

“Stunning and amazing. From mini-retirements to outsourcing your life, it’s all here. Whether you’re a wage slave or Fortune 500 CEO, this book will change your life!”

—PHIL TOWN, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Rule #1*

The 4-Hour Workweek



ESCAPE 9–5, LIVE ANYWHERE,
AND JOIN THE NEW RICH

TIMOTHY FERRISS

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Rules That Change the Rules

—EVERYTHING POPULAR IS WRONG

I can't give you a surefire formula for success, but I can give you a formula for failure: try to please everybody all the time.

—HERBERT BAYARD SWOPE, American editor and journalist; first recipient of the Pulitzer Prize

Everything popular is wrong.

—OSCAR WILDE, *The Importance of Being Earnest*

Beating the Game, Not Playing the Game

In 1999, sometime after quitting my second unfulfilling job and eating peanut-butter sandwiches for comfort, I won the gold medal at the Chinese Kickboxing National Championships.

It wasn't because I was good at punching and kicking. God forbid. That seemed a bit dangerous, considering I did it on a dare and had four weeks of preparation. Besides, I have a watermelon head— it's a big target.

I won by reading the rules and looking for loopholes, of which there were two:

1. Weigh-ins were the day prior to competition: Using dehydration techniques I now teach to elite powerlifters, I lost 28 pounds in 18 hours, weighed in at 165 pounds, and then hyperhydrated

back to 193 pounds.³ It's hard to fight someone from three weight classes above you. Poor little guys.

2. There was a technicality in the fine print: If one combatant fell off the elevated platform three times in a single round, his opponent won by default. I decided to use this technicality as my single technique and just push people off. As you might imagine, this did not make the judges the happiest Chinese I've ever seen.

The result? I won all of my matches by technical knock-out (TKO) and went home national champion, something 99% of those with 5-10 years of experience had been unable to do.

Challenging the Status Quo vs. Being Stupid

Most people walk down the street on their legs. Does that mean I walk down the street on my hands? Do I wear my underwear outside of my pants in the name of being different? Not usually, no. Then again, walking on my legs and keeping my thong on the inside have worked just fine thus far. I don't fix it if it isn't broken.

Different is better when it is more effective or more fun.

If everyone is defining a problem or solving it one way and the results are subpar, this is the time to ask, What if I did the opposite? Don't follow a model that doesn't work. If the recipe sucks, it doesn't matter how good a cook you are.

When I was in data storage sales, my first gig out of college, I realized that most cold calls didn't get to the intended person for one reason: gatekeepers. If I simply made all my calls from 8:00-8:30 A.M. and 6:00-6:30 P.M., for a total of one hour, I was able to avoid secretaries and book more than twice as many meetings as the

3. Most people will assume this type of weight manipulation is impossible, so I've provided sample photographs at www.fourhourworkweek.com. Do NOT try this at home. I did it all under medical supervision.

senior sales executives who called from 9-5. In other words, I got twice the results for $1/5$ the time.

From Japan to Monaco, from globetrotting single mothers to multimillionaire racecar drivers, the basic rules of successful NR are surprisingly uniform and predictably divergent from what the rest of the world is doing.

The following rules are the fundamental differentiators to keep in mind throughout this book.

1. Retirement Is Worst-Case-Scenario Insurance.

Retirement planning is like life insurance. It should be viewed as nothing more than a hedge against the absolute worst-case scenario: in this case, becoming physically incapable of working and needing a reservoir of capital to survive.

Retirement as a goal or final redemption is flawed for at least three solid reasons:

- a. It is predicated on the assumption that you dislike what you are doing during the most physically capable years of your life. This is a nonstarter—nothing can justify that sacrifice.
- b. Most people will never be able to retire and maintain even a hotdogs-for-dinner standard of living. Even one million is chump change in a world where traditional retirement could span 30 years and inflation lowers your purchasing power 2-4% per year. The math doesn't work.⁴ The golden years become lower-middle-class life revisited. That's a bittersweet ending.
- c. If the math does work, it means that you are one ambitious, hardworking machine. If that's the case, guess what? One week into retirement, you'll be so damn bored that you'll want to stick bicycle spokes in your eyes. You'll probably opt to look for a new job or start another company. Kinda defeats the purpose of waiting, doesn't it?

4. "Living Well" (*Barron's*, March 20, 2006, Suzanne McGee).

I'm not saying don't plan for the worst case—I have maxed out 40i(k)s and IRAs I use primarily for tax purposes—but don't mistake retirement for the goal.

2. Interest and Energy Are Cyclical.

If I offered you \$10,000,000 to work 24 hours a day for 15 years and then retire, would you do it? Of course not—you couldn't. It is unsustainable, just as what most define as a career: doing the same thing for 8+ hours per day until you break down or have enough cash to permanently stop.

How else can my 30-year-old friends all look like a cross between Donald Trump and Joan Rivers? It's horrendous—premature aging fueled by triple bypass frappuccinos and impossible workloads.

