for the fight against malaria—a preventable and treatable disease that is spread by mosquitoes and kills more than 750,000 people every year. *End Malaria* puts the charitable mission of this project at center stage.

This book is a great example of how doing good makes good business sense. By purchasing *End Malaria*, you've donated \$20 to Malaria No More to support our efforts to stop children from dying from the absurdity of a mosquito bite. But you've also given yourself the chance to learn from some of the biggest business greats in their respective industries, including Seth Godin, Alan Webber, Dan Pink, and Gina Trapani. Not a bad payout for helping families in Africa protect their children from a deadly disease.

Our approach to ending malaria is based on the same principles of any business. It starts with an idea and grows from there, taking one single spark of inspiration and adding just enough focus, courage, and resilience to make that idea a reality. Every good business sets out to accomplish a specific, deliverable goal, and fighting malaria is no different—our goal is to end malaria deaths in Africa by 2015.

The authors of this compilation came together to share their lessons learned in the business world and to give advice on how to get the most out of an idea, team, or business. Their shared goal is not just to do good work—but also to do good. By participating in this book—either by contributing to it or by purchasing it—you're helping African families defeat malaria once and for all.

Thank you for helping to put malaria out of business.

Timothy “Scott” Case—a technologist, entrepreneur, and inventor—is a Vice Chairman of Malaria No More. Scott was recently named CEO of the Startup America Partnership, where he’ll drive American entrepreneurship to create jobs and sustain U.S. global leadership. Previously co-founder of Priceline.com, Scott also serves as Chairman of Network for Good.

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WHAT YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO

Kevin Kelly founded Wired Magazine, was its Executive Editor for many years, and remains its Senior Maverick. His most recent book is What Technology Wants, which follows the best-selling New Rules for the New Economy. Follow Kevin on the Web at kk.org and see him speak on TED.com.

When you start your first job, all your attention is focused on not screwing up. Your chief goal as a newbie is simply to do a good job. Working smart means doing what is required.

As you gain confidence in your ability to complete a job, your task is to learn new things, to take on additional chores. At this stage, working smart means doing more than is required.

The next level is exploration. As the number of additional tasks you try increases, you begin to see what you are good at (and not so good at). Working smart here means trying as many roles as you can in order to discover what you are best at.

As you educate yourself about your own talent and ambitions, you graduate from doing a task right to doing the right task. It takes some experience to realize that a lot of work is better left undone. It might be busywork that is performed out of habit, or it might be work that is heading in the wrong direction. Working smart means making sure you are spending your time on jobs that are effective and that actually need to be done.

But the smart journey doesn't end there. If you really pay attention to the feedback of those around you, and cons cyoufont>

But recently it began to dawn on me that there is yet another stage beyond doing things well and with love.

It began with my experience as an editor of magazines. A large part of the editor's job is getting other people to complete stories based on ideas the editor (me) has. So I got used to handing over good ideas. But while I could assign most good ideas, every once in a while I'd get a great idea that I simply could not sell. I'd let it go, but a few of those left to die would be resurrected. So I would try again to give them away. Some got picked up, but a few would again get no assignment and retreat. A number of these ideas might go through this cycle a dozen times, until at the end I would have to face it: Here was an idea so good that I could not kill it, yet no one else wanted it.

It took me several times to realize that this was a signal. It said, "This is the one you have to do." These stories would become the best ones I ever wrote.

That's because these were the stories that no one else could write. What I had been inadvertently doing was weeding out good ideas that I could do (but others could do as well) from those few great ideas that only I could do. I had discovered that it was not enough to be able to do something well, and want to do it, and get paid for doing it. Work at its smartest means doing that work that no one else can do.

That's a pretty high bar. Becoming aware of what one can do well that others cannot is an immense challenge. In most cases, it takes our whole lives to discover this. This awareness arrives only through deliberate practice and with the help of others, but the payoff is equally immense. When you are doing something well that others want, and you are the only one who can do it, you will be uncommonly rewarded.

I think my experience may offer one useful tip in this process. When others are doing something similar to what you are, let that activity go because that means you don't have to do it! If people are stealing your ideas, ripping off your moves, or knocking off your style, and they are doing it well, thank them. You've just learned that this assignment is something you don't need to do because someone else can do it. This is scary because you are giving up things you do well, and you might think that after you surrender all the good stuff, there won't be anything excellent left for you. Trust me—there is more to you than that.

But it will take all your life to find it. All, as in all your days. And all, as in all your ceaseless effort. Your greatest job is shedding what you don't have to do.

