

THE BIG IDEAS

The Domino Effect

Is bigger than you may think.

Success Lists

Are better than to-do lists.

Extreme Pareto

80/20 to the max!

Habit Formation

= Using finite discipline wisely.

The Focusing Question

Helps us arrive at The ONE Thing.

Goal Setting to the Now

Is genius.

Time Blocking

= Productivity's greatest power tool.

The One Thing

Let's rock it.

The ONE Thing

The Surprisingly Simple Truth Behind Extraordinary Results

BY GARY KELLER WITH JAY PAPASAN · BARD PRESS © 2012 · 239 PAGES

“When you want the absolute best chance to succeed at anything you want, your approach should always be the same. Go small.

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

The way to get the most out of your work and your life is to go as small as possible...

When you go as small as possible, you’ll be staring at one thing. And that’s the point.”

~ Gary Keller from *The ONE Thing*

The ONE Thing.

The funny thing about this book? When I first picked it up last year, we were doing so many things with our biz (en*theos) that I (literally) couldn’t even read it. (Laughing. I kid you not.)

We had a pretty compelling story about how our “ecosystem” of multiple facets of our biz gave us the best chance to succeed, but the seeds were planted that we needed to focus. And, at the end of the year, that’s what we did—stripping back to all but ONE Thing: my work.

This book is phenomenal.

It’s a really (!) well written, incredibly simple, concise, practical analysis of the whys and hows of discovering and executing our ONE Thing.

It’s packed with Big Ideas. I highly recommend it. (Get it [here](#).)

We’re *barely* going to scratch the surface of this extraordinary book but for now, let’s have fun taking a quick look at some of my favorite goodness!

THE DOMINO EFFECT

“When one thing, the right thing, is set in motion, it can topple many things. And that’s not all.

In 1983, Lorne Whitehead wrote in the *American Journal of Physics* that he’d discovered that domino falls could not only topple many things, they could topple bigger things. He described how a single domino is capable of bringing down another domino that is actually 50 percent larger.”

Dominoes.

This is a REALLY Big Idea.

*“If you chase two rabbits
you will not catch either
one.”*

~ Russian Proverb

"Be like a postage stamp—stick to one thing until you get there."
~ Josh Billings

Quick overview: A domino can knock over another domino that's 50% bigger than it. Gary talks about the fact that the resulting GEOMETRIC growth is rather explosive.

If you start with a 2 inch domino, the 10th domino would be about as tall as NFL quarterback Peyton Manning.

The 18th domino? Imagine the Leaning Tower of Pisa.

The 23rd domino? Now you're looking at the Eiffel Tower.

The 31st domino is taller than Mount Everest while the 57th would get you nearly all the way to the MOON! Now *that's* some explosive growth! :)

All from a tiny little domino doing it's job knocking over another domino that's simply 50% bigger than it.

The point?

We want to line up our string of ONE Thing dominoes and focus ALL our energy on knocking over the.very.next.one—knowing that if we do that we'll be generating a ton of momentum that will help us knock over progressively larger ones!

As Gary advises: "The key is over time. Success is built sequentially. It's one thing at a time."

P.S. Check out [this awesome YouTube clip](#) of a Physics professor doing his own demonstration of the domino effect. He starts with a tiny, tweezer-size domino and his 13th is three feet tall. 2 BILLION times more force is generated between the 12th and 13th than the 1st and 2nd dominoes. That's how we want to roll. Start small. Focus. And create extraordinary power!

TO DO LIST —> SUCCESS LIST

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

~ Gary Keller

"Long hours spent checking off a to-do list and ending the day with a full trash can and a clean desk are not virtuous and have nothing to do with success. Instead of a to-do list, you need a success list—a list that is purposefully created around extraordinary results.

To-do lists tend to be long; success lists are short. One pulls you in all directions; the other aims you in a specific direction. One is a disorganized directory and the other is an organized directive. If a list isn't built around success, then that's not where it takes you. If your to-do list contains everything, then it's probably taking you everywhere but where you really want to go."

To-do lists vs. success lists.

Which do you have?

Are you trying to do *everything*? If so, Gary tells us you might want to slow down and remind yourself of Vilfredo Pareto's wisdom.

You remember Vilfredo, right? The wonderful 19th century Italian economist who discovered that wealth wasn't distributed equally. In fact, he found that back in the day 20% of the people in Italy owned 80% of the wealth.

As Richard Koch tells us in his great book *The 80/20 Principle* ([see Notes](#)): "The 80/20 Principle asserts that a minority of causes, inputs, or effort usually lead to a majority of results, outputs or rewards."

In other words, some of your efforts are MUCH more valuable than others. We need to separate the "vital few" from the "trivial many."

That brings us back to your to-do list.

