



The One Thing You Need to Know

... About Great Managing, Great Leading, and Sustained Individual Success

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Author's Bio: During his seventeen years with the Gallup Organization, Buckingham helped lead research into the world's best leaders, managers, and workplaces. He drew on this research and used it as the basis for two bestselling books: *First Break All the Rules: What the World's best Managers Do Differently* (coauthored with Coffman) and *Now, Discover Your Strengths* (co-authored with Donald Clifton). Buckingham is considered one of the world's leading authorities on employee productivity and the practices of leading and managing.

Author's big thought: In this book Marcus Buckingham offers a dramatically new way to understand the art of success. This is an invaluable course in understanding achievement- a guide to capturing the essence of the three areas fundamental to professional activity- great managing, great leading, and career success.

Chapter Notes:

Chapter One: A Few Things You Should Know About the "One Thing"

Buckingham has chosen to do a deep dive on the three roles that are the most critical if you are to achieve something significant in your life and then sustain and expand this achievement, namely the roles of manager, leader, and individual performer

What is the one thing you need to know about managing?

- To get the best performance from your people, you have to be able to execute a number of different roles very well. You have to:
 - Select people effectively
 - Set Expectations by clearly defining the outcomes you want

- Motivate people by focusing on their strengths and managing around their weaknesses
- As they challenge you to help them grow, learn how to steer them toward roles that truly fit them, rather than simply promoting them up the corporate ladder.
- Without denying complexity, is there is one deep insight that underpins all of these roles and that all great managers keep in the top of their minds? The chapter on great managers supplies the answer.

What is the one thing you need to know about great leading?

- When you study truly effective leaders, the first thing that strikes you is just how different they are.
- The author's question for the chapter on great leading is "When you study models of excellence in leadership- whether 250-year-old models or those of the present- can you look past the superficial idiosyncrasies and identify one primary insight that explains why we excel?"

What is the one thing you need to know about sustained individual success?

- The key to sustaining success is to be able to filter all these possibilities and fasten on to those few that will allow you to express the best of yourself.
- You will learn the one insight you must never forget as you strive for individual success.

The Tests for the One Thing

- For a concept to emerge as the controlling insight, as the One Thing, the first test it must pass is: *It must apply across a wide range of situations and styles.*
- The second test is this: *The controlling insight must serve as the multiplier.* It should be more powerful and show you how to get exponential improvement. It should point to where you will net the greatest return on the investment of your time and energy.
- No matter what the subject, the controlling insight should not merely get you onto the field of play. It should show you how to win and keep winning the game.
- The third and final test: *The controlling insight must guide action.* It must point to precise things you can do to create better outcomes more efficiently and more consistently.

One Controlling Insight

- Buckingham uses the following example - What is the One Thing you need to know about a happy marriage?
- *Find the most generous explanation for each other's behavior and believe it.* If you notice a flaw, recast it in your mind as an aspect of strength.

- The strongest relationships over time are those in which each partner finds a way to build on his/her idealized image of the other.
- The author's aim in this book is not to deny the complexity of managing, leading or sustained individual success, but to penetrate it; not to make these subjects simpler, merely clearer.
- The common thread running through each of the three controlling insights is that success, whether it is as a manager, a leader, or an individual performer, does not come to those who aspire to well-roundedness, breadth, and balance. The reverse is true. *Success comes most readily to those who reject balance, who instead pursue strategies that are intentionally imbalanced.* This focus, this willingness to apply disproportionate pressure in a few selected areas of your working life, won't leave you brittle and narrow. Counter-intuitively, this kind of lopsided focus actually increases your capacity and fuels your resilience.

Part 1

The One Thing You Need to Know about Sustained Organizational Success

Chapter two: Managing and leading: What's the Difference?

- Everyone is fascinated by leadership. Leadership, people would have you think, is the secret sauce that, when ladled liberally over the whole organization, will lead to innovation, initiative, "intreprenurship", and creativity.
- There are all kinds of leadership recipes by many authors. The conventional wisdom seems to be that each employee is, or should be, a leader and that everyone can be a leader.
- Buckingham shares the basic premise that organizations require great leaders. In all of the studies of organizational excellence in which he has participated, excellence was impossible to explain without factoring in the role of the leader.
- Apart from agreement on this basic point, he confesses that his research contradicts pretty much everything else. The role of the leader and the role of the manager are utterly different. The responsibilities are different. The starting points are different. The talents required to excel at each are different.
- This doesn't mean that you cannot excel at both. If you want to excel at both, or if you want to choose between one and the other as your primary focus, you need to be aware of the difference.
- Second, it is inaccurate and not a little helpful to say that everyone, regardless of his or her place in the hierarchy, *must* be a leader. If everyone is trying to play leader, they will lose focus on their primary role.
- Third, because leadership requires natural talents, the notion that anyone can learn to be a great leader, no matter how appealing it is at first glance, is equally inaccurate and unhelpful. The same can be said for great managers. Obviously, you can improve your performance as either a leader or a manager through practice,

experience, and training, but if you lack a few core talents you will never be able to excel consistently in either,