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THIN-SLICING

Roger Martin is the Dean of Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto. He is the author of a number of books, including The Design of Business and Fixing the Game. Follow Roger on the Web at RogerLMartin.com.

The secret to making sure your work is as great as possible is to spend up-front time designing your work to involve the thinnest slice of you possible.

Our work is most fun and productive when we are doing only the work that we are the most qualified in the organization to do, and others around us are doing the work that they are the most qualified to do. Our work is least fun and productive when we are doing work that others around us are as or more qualified to do, but they aren't doing it because we have failed to design the work properly.

I think that generally, we take on too thick a slice of work tasks because often that is the way work is doled out. For example, the task of being Dean of the Rotman School of Management is doled out in one big bundle. If I actually did the bundle handed to me, I wouldn't be nearly as happy or productive as I am. The slice is so thick that I wouldn't be able to do the things that I am more qualified to do than those around me—such as writing articles and books that enhance the reputation of the School outside our home market.

In order to free up the time necessary to do those uniquely value-added things, I have had to design my job carefully to have other people do significant pieces of the thick slice doled out to me. For example, I had a very thick slice of budgeting, financial planning, and financial control. I also had a talented Chief Administrative Officer who had the capacity to grow into taking a significant part of the financial portfolio over from me. In my first two years as Dean, I spent disproportionate time redesigning the financial aspects of my job and that of the CAO, and I worked hard to make sure she and I were on the same page in terms of the School's financial strategy. Thereafter, she ramped up her responsibilities dramatically, taking on new challenges that made her happier

with her job, and freeing up many of my days. I did the same with the Vice-Dean, Academic, and the Vice-Dean, Programs, my Chief of Staff, and the heads of Marketing, Events, Advancement, and Alumni Affairs.

Together, these efforts had the effect of thinning my job down to the point that I could broaden it out dramatically. Many people ask whether I get any sleep when they look at the breadth of activities in which I engage. I answer that I love sleep and get plenty of it. They think otherwise because they imagine that I am taking a thick slice of everything I do. I don't; I relentlessly thin down.

One might wonder why everyone doesn't do the same thing. I believe the reason is that most people are unwilling to do the time-consuming design work up front. It is an investment—and a substantial one—in future personal productivity. If I had simply tossed a bunch of financial responsibilities to my CAO and wished her the best of luck, I don't think there would have been a happy ending. I had to work with her to make sure that she and I had a similar view of what we were trying to accomplish. I also had to work with my boss, the Provost of the University, to get permission to shift some of my responsibilities to my CAO. That work caused me to spend more of my time in my first year or two as Dean on the financial portfolio in my job than I would have spent had I just decided to keep the thick job. So there was a cost, a real cost. But I would argue that in the next decade, the savings have been easily ten times the up-front cost—and they are growing with each passing year.

But the key is that the CAO is happier—as are the others who have taken big slices of what could have and even should have been my job. And I am happier too!

View this Book:

<http://www.amazon.com/End-Malaria-ebook/dp/B005CKBF4I/>

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We Are All Weird is a celebration of choice, of treating different people differently and of embracing the notion that everyone deserves the dignity and respect that comes from being heard. The book calls for end of mass and for the

beginning of offering people more choices, more interests and giving them more authority to operate in ways that reflect their own unique values.

For generations, marketers, industrialists and politicians have tried to force us into little boxes, complying with their idea of what we should buy, use or want. And in an industrial, mass-market driven world, this was efficient and it worked. But what we learned in this new era is that mass limits our choice because it succeeds on conformity.

As Godin has identified, a new era of weirdness is upon us. People with more choices, more interests and the power to do something about it are stepping forward and insisting that the world work in a different way. By enabling choice we allow people to survive and thrive.

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Excerpt from We Are All Weird

Mass, normal, weird & rich

This is a book about four words and how the revolution we're living through demands we change our understanding of what they mean.

MASS is what allowed us to become efficient. Mass marketing and mass production and mass compliance to the rules of society have defined us. Mass is what we call the undifferentiated, the easily reached majority that seeks to conform and survive.

NORMAL is what we call people in the middle. Normal describes and catalogs the defining characteristics of the masses. Normal is localized—being a vegetarian is weird in Kansas but normal in Mumbai. What's normal here is not what's normal there. Finding and amplifying normal is essential to anyone who traffics in mass. Over time, marketers have made normal a moral and cultural standard, not just a statistical one.

WEIRD are what we call people who aren't normal. Your appearance or physical affect might be unusual by nature or by birth, but, like me, you're probably mostly weird by choice. Different by nature isn't your choice, and it's not my focus here. Weird by choice, on the other hand, flies in the face of the culture of mass and the checklist of normal. I'm interested in this sort of weird, people who have chosen to avoid conforming to the masses, at least in some

parts of their lives.