Is it packed with EVERYTHING you "need" to get done? Or is it focused on the vital few things that will help you SUCCEED?

"Multitasking doesn't save time—it wastes time."

~ Gary Keller

Let's change that to-do list into a success list!

Gary walks us through how to approach that in the book. For now, let's take a look at how to take Vilfredo out for an extreme adventure! :)

EXTREME PARETO

"Pareto proves everything I'm telling you—but there's a catch. He doesn't go far enough. I want you to go further. I want you to take Pareto's Principle to an extreme. I want you to go small by identifying the 20 percent, and then I want you to go even smaller by finding the vital few of the vital few. The 80/20 rule is the first word, but not the last, about success. What Pareto started, you've got to finish. Success requires that you follow the 80/20 Principle, but you don't have to stop there.

Keep going. You can actually take 20 percent of the 20 percent of the 20 percent and continue until you get to the single most important thing! No matter the task, mission, or goal. Big or small. Start with as large a list as you want, but develop the mindset that you will whittle your way from there to the critical few and not stop until you end with the essential ONE. The imperative ONE. The ONE Thing."

So, we know we need to find the 20% that drives the 80% of our results. Got it.

Now... Can you find the 20% of your 20%? What about the 20% of *that* 20%? Do that long enough and where do you wind up?

With your ONE Thing. *That's* where we want to play.

Extreme Pareto.

(So.... Begs the question: What's your 20% that drives 80% of your results? The 20% of that? The 20% of *that*? What's your ONE Thing?!)

DISCIPLINE + HABIT FORMATION

"The trick to success is to choose the right habit and bring just enough discipline to establish it. That's it. That's all the discipline you need."

~ Gary Keller

"Discipline and habit. Honestly, most people never really want to talk about these. And who can blame them? I don't either. The images these words conjure in our heads are of something hard and unpleasant. Just reading the words is exhausting. But there's good news. The right discipline goes a long way, and habits are hard only in the beginning. Over time, the habit you're after becomes easier and easier to sustain. It's true. Habits require much less energy and effort to maintain than to begin. Put up with the discipline long enough to turn it into a habit, and the journey feels different. Lock in one habit so it becomes part of your life, and you can effectively ride the routine with less wear and tear on yourself. The hard stuff becomes habit, and habit makes the hard stuff easy."

The way [Gary](#) and [Jay](#) walk us through the relationship between willpower and habits is simply genius.

First, we need to realize the fact that willpower is FINITE. We only have so much of it in a given period of time (say a day). Gary tells us it's kinda like your cell phone. You start with a full battery at the beginning of the day. Green, baby! And, slowly, during the course of the day, the battery gets depleted so you're looking at red at the end of the day.

SAME WITH YOUR WILLPOWER.

As I'm sure you've noticed by this point, you only have so much to sprinkle around and it quickly gets depleted (hello, poor(er) afternoon/evening choices!).

The trick? We need to use that finite willpower *wisely*.

How? We need to use it to create HABITS that then go on autopilot.

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

~ Gary Keller

"Efficiency is doing the thing right. Effectiveness is doing the right thing."

~ Peter Drucker

"Connect today to all your tomorrows. It matters."

~ Gary Keller

As Gary brilliantly articulates: Habits require *much* less energy to *maintain* than to *begin*.

That's a HUGE distinction.

Although it takes a fair amount of willpower to CREATE a habit, it takes considerably (!) less to MAINTAIN it. Knowing that is gold. Then, we just need to identify the ONE behavior that will have the most positive impact in our lives and stick to it until we've locked it in as a habit.

How long does that take? We've all heard the "21 days" dealio but Gary tells us that the research tells us it's more like 66 days on average. (Range is 18 days to 254 days.) Some are easier than others. But don't give up too soon.

Decide on your ONE habit and go crush it.

What's yours?

What's the behavior that, when you engage in it consistently (every.single.day!) will have THE most positive impact in your life?

Not the 10 things. Or the 5 things. The ONE thing.

What is it?

Let's give it 66 days to lock it in, shall we?

THE FOCUSING QUESTION

"Most people are familiar with the Chinese Proverb "A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step." They just never stop to fully appreciate that if this is true, then the wrong first step begins a journey that could end as far as two thousand miles from where they want to be. The Focusing Question helps keep your first step from being a misstep."

That's funny.

Take the wrong first step in that 1,000 mile journey and you might just wind up 2,000 miles away from where you want to be. D'oh!

How do we make sure we're headed in the right direction?

The Focusing Question.

Check out the book for the full low-down.

Here it is: "What's the ONE Thing I can do such that by doing it everything else will be easier or unnecessary?"

That's your Focusing Question.

What's your answer? :)

GOAL SETTING TO THE NOW

"Goal Setting to the Now will get you there."