- And finally, the most effective leaders are not-self-effacing and humble in his opinion. In fact, a powerful ego, defined as the need to stake grand claims, is one of their most defining characteristics.
- All great managers excel at turning one person's talent into performance. This, in all its simplicity, is the role of great managers. At their best, great managers speed up the reaction between each employee's talents and the company's goals.
- The chief responsibility of a great manager is not to enforce quality, or to ensure customer service, or to set standards, or to build high performance teams. Each of these is a valuable outcome, and great managers may well use these outcomes to measure their success. But these outcomes are the end result, not the starting point. The starting point is each employee's talents.
- The challenge: To figure out the best way to transform these talents into performance. This is the job of the manager.
- Great managers resolve the dilemma of being caught in the middle between the company and the employee. They know that they are paid by the company to make you want to give your all, but they also know that you will give your all only if you feel supported, challenged, understood, and stretched to be as successful as your talents will allow. As a result, great managers know they have no choice. To do their job, they *must* start with your feelings. They *must* convince you that, in their eyes, your success is paramount.
- In interviews, their commitment to each employee's success appears to be driven less by logic than by intuition and instinct. This is because one of the talents most characteristic of great managers is an ability to derive satisfaction from seeing tiny increments of growth in someone else. This talent is commonly known as *the coaching instinct*.
- If you don't possess this coaching instinct, much of this will seem foreign to you. On a rational level you will probably appreciate the need for managers to help other people grow, but you won't be fascinated by this growth, and drawn to it, and thrilled by it the way great managers are. In fact, because your brain is not tuned to a frequency that picks up people's small improvements, over time you management responsibilities will quickly seem like thankless chores.
- So if great managers turn one person's talent into performance, what do great leaders do? What unique thing do they accomplish that makes them great leaders?
- First we need a good definition of leadership. A great many people have taken a crack at defining leadership.
- When organizations say that each and every employee can be a leader, more often than not they are referring to four behaviors: initiative, creativity, the courage of

one's convictions, and integrity. Buckingham feels they err when they label these behaviors leadership. From all his research the only satisfactory definition he has found is: **Great leaders rally people to a better future.**

- The two key words in this definition are "better future." What defines a leader is his preoccupation with the future. In his head he carries a vivid image of what that future could be, and his image drives him on. This image, rather than goals of outperforming competitors, or being individually productive, or helping other people achieve success, is what motivates the leader.
- An effective leader might also be competitive, achievement oriented, and a good coach. But these are not the characteristics that make him a leader. He is a leader if, and only if, he is able to rally others to the better future he sees.
- His point is that leaders are fascinated by the future. You are a leader if, and only if, you are restless for change, impatient for progress, and deeply dissatisfied with the status quo.

- If the core talent of great managers is an instinct to coach others toward success, then optimism and ego are the talents underpinning all great leadership. The need for optimism is almost self-evident. As a leader you must believe, deeply, instinctively, that things can get better. You see the future so vividly, so distinctly that you can't get it out of your head. You have no choice but to do everything in your power to make them real.
- If you don't feel this way, first, you will be right more often than the optimist. After all, there are many more ways that things can go wrong than right. And second, there are jobs for you, jobs in which an innate skepticism can serve as a distinct advantage. Properly defined, the opposite of a leader isn't a follower. The opposite of a leader is a pessimist.
- That doesn't mean that leaders are wide-eyed dreamers, delusional about or dismissive of present realities. On the contrary, the best leaders are markedly clear-eyed when it comes to assessing the challenges of the present. It simply means that, despite their realistic assessment of present challenges, they nonetheless believe that they have what it takes to overcome these challenges and forge ahead.

- The need for a leader to have a strong ego is less self-evident. A review of the business pages reveals a motley crew of executives all of whom appear to have succumbed to a surfeit of ego. The list is depressingly long and growing. The reputations of these executives fell not because their egos were too strong but because their principles weren't strong enough. They had too little integrity, not too much ego.
- The key thing about leading is not only that you envision a better future, but also that you believe, in every fiber of your being, that you are the one to make this

future come true. You are the one to assume the responsibility for transforming the present into something better.

- These leaders are not humble in their assessment of their own abilities. Virtually nothing about them is humble. The best leaders have a strong expertise orientation. They are curious and inquisitive, always on the lookout for the small insight, the novel perspective that might nudge them over the tipping point and give them an edge over their competition.
- Nor does it mean that they are brash or abrasive. As Jim Collins pointed out, many of the more effective leaders are quite reserved.
- Nor does it mean they are egomaniacal. The difference between a leader with a powerful ego and an egomaniac is how the ego is channeled. The effective leader takes his self-belief, his self-assurance, and presses them into the service of an enterprise bigger than himself. For the egomaniac, the self is the enterprise.
- If you want to help a budding leader, challenge him to be more inquisitive, more curious, and thereby more vivid in describing his image of a better future, then encourage him to channel his cravings and his claims toward making his image come true.
- The necessity for leaders to possess optimism and ego serves to answer the age-old question: Are leaders born or are they made? They are born. A leader is born with an optimistic disposition or she is not. To lead effectively, you must be unfailingly, unrealistically, even irrationally optimistic. Like it or not, this is not learnable.
- The same applies to ego. Through careful nurturing you can make a person feel more self-confident and more self-assured than he used to be, but nothing you can do will ever imbue him with the kind of powerful, claiming ego that so characterizes the best leaders.
- None of this implies that a person cannot be helped to improve as a leader. She can be helped to refine her picture of the future, even to change it entirely, and to employ ever more effective ways to present this future to her followers. But what you cannot help her do is see a better future, believe in this future, and have faith that she is the one to create it.
- From all of this, you can see the vital distinction between the role of the manager and that of the leader. Each is critically important to the sustained success of the organization, but the focus of each is entirely different.
- The manager's starting point is the individual employee. He looks at her palette of talents, skills, knowledge, experience, and goals, and then uses these to design a specific future in which the individual can be successful. That person's success is his focus.
- The leader sees things differently. He starts with his image of the future. This better future is what he talks about, thinks about, ruminates on, designs, and

