

THE BIG IDEAS

Have a Clear Vision

But... Skip The Secret.

Think Big

Succeed. Repeat.

Work Your Butt Off

Reps, reps, reps, and more reps.

Don't Complain

Do something.

Break Your Mirrors

And be useful. TODAY.

"Granted, I am a lunatic. I don't do anything like a normal person. I don't have normal dreams. My risk tolerance for big goals and new challenges is sky high. Everything I do, I do big."

~ Arnold Schwarzenegger

Be Useful

Seven Tools for Life

BY ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER · PENGUIN PRESS © 2023 · 288 PAGES

"This book is called *Be Useful* because that is the best piece of advice my father ever gave me. It has stuck in my brain and never left, and my hope is that the advice I am offering you in the pages that follow will do the same thing. Being useful was also the motivating force behind all my decisions, and the organizing force around the tools I used to make them. Being a bodybuilding champion, being a millionaire leading man, being a public servant—those were my goals, but they were not what motivated me. ...

I wrote this book to honor those words and pay forward his advice. I wrote it in appreciation for the years I've had that he didn't, which I've used to make amends, to climb back from the bottom, and to build the fourth act of my life. I wrote this book because I believe that anyone can benefit from the tools I've used through every phase of my life, and that all of us need a reliable road map for the kind of life we've always wanted to live.

But most of all, I wrote it because everybody needs to be useful."

~ Arnold Schwarzenegger from *Be Useful*

Arnold Schwarzenegger is a FASCINATING human being and this is a *fantastic* book.

I basically read it in one sitting one fine Sunday in between supporting Emerson during one of his recent chess tournaments. I watched [Arnold's inspiring documentary on Netflix](#) so when I saw he released this book, I immediately got it, read it, and here we are.

I highly recommend the book. Get a copy [here](#).

Unless you've been in seclusion in the Himalayas for the last fifty years, you know who Arnold Schwarzenegger is. The young Arnold dominated the bodybuilding world then he became a leading man in Hollywood before serving for eight years as California's 38th governor.

In this book, he tells us about the seven tools he encourages us to use to create a life of deep meaning and purpose and to, in short... BE USEFUL.

The book is packed with Big Ideas. I'm excited to share some of my favorites so let's get to work.

HAVE A CLEAR VISION—SKIP THE SECRET

"Before I go any further, I recognize that this sounds like a lot of woo-woo manifestation mumbo jumbo, like The Secret and all those law of attraction books being peddled by BS artists. This isn't that. I'm not saying that if you visualize what you want, then it will come true. Hell no. You have to plan and work and learn and fail and work and fail some more. That's just life. Those are the rules.

What I am saying is that if you want your vision to stick, if you want to increase the chances of success looking exactly like you hoped it would when you first figured out what you wanted your

life to look like, then you need to get crystal clear on that vision and tattoo it to the inside of your eyelids.

You need to SEE IT.”

*“I relish the challenge of
having to climb back up.
It’s the struggle that makes
success, when you achieve it,
taste so sweet.”*

~ Arnold Schwarzenegger

That’s from the first chapter featuring the first rule of life: “Have a Clear Vision.”

As you may know, Arnold is renowned for the power of his vision.

In fact, [George Leonard](#) actually quotes him in his classic book *Mastery*: “All I know, is that the first step is to create the vision, because when you see the vision there—the beautiful vision—that creates the ‘want power.’ For example, my wanting to be Mr. Universe came about because I saw myself so clearly, being up there on stage and winning.”

In the book, Arnold tells us about how *clearly* he saw himself becoming Mr. Universe. Then how *clearly* he saw himself as a Hollywood star. Then how *clearly* he saw himself sitting at his desk as the governor of California.

And...

I love the way Arnold makes it VERY clear that we’re not talking about woo-woo Secret nonsense where we think that if we stare at our vision board long enough we’ll somehow “manifest” everything we’ve ever dreamt of.

Arnold’s wisdom and success is essentially the concrete expression of [Gabriele Oettingen](#)’s scientific wisdom in *Rethinking Positive Thinking*. Check out those Notes for what remains one of my all-time favorite books.