By thinking through the filter of Goal Setting to the Now, you set a future goal and then methodically drill down to what you should be doing right now. It can be a little like a Russian matryoshka doll in that your ONE Thing "right now" is nested inside your ONE Thing today, which is nested inside your ONE Thing this week, which is nested inside your ONE Thing this month. . . . It's how a small thing can actually build up to a big one.

You're lining up your dominoes."

Goal Setting to the Now.

"There is an art to clearing away the clutter and focusing on what matters most. It is simple and it is transferable. It just requires the courage to take a different approach."

~ George Anders

Gary walks us through a REALLY powerful way to set up your Big Picture long-term goal ONE Thing goal and then tie it ALL the way back to your right now One Thing goal.

Very, very cool.

Imagine those nested Russian dolls/your dominoes lined up. Go alllllll the way out to your big Someday Goal. What's the ONE Thing you want to do Someday?

Tie that back to your Five-Year Goal. What's your ONE Thing for 5 years out that's tied to your Someday Goal?

Connect that to your One-Year goal. What's your ONE Thing for this year that's tied to your 5-Year Goal?

Now, connect that to your Monthly Goal. Your ONE Thing that supports your Yearly Goal?

Let's tie that to your Weekly Goal. ONE Thing = ?

Your ONE Thing Daily Goal that's connected to your Weekly Goal?

And... we've arrived at right now.

So, let's tie it all together. Based on your Daily Goal, what's the ONE Thing you can do RIGHT NOW that would best serve that Daily Goal? ... which, of course, best serves that Weekly Goal which best serves the Monthly Goal which best serves the One-Year Goal which best serves the Five-Year Goal which best serves the Someday Goal?

Well, what is it? :)

That's a super-quick look at Goal Setting to the Now. Genius.

(Is now a good time to take the time to contemplate that ONE Thing sequence?)

TIME BLOCKING = PRODUCTIVITY'S GREATEST POWER TOOL

"Anyone who dreams of an uncommon life eventually discovers there is no choice but to seek an uncommon approach to living it."

~ Gary Keller

"Most people think there's never enough time to be successful, but there is when you block it. Time blocking is a very results-oriented way of viewing and using time. It's a way of making sure that what has to be done gets done. Alexander Graham Bell said, "Concentrate all your thoughts upon the work at hand. The sun's rays do not burn until brought to a focus." Time blocking harnesses your energy and centers it on your most important work. It's productivity's greatest power tool."

Time blocking.

It's HUGE.

As Gary says, "It's productivity's greatest power tool."

(That's a big statement. I like to take uber-smart + uber-successful people literally so let's pay attention to that one! :)

So, time blocking is big. Got it. What is it?

Simple.

"Focus is a matter of deciding what things you're not going to do."

~ John Carmack

When you've decided what you need to do, you block out a nice big ol' chunk of uninterrupted time to go CRUSH it.

Go to your calendar. Block out the time for your ONE Thing. If it's a one-time thing, you mark it off once. If it's a repeatable, every day Thing, you mark your calendar off for that block every day.

Once it's marked, NOTHING gets in the way of you exclusively focusing on that.

No email. No phone calls. No interruptions. Period. You simply crush it.

"To get through the hardest journey we need take only one step at a time, but we must keep stepping."

~ Chinese Proverb

That's time blocking in a nutshell. It's productivity's greatest power tool. Let's use it.

P.S. Keep this in mind: "If disproportionate results come from one activity, then you must give that one activity disproportionate time. Each and every day, ask this Focusing Question for your blocked time: "Today, what's the ONE Thing I can do for my ONE Thing such that by doing it everything else will be easier or unnecessary?" When you find the answer, you'll be doing the most leveraged activity for your most leveraged work.

This is how results become extraordinary."

THE ONE THING

"If you try to do everything, you could wind up with nothing. If you try to do just ONE Thing, the right ONE Thing, you could wind up with everything you ever wanted.

The ONE Thing is real. If you put it to work, it will work.

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

And make doing the answer your first ONE Thing!"

Well that's a SUPER quick look at this really (!!!) great book. Again, I highly recommend it. If you, like me, can be a *little* too creatively diffused at times, I think you'll especially appreciate its focusing mojo.

Perhaps your ONE Thing is to [get the book](#) right now and start rockin' it! Either way, hope you enjoyed and here's to our ONE thing!

B

Brian Johnson,
Heroic Philosopher CEO

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About the Author of This Note

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Brian Johnson is the Founder + CEO of Heroic. He's spent half of the last 25 years as a Founder/CEO and the other half as a Philosopher. Brian loves integrating ancient wisdom and modern science to help YOU become the best, most heroic version of yourself so we can create a world in which 51% of humanity is flourishing by 2051. Learn more at heroic.us.