refines. Only with this image clear in his mind does he turn his attention to persuading other people that they can be successful in the future he envisions. But, through it all, the future remains his focus. You can play both roles, of course, but if you do, you must know when to change gears. When you want to manage, begin with the person. When you want to lead, begin with the picture of where you are headed.

Chapter three: The One Thing You Need to Know: Great Managing

The four skills you simply must learn if you are not to fail as a manager are:

- *You must select good people.* When you hire someone you are hiring a human being blessed with certain predictable patterns of emotion, learning, memory, and behavior. If these patterns are not to your liking, you are going to have to spend a tremendous effort to eradicate them and forge entirely new ones. It will serve you well to take extreme care when inviting a new person onto your team.
- When it comes to building the right team, time is nonnegotiable. You will spend the time. The only question is where you will spend it: on the front end, carefully selecting the right person, or at the back end, desperately trying to transform the person into who you wished he was in the first place.
- The guidelines are: Know what talents you are looking for. Ask open ended questions and have clearly in mind what you are listening for.
- *Listen for specifics.* Conventional wisdom holds that the best predictor of future behavior is *frequent* past behavior. You need to listen for specific examples of where and when the person has actually done what you are asking him about.
- *Define clear expectations.* Confusion retards everything, from efficiency and focus to teamwork and partnership all the way to pride and satisfaction. Research reveals that less than 50 percent of employees claim that they know what is expected of them at work. While all managers know that setting clear expectations is paramount, most struggle to execute. Good managers bring clarity by doing so "constantly". They meet with their people four or five times a year to check progress, offer advice, and agree on course corrections. They begin at the point of hire and then continue to clarify expectations in virtually every meeting, every conversation, and every presentation.
- *Praise and recognition:* if we want to see specific behaviors repeated, we must make sure that these behaviors meet with consequences that are certain, immediate, and positive. We must come to be known as a manager that will recognize excellence immediately and praise it. Research reveals that less than a third of people report that they frequently receive praise or recognition for good work. Good managers don't need reminding of the power of praise. They seem to know instinctively that praise isn't merely a reaction to good performance; it is a cause of it. Good managers say that you should never worry about over praising someone so long as

the performance warrants it. Excellence is rarely a function of one-off achievement, but rather is a result of repeated practice and incremental improvement. Your job as a manager is to notice these incremental improvements and celebrate them.

- Conversely, if you withhold praise for good behaviors in the misguided belief that otherwise the employee will become complacent, then over time you will begin to see fewer and fewer of these behaviors. So if you want to stimulate excellent performances from your people, make immediate praise a constant, predictable. And certain part of your management style.
- *You must show care for your people.* A multitude of research studies confirm that employees are more productive when they feel that someone at work cares about them. It also reveals that employees who feel cared about are less likely to miss work days, less likely to have accidents on the job, less likely to file workers' compensation claims, less likely to steal, less likely to quit, and more likely to advocate the company to friends and family.
- As the manager, you must set the example and forge bonds of your own. Be deliberate about it. Be explicit. Tell your people that you care about them. Tell them that you want them to succeed. Keep their confidences. Learn about their personal lives, and as far as you are able, be willing to accommodate the challenges of their personal lives into their work schedules.
- Good managers are willing to deal quickly with poorly performing employees precisely because they want each employee to succeed. Counterintuitive though it may sound, the caring manager confronts poor performance early.
- Mediocre managers assume (or hope) that their employees will be motivated by the same things, driven by the same goals, desire the same kind of relationships, and learn roughly in the same way. They believe that the job of the manager is to mold, or transform, each employee into the perfect version of the role, Great managers don't. They do the opposite. The one Thing all great managers know about great managing is this:
Discover What is Unique About Each Person and Capitalize on It.
- Your employees will differ in terms of how they think, how they build relationships, how they learn, how altruistic they are, how patient, how much of an expert they need to be, how prepared they need to feel, what drives them, what challenges them, and what their goals are.
- The grand majority of these differences are enduring and resistant to change. Given that your most important resource as a manager is time, by far the most effective way to invest *your* time is to identify exactly how each employee is different and then figure out how you can best incorporate these differences into your overall plan of action.