As Professor Oettingen says: “Based on two decades of research findings, replicated across a variety of research participants, contexts, and methods, you would be ill-advised to indulge in dreams about achieving your goals and then assume you’re well on your path to success. Life just doesn’t work that way.”

Her recommendation echoes Arnold’s...

START with a clear vision.

THEN rub it up against reality.

“You have to plan and work and learn and fail and work and fail some more. That’s just life. Those are the rules.”

So...

What’s YOUR vision?

And...

What’s your plan to make it a reality?

P.S. Although I didn’t tattoo my eyelids with my ultimate vision, I did tattoo my left forearm. Every single morning (and multiple times a day) I look down and say to myself, “Hero, I see a world in which 51% of humanity is flourishing by the year 2051.”

P.P.S. Here’s a quick look at Arnold’s seven rules:

1. HAVE A CLEAR VISION
2. NEVER THINK SMALL
3. WORK YOUR BUTT OFF
4. SELL, SELL, SELL
5. SHIFT GEARS
6. SHUT YOUR MOUTH, OPEN YOUR MIND
7. BREAK YOUR MIRRORS

*“In German, we have a
saying: Wenn schon, denn
schon. Roughly translated,
it means ‘If you’re going to
do something, DO IT. Go all
out.’”*

~ Arnold Schwarzenegger

"What I'm saying is, if you're going to do it, do it. Not just because going all in might be the thing that guarantees your success, but because not going all in will absolutely guarantee you fall short. And it's not just you who will suffer as a result."

~ Arnold Schwarzenegger

"Work works. That's the bottom line. No matter what you do. No matter who you are. My entire life has been shaped by that single idea."

~ Arnold Schwarzenegger

THINK BIG. SUCCEED. REPEAT.

"There's a story about Sir Edmund Hillary, the first person to summit Mount Everest. When he came back down to base camp, he was met by reporters who asked him what the view was like at the top of the world. He said it was incredible, because while he was up there he saw another mountain in the Himalayan range that he hadn't climbed yet, and he was already thinking about the route he would take to summit that peak next.

When you reach the mountaintop, it gives you a brand new perspective on the rest of the world, on the rest of your life. You see new challenges that were out of sight before, and you see old challenges in new ways. With this huge victory now under your belt, they all become conquerable."

Isn't that an *extraordinary* image?!

Imagine Sir Edmund Hillary.

He's the first person to summit Mount Everest.

He comes back down and reporters ask him about the view.

And... He says it was amazing because he could see his next climb!

[Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi](#) would certainly approve.

That story feels like it's perfectly pulled out of his brilliant book [Creativity](#) where he tells us: *"Like the climber who reaches the top of the mountain and, after looking around in wonder at the magnificent view, rejoices at the sight of an even taller neighboring peak, these people never run out of exciting goals."*

Arnold shares that story in the second chapter-rule: "Never Think Small" in the context of creating wins in your life and establishing a self-image as someone who succeeds.

He tells us: *"Thinking big and succeeding does something for us. It certainly did something for me. It became addictive, because I learned that the only limits that truly exist are in our minds. I realized that our potential is limitless—mine and yours!"*

All that makes me think of [David Goggins](#) and his "Cookie Jar" filled with highlights of him at his best that sustain him when he's at his worst.

As Goggins tells us in [Can't Hurt Me](#): *"That's one reason I invented the Cookie Jar. We must create a system that constantly reminds us who the f*** we are when we are at our best, because life is not going to pick us up when we fall. There will be forks in the road, knives in your f***** back, mountains to climb, and we are only capable of living up to the image we create for ourselves."*

With that in mind...

Think of a time in your life when YOU thought BIG, went for it, and SUCCEEDED.

Seriously. What's the ONE thing you're MOST proud of?

Feast on that Hero Bar.

"THAT'S LIKE YOU!!!" to dream big and dominate.

Now...

What's your NEXT big mountain?

Use your past success as fuel for your current quest, Hero.

TODAY.

"Regardless of the size of your dream, if you don't push yourself, if you don't give it your all then you're only letting yourself down." No man is more unhappy, the Stoic philosopher Seneca said, 'than he who never faces adversity. For he is not permitted to prove himself.'"