RICH is my word for someone who can afford to make choices, who has enough resources to do more than merely survive. You don't need a private plane to be rich, but you do need enough time and food and health and access to be able to interact with the market for stuff and for ideas.

The swami I met in a small village in India is rich. Not because he has a fancy house or a car (he doesn't). He's rich because he can make choices and he can make an impact on his tribe. Not just choices about what to buy, but choices about how to live.

...

Human beings prefer to organize in tribes, into groups of people who share a leader or a culture or a definition of normal. And the digital revolution has enabled and amplified these tribes, leaving us with millions of silos, groups of people who respect and admire and support choices that outsiders happily consider weird, but that those of us in the tribe realize are normal (*our* normal).

My argument is that the choice to push all of us toward a universal normal merely to help sell more junk to the masses is both inefficient and wrong. The opportunity of our time is to support the weird, to sell to the weird and, if you wish, to become weird.

The battle of our time

It's not between men and women...

or the left and the right...

or even between the Yankees and the Red Sox.

The epic battle of our generation is between the status quo of mass and the never-ceasing tide of weird.

It's difficult to not pick sides. Either you'll want to spend your time and effort betting on mass and the status quo—and trying to earn your spot in this crowded mob—or you'll abandon that quest and realize that there are better opportunities and more growth if you market to and lead the weird.

Two decisions you'll need to make within the hour:

1. Do you want to create for and market to and embrace the fast-increasing population that isn't normal? In other words, which side are you on—fighting for the status quo or rooting for weird?

and

2. Are you confident enough to encourage people to do what's right and useful and joyful, as opposed to what the system has always told them they have to do? Should we make our own choices and let others make theirs?

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PART 1: CAPITALISM, INDUSTRY AND THE POWER OF MASS—AND ITS INEVITABLE DECLINE

It's not an accident that our instincts, expectations and biases are organized around honoring the masses. We shun the outliers, train students to conform and reward companies that create historically efficient mass market products.

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The mass market redefines normal

The mass market—which made average products for average people—was invented by organizations that needed to keep their factories and systems running efficiently.

Stop for a second and think about the backwards nature of that sentence.

The factory came first. It led to the mass market. Not the other way around.

Governments went first, because it's easier to dominate and to maintain order if you can legislate and control conformity. Marketers, though, took this concept and ran with it.

The typical institution (an insurance company, a record label, a bed factory) just couldn't afford mass customization, couldn't afford to make a different product for every user. The mindset was: This is the Eagles' next record. We need to make it a record that the masses will buy, because otherwise it won't be a hit and the masses will buy something else.

This assumption seems obvious—so obvious that you probably never realized that it is built into everything we do. The mass market is efficient and profitable, and we live in it. It determines not just what we buy, but what we want, how we measure others, how we vote, how we have kids, and how we go to war. It's all built on this idea that everyone is the same, at least when it comes to marketing (and marketing is everywhere, isn't it?).

Marketers concluded that the more the market conformed to the tight definition of mass, the more money they would make. Why bother making products for left-handed people if you can figure out how to get left-handed people to buy what you're already making? Why offer respectful choice when you can make more money from forced compliance and social pressure?

Mass wasn't always here. In 1918, there were two thousand car companies active in the United States. In 1925, the most popular saddle maker in this country probably had .0001% market share. The idea of mass was hardly even a dream for the producer of just about any object.

At its heyday, on the other hand, Heinz could expect that more than 70 percent of the households in the U.S. had a bottle of their ketchup in the fridge, and Microsoft knew that every single company in the Fortune 500 was using their software, usually on every single personal computer and server in the company.

Is it any wonder that market-leading organizations fear the weird?

The End of Mass

This is a manifesto about the end of the mass market. About the end of mass politics, mass production, mass retailing, and even mass education.

The defining idea of the twentieth century, more than any other, was mass.

Mass gave us efficiency and productivity, making us (some people) rich. Mass gave us huge nations, giving us (some people) power. Mass allowed powerful people to influence millions, giving us (some people) control.

And now mass is dying.

We see it fighting back, clawing to control conversations and commerce and politics. But it will fail; it must. The tide has turned, and mass as the engine of our culture is gone forever.

That idea may make you uncomfortable. If your work revolves around finding the masses, creating for the masses, or selling to the masses, this chance,

is very threatening. Some of us, though, view it as the opportunity of a lifetime. The end of mass is not the end of the world, but it is a massive change, and this manifesto will help you think through the opportunity it represents.