- Great managing is about release. It is about constantly tweaking the world so that the unique contribution, the unique needs, the unique style of each employee can be given free rein. Your success as a manager will depend almost entirely on your skill at doing this.
- Great managers do not capitalize on each person's uniqueness because they made the mistake of hiring mediocre employees. They do so because, even when they are blessed with the most talented of employees, they know the power of individualization is extraordinarily far reaching.
- Capitalizing on each person's uniqueness saves you time. Even the most talented employees are not perfectly well-rounded. The inefficient manager is one who fights against these imperfections and tries to eradicate them.
- Finding and capitalizing on each person's uniqueness makes each person more accountable.
- Capitalizing on what is unique about each person builds a stronger sense of team. This is counterintuitive, but the more you think about it, the more compelling it becomes. The strongest teams are built around the concept of interdependency. You make people need one another.
- Finally, when you capitalize on what is unique about each person you introduce a healthy degree of disruption into your world. You shuffle existing hierarchies and assumptions about who is allowed to do what. You shuffle existing beliefs about where the true expertise lies.
- When you capitalize on what is unique about each person, you stimulate individual excellence. And when people excel, they not only stand out, they also stand tall. This is to say their vision is better.
- How can you determine whether you should continue to try to capitalize on a person's uniqueness, or whether the person's eccentricities are so extreme that you should cut your losses and find someone else for the role? If the person is making a significant contribution to the organization, it is often worth shuffling existing arrangements in order to accommodate his uniqueness. If he isn't, it isn't. The point is to help him contribute his utmost.
- While acknowledging the link between individualization and performance, great managers are intrigued by each employee's uniqueness not simply because it serves to drive performance, but also because they can't help it. They could no more ignore them than ignore their own needs and desires.
- There are certain skills and insights you can learn to refine this talent and thereby solidify it as the essence of your approach to managing.

Three levers

- There are three things you need to learn about a person in order to manage him effectively, three levers that you can pull to help him perform. First you need to learn his strengths and weaknesses; second, his triggers; and third, his unique style of learning.

Strengths and weaknesses

- What separates the great manager from the mediocre is what he decides to do with these strengths and weaknesses once he's identified them. The great manager believes that the most influential qualities of a person are innate and therefore that the essence of management is to deploy these innate qualities as effectively as possible and so drive performance.
- The great manager is not preoccupied with concerns about overconfidence. Instead his greatest fear is that he will fail to help each person turn her innate talents into performance.
- Current research suggests that accurate self-awareness rarely drives performance, and that in many circumstances, it actively retards performance. Only self-assurance drives performance, even when this self-assurance turns out to be unrealistic. As the research reveals, people who have a slightly unrealistic confidence in their abilities outperform those whose self-assessments were more realistic. These overconfident optimists are also more persistent and more resilient when faced with obstacles. If you want a person to achieve his utmost and to persist in the face of resistance, reinforce his belief in his strengths, even overemphasize these strengths, and give him an almost unreasonable confidence that he has what it takes to succeed. Your job is not to provide him with a realistic picture of the limits of his strengths and the liability of his weaknesses - your job is to get him to perform. It is to build his self-assurance, not his self-awareness.
- To combat nonchalance in an employee, build up the size of the challenge. Do whatever it takes to get his attention and make him take his challenge seriously.
- The state of mind you should try to create in him is one where he has a fully realistic assessment of the difficulty of the challenge ahead of him, and at the same time an unrealistically optimistic belief in his ability to overcome it.
- Figure out whether the person's struggles are being caused by his lack of skills or knowledge rather than by a lack of talent. The first strategy is to provide him with training in the skills or knowledge he lacks, allow him some time to incorporate these into his behavior, and then see whether his performance improves.
- A second strategy is to find him a partner, someone whose talents are strong in precisely those areas where his are weak.
- A third strategy is to insert into the employee's world a technique or trick that accomplishes through discipline what the employee is unable to accomplish through instinct.
- The final strategy is the most extreme. If skills and knowledge training produce no improvement, if complementary partnering proves impractical, if no nifty technique can be found, you are going to have to rearrange the employee's working world so that his weakness is no longer in play.

Triggers

- Great managers are always on the lookout for people's triggers. They know that a person's strengths, although powerful in their own right, will require precise triggering to keep them switched on. Squeeze the right trigger and the person will be more likely to push himself harder and to persevere in the face of resistance. Squeeze the wrong one, and the person may well shut down.
- The tricky thing about triggers is that they come in a myriad of forms. One employee's might be tied to time of day, another's to you as the boss. Sometimes you'll trigger an employee's strengths simply through the way you present a challenge.
- Of all the different types of triggers, by far the most powerful is the recognition trigger. Great managers realize that each employee is playing to a slightly different audience. If you are to excel as a manager you must be able to match the employee to the audience he values most. For example, one employee's audience might be his peers, another's might be you. Tailoring praise to fit the person is mostly the manager's responsibility. However this doesn't mean that organizations are completely off the hook. There's no reason why a large organization couldn't take this individualized approach to recognition and scale it across every employee.