~ Arnold Schwarzenegger

P.S. At the end of this chapter, Arnold tells us: *"It's no harder to think big than it is to think small. The only hard part is giving yourself permission to think that way. Well, I don't just give you permission, I demand it of you, because when you're thinking about your goals and crafting that vision for your life, you have to remember that it's not just about you. You could have a huge impact on the people around you. While you are breaking new ground in your own life, you could be blazing trails for people you didn't even know were watching.*

How big you dream, whether you give it your all, or whether you give in at the first sign of trouble—these things matter. They matter for your own happiness and success, obviously. But they also matter because it could make a real difference in the world, far beyond what you can directly impact yourself."

WORK YOUR BUTT OFF

"I bet you and I have a lot in common. We're not the strongest, smartest, or richest people we know. We're not the fastest or the most connected. We're not the best looking or the most talented. We don't have the best genetics. But what we do have is something a lot of those other people will never have: the will to work.

If there is one unavoidable truth in this world, it's that there is no substitute for putting in the work. There is no shortcut or growth hack or magic pill that can get you around the hard work of doing your job well, of winning something you care about, or of making your dreams come true. People have tried to cut corners or skip steps in this process for as long as hard work has been hard. Eventually, those people either fall behind or get left in our dust, because working your butt off is the only thing that works 100 percent of the time for 100 percent of the things worth achieving."

Rule #1: Have a Clear Vision.

Rule #2: Never Think Small.

Then what? Then we get to Rule #3: "Work Your Butt Off."

Here's a hint on whether or not you're working hard enough...

"If the work of being great or achieving something special hasn't hurt or cost you anything, or at least made you uncomfortable, then I'm sorry to be the one to tell you, but you're not working hard enough. You're not sacrificing all that could be sacrificed in order to be all that you could become."

Arnold tells us that in his quest to become THE greatest bodybuilder ever he trained for FIVE hours PER DAY for FIFTEEN YEARS.

Get this...

At his peak, he was moving FORTY THOUSAND POUNDS OF WEIGHT PER WORKOUT.

I got goosebumps typing that.

Sub-chapters in this chapter include: "Reps, Reps, Reps," "Pain Is Temporary," "Follow Up, Follow Through," and "There are Twenty-Four Hours. Use Them."

Additional admonitions include: *"Don't be a lazy f*ck. Do the work. The only time you are allowed to use the phrase 'I took care of it' is when it is done. Completely."*

As I typed that and flipped back through my underlines and asterisks deciding which of the near-infinite number of quotable passages I can pull out for you, I was struck by the clarity of Arnold's demands and the ferocity with which he practiced his philosophy.

I also thought of [Phil Stutz](#) and his Big 3 things from which we will never be exonerated: Pain, Uncertainty, and CONSTANT Work.

"I actually think it was the American country singer and sausage maker Jimmy Dean who nailed it. He said, 'Do what you say you're going to do, and try to do it a little better than you said you would.' Follow up and follow through, fully."

~ Arnold Schwarzenegger

I also thought of Phil's favorite teacher [Rudolf Steiner](#) and the two things he said get in our way of actualizing our potential: Fear and Laziness.

I'll leave it at that for now. Actually... One more thing before we move on...

Know this: Arnold didn't approach his life with a "joyless urgency" as Oliver Burkeman puts it in *Four Thousand Weeks*. You simply won't put in the hard work unless you LOVE what you do.

Which is why Csikszentmihalyi said: "Creative persons differ from one another in a variety of ways, but in one respect they are unanimous: They all love what they do. It is not the hope of achieving fame or making money that drives them; rather, it is the opportunity to do the work that they enjoy doing."

And why Arnold says: "When did you ever have fun?" others will wonder. 'I never wasn't having fun', I'll say. 'Why would I bust my butt like that if it wasn't fun?'"

DON'T COMPLAIN ABOUT IT. DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT.

"But more importantly, I have a rule: no complaining about a situation unless you're prepared to do something to make it better. If you see a problem and you don't come to the table with a potential solution, I don't want to hear your whining about how bad it is. It couldn't be that bad if it hasn't motivated you to try to fix it."