Weird isn't just the new normal; it's actually a good thing

My ulterior motive in bringing you this manifesto has little to do with helping you sell more stuff and more to do with allowing us (all of us) to embrace the freedom we have. The freedom to choose. The freedom to choose to be weird.

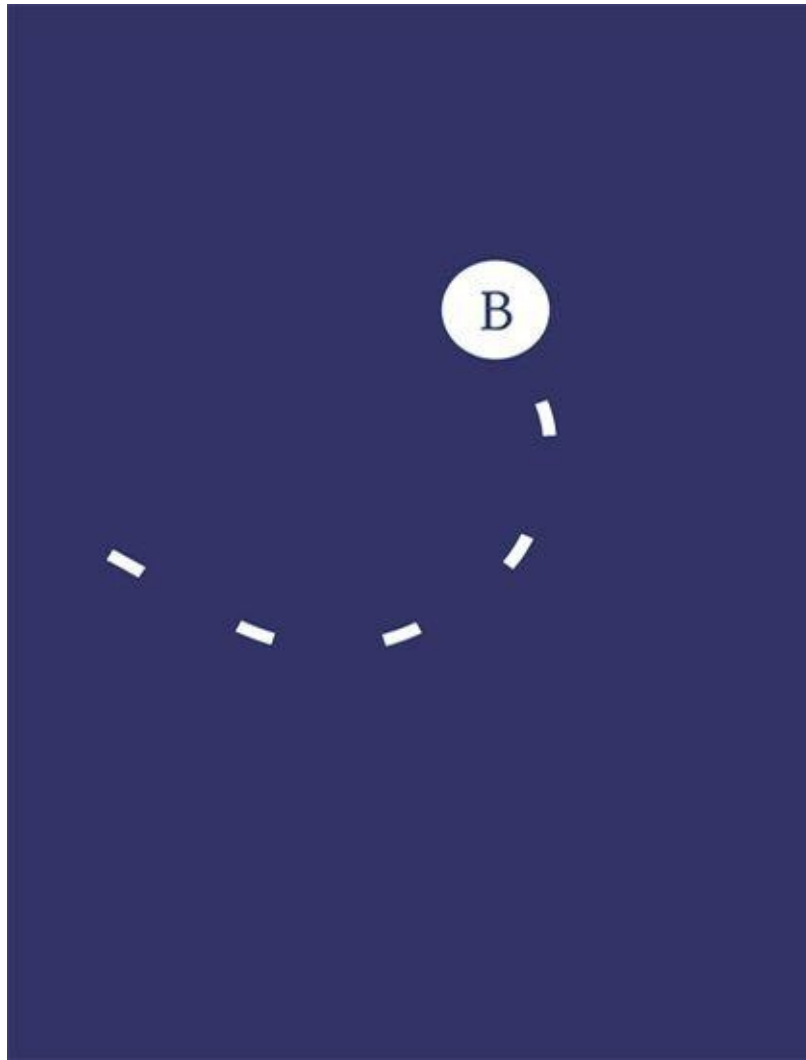
Wholesale compliance, like mass, is a relatively new phenomenon. We're coming to the end of a century of industrialism, a century when manufacturing, marketing, politics, and social systems were all in alignment, all organized to push us toward the center.

The way of the world is now more information, more choice, more freedom, and more interaction. And yes, more weird.

View this Book:

<http://www.amazon.com/We-Are-All-Weird-ebook/dp/B005G5DSLW/>

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In 2011, Sarah Kay performed her poem “B” at the TED conference in Long Beach, California to standing ovations. Now the video of that performance has been forwarded to mothers and daughters (and fathers and sons) all over the world. Originally written in 2007, “B” is a thank you note, a love letter, a wish, a

promise, a confession, and a secret. With beautiful illustrations by Sophia Janowitz, “B” is finally available in this whimsical, magical book.

This book is the perfect gift for every mother and every daughter. Short, touching and lovingly illustrated, it is a family tradition waiting for you to start.

View this Book:

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/B005QCNJ8W>

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Pick Four is an updated version of Zig Ziglar's legendary goal-setting program, *The Performance Planner*. Updated, simplified and introduced by Seth Godin, *Pick Four*, is designed to help anyone achieve his or her goals. Available only as a physical book, this edition includes four copies of *Pick Four*, ideal for sharing with friends or stretching your goals out over the year. Using Ziglar's philosophy that the key to success is directed action, this book challenges the reader to reach

outside his or her comfort zone and take the necessary steps to achieve success. Known for his genuine, honest and authentic approach, Ziglar imparts a decade's worth of strategies. *Pick Four* is an important tool for anyone looking to create positive change; guaranteed to put you on your path to success.

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