Style of learning

- The third thing you need to know about a person is his particular style of learning. Each person's mental receiver is tuned to a distinct frequency. Broadcast your message on the wrong frequency, and no matter how sage your advice or how carefully crafted your lesson plan, it won't be heard.
- A review of adult-learning theory reveals that three styles of learning pre-dominate. Each of the three will require a slightly different coaching technique from you. Certain employees may rely on a combination of two or perhaps even all three styles.
- First there is **Analyzing**. The best way to teach an Analyzer is to give her ample time in the classroom. Role-play with her. Post-mortem with her. Break her performance down into its component parts so that she can then carefully build it back up into a total performance. Always allow her time to prepare. Don't expect her to learn much by throwing her into the middle of a new situation and telling her to wing it.
- The second dominant learning style is **Doing**. And in direct contrast to the Analyzer, the best way to teach a Doer is to throw him in the middle of a new situation and tell him to wing it. The most powerful learning moments for the Analyzer occur prior to the actual performance, whereas for the Doer they occur *during* the performance.
- Finally, there's **Watching** or to use the more technical term, "imitation". Watchers won't learn much if you break a task down into its component parts and ask them to

practice each part or if you ask them to role-play with you. Watchers are often viewed as poor students but they aren't necessarily poor learners. Watchers can learn a great deal, but only when they are given the chance to see the total performance. If you're trying to teach a watcher, by far the most effective technique is to get her out of the classroom, take her away from the manuals, and make her ride shotgun with one of your most experienced performers.

- The best way to identify these three levers is to ask a few simple questions and listen to the answers. For example, for strengths -
 1. What was the best day at work you've had in the last three months? What were you doing? Why did you enjoy it so much?
 2. For weaknesses: What was your worst day at work in the last three months? What were you doing? Why did it grate on you so much?
 3. For triggers: What was the best relationship with a manager that you've ever had? What made it work so well?
 4. For triggers: What was the best praise or recognition you've ever received? What made it so good?
 5. For unique style of learning: When in your career do you think you were learning the most? Why did you learn so much? What's the best way for you to learn?

Chapter four: The One Thing You Need to Know: Great Leading

- The ability to cut through individual differences and fasten upon few emotions or needs that all of us share is at the core of great leadership. This ability is called *extended empathy*. No matter how admirable his achievements, or how valuable his expertise, when a leader lacks extended empathy, when he loses sight of those things we all share, he loses the ability to lead.
- The job of great leaders is to rally people toward a better future, and as such, they are not intermediaries. They are instigators. Driven by their compulsion for a better future, their challenge is to do everything in their power to get other people to join together to make this future come true. They will perform this role well only when they find a way to make people, regardless of each person's uniqueness, excited by and confident in this better future. If, through their word, actions, images, pictures, and scores, they can tap into those things we all share, they will succeed as leaders. If they can't, they will struggle.
- So, while great managers discover what is unique about each person and capitalize on it, great leaders do the inverse. The One Thing every great leader knows he must do this:

Discover What is Universal and Capitalize on it.

Five fears, five needs, one focus

- Despite our differences, we all share a great deal.

- Every leader is indebted to the anthropologist Donald Brown for giving us the raw details for describing these universals of human nature. These universals imply that all humans share a common experience, we share common virtues and vices, and therefore that, if we are inquisitive enough, if we listen closely enough, we should be able to empathize with and understand one another.
- For the leader, the list offers clues to the individuals he can call upon to rally his followers to a better future. These universals can be readily distilled down to five; we can view them as five pairings of fears and needs.
- I'll briefly describe the five - all of them have some relevance to your efforts at leading people - and then identify which of the five should command your greatest attention as a leader.
 1. *Fear of Death (our own and our family's) - the need for security.* Some of our most basic needs stem from our urge to secure our lives and the lives of our loved ones.
 2. *Fear of the Outsider - The need for community.* We are herd animals, and we organize ourselves to keep the herd strong.
 3. *Fear of the Future - The Need for Clarity.*
 4. *Fear of Chaos - the need for authority.* Two universals reveal just how much we all fear chaos. First, every society has devised its own story of how the world came to be, and in each, in each creation myth, the world was created out of chaos. Second, one of the most universal of human traits is our need to classify things. And out of our desire for order springs our need for authority.
 5. *Fear of Insignificance - the need for respect.* Every society sees the individual person as having a worth and a value that is distinct from the group's. Thus, in every society, we find a craving for prestige and for the respect that comes with it.
- The more you understand the interplay of these fears and needs in your people, the more effective a leader you will be. Although each is relevant to your efforts at leading, one of them demands your greatest focus.
- If you can grapple with the third universal, with the fear of the future and somehow neutralize it, even turn it into something positive, you will have positioned yourself to pull off something truly significant as a leader. Fear of the unknown does exist, and from an evolutionary perspective, it's good that it does. If you are going to succeed as a leader, you simply must find a way to engage our fear of the unknown and turn it into spiritedness. If great managers are catalysts, speeding up the reaction between the individual's talents and the company's goals, then great leaders are alchemists. Somehow they are able to transform our fear of the unknown into confidence in the future.
- By far the most effective way to turn fear into confidence is to be clear; to define the future in such vivid terms, through your actions, words, images, pictures,

heroes and scores that we can all see where you, and thus we, are headed. Clarity is the antidote to anxiety, and therefore clarity is the preoccupation of the effective leader.