And when exactly has complaining ever gotten someone closer to achieving their goals? You work to make a dream come true, you don't whine it into existence. Plus, problems and adversity are a normal part of every person's journey. Whatever your vision is, there is going to be struggle. Tough times. Things that bug you. You have to learn how to manage those moments. You have to get good at shifting gears and finding the positive in things. You have to know how to reframe the failure you experience and understand the risks you're undertaking. Confronting problems instead of complaining about them gives you the chance to practice all these skills."

That's from Rule #5: "Shift Gears."

More specifically, we want to "Shift Gears and Find the Positive."

Yes, we all have a negativity bias. And, yes. It's a lot easier to COMPLAIN about something than it is to actually DO something about the things you want to see changed. And... New Rule: No complaining about a situation unless you're prepared to do something to make it better. Period.

As we discuss all the time, the Victim complains, gossips, and criticizes. The Hero asks: "What do I want?" And, "What do I need to do to make that a reality?" Then they go do it.

So... What do YOU want to see in the world? And... What are you going to do about it?

Get on that. Go use all the inevitable challenges for fuel. Practice your philosophy and give us all you've got. Today.

P.S. Arnold also tells us about the Stoics and [Nietzsche](#) and their practice of embracing reality. Nietzsche put it this way back in the day: "My formula for greatness in a human being is *amor fati*: that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Not merely to bear what is necessary.... but love it."

P.P.S. Arnold shares a story about a time when an open heart surgery went nearly catastrophically bad. He tells us: "I let all those emotions have their moment in my mind, but then when the doctors finally left the room, I said to myself, 'OK, Arnold, this isn't what you would have preferred, but you're alive. Let's switch gears here. Now you have a goal, to get out of this place. And you have a mission to do all your exercises and achieve the results that will get you discharged. It's time to get to work.'"

"I have a rule. You can call me Schnitzel, you can call me Termie, you can call me Arnie, you can call me Schwarzie, but don't ever call me a self-made man."

~ Arnold Schwarzenegger

BREAK YOUR MIRRORS

"I am not sharing these stories with you as a way to tell you to do what I did, or to do what firefighters and commandos and first responders do. I am also not asking you to be Robin Hood or Mother Teresa, or to abandon your personal ambition or your personal possessions. I am only asking you to break your mirrors and do for others what you are able to do. I am asking you to give back. To pay it forward. To be as useful as often as you can. And I am asking you to do that for the same reason that any of us have chosen to give back. Because we owe a debt of gratitude to the people who got us where we are today. Because we can do for the next generation exactly what the previous generations did for us. Because it will make the world a better place. Because it will make you happier in ways you could have never anticipated.

One thing you learn when you've lived long enough and worked hard enough to see your wildest dreams come true, is that we're all connected. We're all in this thing called life together. It's not a zero-sum game. It's one that can have multiple winners. An unending amount of winners, really... as long as you make giving back part of life, when we break our mirrors so we can see all the people behind the glass who could use our help, that's when we all benefit.

It doesn't matter how young or old you are, how much or how little you have, how much you've done or how much you have left to do. In every case, giving more will get you more. Want to help yourself? Help others. Learn to start from that place, and that is how you will become the most useful version of yourself—to your family, to your friends, to your community, to your nation ... and to the world."

Those are the final words of the final chapter-rule called "Break Your Mirrors."

"Break your mirrors?" Yes.

Arnold quotes a passage from a speech his late father-in-law Sargent Shriver gave to the graduating class at Yale University in 1994 as he tells us to quit looking at a reflection of ourselves. We need to look at all the people *behind* the glass who could use our help as we commit to serving them as profoundly as we can.

In short, it's time for us to... BE USEFUL.

Not someday.

Today.

B

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About the Author of This Note

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Brian Johnson is the Founder + CEO of Heroic Public Benefit Corporation and the author of [Areté: Activate Your Heroic Potential](#). He's 50% Philosopher and 50% CEO and 101% committed to helping create a world in which 51% of humanity is flourishing by the year 2051. As a Founder/CEO he's made crowdfunding history and built and sold two social platforms. As a Philosopher/teacher, he's helped millions of people from around the world, trained 10,000+ [Heroic Coaches](#) from 100+ countries and created a protocol that science says changes lives. He lives in the country outside Austin, Texas, with his wife, Alexandra, and their two kids, Emerson and Eleanor. Learn more at [heroic.us](#).