The Points of Clarity

1. Who Do We Serve?

- You, the leader, must be clear about whom you are choosing to serve because if we, your followers, are going to follow you into the future, we need to know precisely whom we are trying to please. Tell us explicitly, vividly, who are main audience is. When you do this with clarity, you give us confidence - confidence in our judgment, confident in our decisions, and ultimately, confidence in our ability to know where to look to determine if we have fulfilled our mission.
- Each organization does serve many masters. How does the effective leader reconcile this truth with the need to be brilliantly clear in answering this question? One solution is to focus on one master, become expert at serving this master, and through "the power of the ripple effect," you will wind up serving them all.
- A leader doesn't need to be clear on all points. One of the areas in which he should allow significant ambiguity is in the strategies and tactics selected by his employees. Yet, he should be clear about whom he is trying to serve, but then actively encourage his employees to devise novel and as yet unproven ways of serving them. In the end your success will depend on increasingly complex customer segmentation and more on your ability, once you've decided on your chosen customer, to describe the needs of this customer with great vividness. The confidence of your followers depends on this.
- Every division and every department within the organization exists to create something of value for a particular customer, either internal or external. If you find yourself leading one of these divisions or departments, it will be imperative that you define your group's customer as precisely and vividly as, it is hoped, your CEO has done for the organization's customer. You might lead on a lightly smaller stage, but your followers' need for clarity about whom they are serving is just as acute.

2. What is Our Core Strength?

- Most smart observers would agree that the strategy of "getting your strengths together and making your weaknesses irrelevant" is by far the most effective. The most common explanation is the same as that to explain why you need to be clear about who you serve: namely that it helps you determine where you should be spending time and money and where you shouldn't. This asset allocation has merit.
- Interestingly, the strengths you pick don't have to reflect present reality. You don't have to be right. Your clarity is a constructive act. If you are clear, your followers will make you right.

- If you want your people to follow you confidently into a better future, tell them clearly where their core strengths lies, and thus focused, thus fortified, they will do everything in their power to make it come true.

3. What is Our Core Score?

- The old truisms tell us that "what gets measured gets managed" and "you get what you inspect", and they survive as truisms because they are manifestly true.
- It is your responsibility as a leader to sort through all the many things that can be measured and identify the one score that your followers should focus on. You must tell us what score we should use to measure our progress.
- Don't give us a scorecard with five or twenty metrics on it. Don't take all the many metrics that our organization can generate and present them to us as your "balance scorecard." It is too complex. This complexity confuses us and makes us anxious.
- You must cut through its complexity and give us one metric, one number to track our progress. Give us a score that we can do something about, or that measures how well we are serving the people you told us we should be serving, or that quantifies the strength you have assured us we possess. If you can identify the core score that can do some or all of these things, we will reward you with our confidence.
- Ideally this score will be a leading indicator of success, such as employee engagement or employee safety or crime, rather than a trailing indicator, such as sales or profit or tax revenue, but, from the perspective of your followers, what matters most is that it's clear.

4. What Actions Can We Take Today?

- The leader must take action because only action leads to impact. But actions also possess a separate, equally powerful quality. Actions are unambiguous. They are clear. If you, the leader, can highlight a few carefully selected actions, that we, your followers, will happily latch on to these actions and use them to calm our fear of the unknown. We will simply look to see what actions you are taking and found our faith and confidence on these.
- We will respond best to two distinct types of action: systematic and symbolic action. Each is powerful, but each clarifies in a different way. Systematic action interrupts our day-to-day routines and forces us to become involved in new activities. It disrupts us.
- Symbolic action doesn't alter what we do; it just grabs our attention.
- The effective leader knows how to use both to great effect. If you can sort through all the actions available to you and identify the few that can either grab our attention or alter our routines, then our confidence in you and your better future will grow strong.

The Disciplines of Leadership

- Faced with this barrage of diverse demands, there are several steps you can take to find the clarity your followers require. These steps are limited only by your ability to distill from your complex world a clear insight into whom your organization is trying to serve, or what its core strength is, or what score you should target, or what symbolic and systematic actions you should highlight is partly determined by your talents.
- More than likely, if you aspire to leadership, you do possess some talent for distillation, for piercing complexity and finding clarity.
- From the author's research it is apparent that, although no two leaders are identical, all effective leaders do seem to develop in their working lives certain disciplines that aid them in their quest for clarity.

There are three prevalent disciplines. Any of these disciplines, when practiced with rigor, will help you increase your effectiveness as a leader.

1. Discipline 1: Take Time to Reflect

- Thinking time is incredibly valuable time, for it forces them to process all that has happened, to sift through the clutter, to process ideas, and, in the end to conclude. It is this ability to draw conclusions that allows them to project such clarity.
- Leaders think about excellence and about success during these reflection times. They understand that success is not the opposite of failure. They realize that the only thing more damaging than not understanding why something failed is failing to understand why something succeeded.

2. Discipline 2: Select Your Heroes With Great Care.

- Here Buckingham is referring to those employees whose performance leaders choose to celebrate. They will reveal the future you are trying to create.
- If you can tell us, your followers, exactly what she did to deserve this recognition, if you can show us the people she served, or the strength she embodied, or the scores she achieved, or the actions she took, you will make everything much clearer. Her specific behaviors are the building blocks of our better future.

3. Discipline 3: Practice.

- The final discipline employed by the best leaders is this: they practice. They discipline themselves to practice the words, the images, and the stories they will use to help us perceive the future more clearly.
- The most effective leaders don't waste time trying to come up with newer and better speeches. Instead, having practiced and refined their speech they seek out newer and bigger audiences and then give the same speech.
- Do not worry about being repetitious. Just when you are starting to get bored by the sound of your own voice may well be the very moment when you finally reach into

our minds, pierce our confusion and allow us to see for the first time your, and our, better future.

- In summary, effective leaders don't have to be passionate or charming but they must be clear. They must never forget the truth that of all the human universals - our need for security, for community, for clarity, for authority, and for respect - our need for clarity, when met, is the most likely to engender in us confidence, persistence, resilience, and creativity.
- Show us clearly whom we should seek to serve, show us where our core strength lies, show us which score we should focus on and which actions must be taken today, and we will reward you by working our hearts out to make our better future come true.

Part 2

The One Thing You Need to Know about Sustained Individual Success

Chapter five: The twenty percenters

- According to Gallup research only twenty percent of people report that they are in a role where they have a chance to do what they do best every day, and that the rest of the working world feels like their strengths are not being called upon every day.
- On one level it is sad that so many people feel miscast, but, another level, what a wonderful untapped resource for any manager or company insightful enough to use it.
- The twenty percenters are those few individuals, who, by dint of their ability, hard work, persistence, contacts, and yes, some measure of good fortune, manage to experience extraordinary, repeated, and maintained success. They choose wisely in their careers, and then, as the years go by, they build on their early successes making one right move after another. As their careers progress they actually seem to get better. They become more creative, more resilient, and more expansive.
- The rest of us tend to be much less consistent in both our achievements and our satisfactions.
- Even when we do experience success, many of us suffer from what has been known as Imposter Syndrome, the suspicion that we are not as good as everyone says we are, that our successes may have been accidental, and that, consequently, we may not be entirely sure how to repeat them.
- From the author's research, the difference between the twenty percenters and the rest of us can be found less in what they choose to do and more in what they choose *not* to do.
- When confronted with a resource as scarce and inflexible as time is, twenty percenters are rigorously discriminating about how they choose to deploy it. No matter how tempting the offer, they refuse to get sucked into activities that, on some visceral level they know they will not enjoy.

- The One Thing we all need to know to sustain our success:
 - **Discover What You Don't Like Doing and Stop Doing It**
- Your strengths - your love of problem solving, your assertiveness, your altruism, your analytical mind - are your natural appetites, and are, in this sense, irrepressible. Your strengths are not only activities for which you have some natural talent; they are also activities that strengthen you. When using them you feel powerful, authentic, confident, and in the best sense, challenged. As such they are reinforcing.
- The secret to sustained success lies in knowing which activities engage your strengths and which do not and in having the self-discipline to reject the latter,
- If your strengths are those activities which strengthen you, your weaknesses are the opposite. To sustain success you must recognize weaknesses for what they are and ruthlessly eradicate them from your life. In this sense, success is less about accumulating and more about editing.
- Sustained success has nothing to do with age, sex, race or religion. Education may have something to do with it, but education alone is not the answer. It's not hard work nor risk taking.

What is sustained success?

- It's a broad term. How do we define it?
- Obviously, each person is driven by his own particular definition of success.
- Here is Buckingham's definition: *Sustained success means making the greatest possible impact over the longest period of time. This definition accommodates our diversity.*
- To have a great impact over a long period of time requires two things from you.
 - First, it requires that you take your natural talents and your enthusiasm and apply yourself to learning enough role-specific skills and knowledge to be deemed good at something. It also means targeting your learning toward those areas where you possess some kind of comparative advantage over somebody else.
 - Second, this definition of success requires that you not only are good at something, but that you stay good and more than likely get better. To survive the changes along the way it will demand that you be resilient, flexible, open to learning, innovative, confident, optimistic, and all the while devoid of stress to maintain your energy for the long haul.
- The controlling insight, the One Thing, must first tell you how to deal with those aspects of yourself that make you different from everyone else, and then it must show you how to be resilient, creative, and serene enough to win, and keep winning.

Chapter six: The Three Main Contenders

- Here are three persuasive contenders for you to consider. Each of them contains elements that may help you make small but important adjustments to your working life.

Contender 1 - "Find the right tactics and employ them"

- No matter what your talent or intelligence, success results only when you employ the right tactics.
- You will find volumes of tactical advice available. The author's three favorites include:
 - *The Power of Full Engagement* by Tony Schwartz and Jim Loehr
 - *The 5 patterns of Extraordinary Careers* by James Citrin and Richard Smith
 - *Career Warfare* by David D'Alessandro
- Find the right tactics and employ them doesn't tell you how to avoid being a commodity. You have different strengths, weaknesses, interests, background and experiences. If there is the One Thing you must do, it must tell you what to do with this unique mix of resources. It must make your individuality your focus.

Contender 2 - "Find your flaws and fix them"

- The author doesn't have much sympathy for this one. It remains the most commonly held view, both in the United States and around the world.
- Its basic premise is this: although you possess a unique compliment of strengths and weaknesses, your greatest room for growth lies in your areas of weaknesses. So, in order to succeed, you must identify your weaknesses and work to improve them.
- "Find your flaws and fix them" holds such universal appeal. It will keep you challenged. It will keep you nicely well rounded. It will keep you humble. And perhaps most important it will keep your boss happy.
- Despite its appeal, few successful individuals subject themselves to it. Few successful managers subject their people to it. And few successful teachers subject their students to it.
- The most up-to-date research yields two answers, one biological, one emotional. The biological answer reveals that you will not, in fact, learn the most in your areas of weakness. The emotional answer states that you will not in fact feel most energized and challenged when fixing your flaws.

Contender 3 - "Discover your strengths and cultivate them"

- First hand reflection on past successes can serve as an excellent starting point. The more you investigate your past successes, the more you'll recognize that certain recurring patterns of behavior or perception always seem to crop up. These patterns are a consistent part of your personality - you're always competitive, or

focused, or patient, or conceptual - but also that you're most successful whenever these patterns mesh perfectly with the challenge facing you.

- These patterns are your strengths, and because of the way your brain is wired, you are likely to be blessed with them your entire life.
- The One Thing you need to know about sustained individual success - "Discover what you don't like doing and stop doing it" - confronts the issue directly. You should start your career by taking stock of your strengths and orienting your career choices around them. As you experience some measure of success, you should feel free to experiment, to try new roles and responsibilities and see how they fit. However, as you grow, as you experience success, you must keep your senses alert to those aspects of your role that bore you, or frustrate you, or drain you. Whenever you become aware of something you dislike, don't try to work through it. Do not put up with it. Instead, cut it out of your life as fast as you can. Eradicate it.
- "Discover your strengths and cultivate them" is then sound advice, but it is incomplete. It will get you in the game. But the initial success it causes sets off a series of repercussions - more opportunities, more complexity, and more choice - which, if you are not careful, will prove extremely unproductive for you.
- "Discover what you don't like doing, and stop doing it" tells you how to handle these repercussions.
- To sustain your success, be vigilant. Assess where and how you are spending your time. Feel free to experiment with new roles, skills, and responsibilities, but the moment you perceive that you are spending less than 70 percent of your time on the things you love to do, identify the activities getting in the way and take action to remove them. The more effective you are at this, the more creative, the more resilient, the more valuable, and thus the more successful you will be.

Chapter Seven: So, How do you Sustain Success If...

- The more carefully you identify the cause of your dislike, the better you will be able to determine what you need to do to eradicate it.
- A dislike is caused most often by one of four distinct emotions. Each of these emotions has, in turn, a different cause, and therefore each will respond to different interventions.
- *You're Bored* - if your overriding feeling is one of boredom, the chances are that your deep interests are not engaged. You may enjoy the activities themselves, but the content leaves you cold. When the content of your job proves deeply uninteresting to you, you must change the job.
- *You're Unfulfilled* - sometimes your dislike stems not from a lack of interest, but from a lack of fulfillment. You may enjoy the activities of the job, even perform them well, but your values are not engaged. The most obvious example of this is

when your company, or your boss, asks you to do something blatantly unethical. Clearly, when faced with this situation, your only recourse, having made your disagreement known and seen no change in behavior, is to remove yourself from the situation, which usually means quit the role.

- *You're frustrated*- If your interests and your values are both engaged but your strengths are not in play, this creates a very different feeling: frustration. Your only recourse when your frustration builds is to find another role entirely, one that gives your strengths free rein. If you catch your frustrations before they reach the red zone, you can tweak your role so that a part of it plays to your strengths, experience some success, and then parlay this success into a new, changed role that plays to your strengths entirely.
- *You're drained*- This last emotion, although potentially the most damaging, actually offers you the widest range of interventions. This emotion is caused, not by lack of interest, nor a lack of fulfillment, nor a repressed strength. Instead it is created when suddenly or gradually, your job requires you to have a strength where you have a weakness. When you are asked every day to engage with the world in a way that is unnatural for you, when, every day, you miss things you should have seen, when, every day, you are confused by things that others find clear, it is a draining experience.
- You could quit the role, or try to tweak the role so that less of it calls upon your weaknesses. You could also seek out the right partners, or find an aspect of the role that brings you strength. These four tactics will prove the most effective as you try to smooth away the irritants from your strengths' path.

Conclusion: Intentional Imbalance

- In each of the roles - manager, leader or individual contributor, the critical skill is not balance, but its inverse, intentional imbalance.
- The great manager bets that he will prevail by magnifying, emphasizing, and then capitalizing on each employee's uniqueness.
- The great leader comes to a conclusion about his core customer, his organization's strength, its core score, and the actions he will commit to right now, and then, in the service of clarity, banishes from his thought and conversation almost everything else.
- The sustainably effective individual, by rigorously removing the irritants from his working life, engages with the world in an equally imbalanced fashion.

Recommendation: Your understanding of this subject would be greatly enhanced by reading all the examples in this book. A diverse number of companies and industries are

used to illustrate Buckingham's points. I don't really agree with everything he says, but it is worth reading to stimulate thought!



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My associates and I specialize in and have a passion for working with successful accounting firms. Our concentration is on what are commonly called the "soft skills." Through our experience we have demonstrated that what is true for Fortune 500 companies is also true in creating a competitive advantage for accounting firms.

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