Alternating periods of activity and rest is necessary to survive, let alone thrive. Capacity, interest, and mental endurance all wax and wane. Plan accordingly.

The NR aims to distribute "mini-retirements" throughout life instead of hoarding the recovery and enjoyment for the fool's gold of retirement. By working only when you are most effective, life is both more productive and more enjoyable. It's the perfect example of having your cake and eating it, too.

Personally, I now aim for one month of overseas relocation or high-intensity learning (tango, fighting, whatever) for every two months of work projects.

3. Less Is Not Laziness.

Doing less meaningless work, so that you can focus on things of greater personal importance, is NOT laziness. This is hard for most to accept, because our culture tends to reward personal sacrifice instead of personal productivity.

Few people choose to (or are able to) measure the results of

their actions and thus measure their contribution in time. More time equals more self-worth and more reinforcement from those above and around them. The NR, despite fewer hours in the office, produce more meaningful results than the next dozen non-NR combined.

Let's define "laziness" anew—to endure a non-ideal existence to let circumstance or others decide life for you, or to amass a fortune while passing through life like a spectator from an office window. The size of your bank account doesn't change this, nor does the number of hours you log in handling unimportant e-mail or minutiae.

Focus on being productive instead of busy.

4. The Timing Is Never Right.

I once asked my mom how she decided when to have her first child, little oP me. The answer was simple: "It was something we wanted, and we decided there was no point in putting it off. The timing is never right to have a baby." And so it is.

For all of the most important things, the timing always sucks. Waiting for a good time to quit your job? The stars will never align and the traffic lights of life will never all be green at the same time. The universe doesn't conspire against you, but it doesn't go out of its way to line up all the pins either. Conditions are never perfect. "Someday" is a disease that will take your dreams to the grave with you. Pro and con lists are just as bad. If it's important to you and you want to do it "eventually," just do it and correct course along the way.

5. Ask for Forgiveness, Not Permission.

If it isn't going to devastate those around you, try it and then justify it. People—whether parents, partners, or bosses—deny things on an emotional basis that they can learn to accept

after the fact. If the potential damage is moderate or in any way reversible, don't give people the chance to say no. Most people are fast to stop you before you get started but hesitant to get in the way if you're moving. Get good at being a troublemaker and saying sorry when you really screw up.

6. Emphasize Strengths, Don't Fix Weaknesses.

Most people are good at a handful of things and utterly miserable at most. I am great at product creation and marketing but terrible at most of the things that follow.

My body is designed to lift heavy objects and throw them, and that's it. I ignored this for a long time. I tried swimming and looked like a drowning monkey. I tried basketball and looked like a caveman. Then I became a fighter and took off.

It is far more lucrative and fun to leverage your strengths instead of attempting to fix all the chinks in your armor. The choice is between *multiplication* of results using strengths or *incremental* improvement fixing weaknesses that will, at best, become mediocre. Focus on better use of your best weapons instead of constant repair.

7. Things in Excess Become Their Opposite.

It is possible to have too much of a good thing. In excess, most endeavors and possessions take on the characteristics of their opposite. Thus:

Pacifists become militants. Freedom
fighters become tyrants. Blessings
become curses. Help becomes
hindrance. More becomes less.⁵

5. From *Less Is More*. Goldian VandenBroeck.

Too much, too many, and too often of what you want becomes what you don't want. This is true of possessions and even time. Lifestyle Design is thus not interested in creating an excess of idle time, which is poisonous, but the positive use of free time, defined simply as doing what you want as opposed to what you feel obligated to do.

8. Money Alone Is Not the Solution.

There is much to be said for the power of money as currency (I'm a fan myself), but adding more of it just isn't the answer as often as we'd like to think. In part, it's laziness. "If only I had more money" is the easiest way to postpone the intense self-examination and decision-making necessary to create a life of enjoyment—now and not later. By using money as the scapegoat and work as our all-consuming routine, we are able to conveniently disallow ourselves the time to do otherwise: "John, I'd love to talk about the gaping void I feel in my life, the hopelessness that hits me like a punch in the eye every time I start my computer in the morning, but I have so much work to do! I've got at least three hours of unimportant e-mail to reply to before calling the prospects who said 'no' yesterday. Gotta run!"

Busy yourself with the routine of the money wheel, pretend it's the fix-all, and you artfully create a constant distraction that prevents you from seeing just how pointless it is. Deep down, you know it's all an illusion, but with everyone participating in the same game of make-believe, it's easy to forget.

The problem is more than money.

9. Relative Income Is More Important Than Absolute Income.

Among dietitians and nutritionists, there is some debate over the value of a calorie. Is a calorie a calorie, much like a rose is a rose? Is fat loss as simple as expending more calories than you

consume, or is the source of those calories important? Based on work with top athletes, I know the answer to be the latter.

What about income? Is a dollar is a dollar is a dollar? The New Rich don't think so.

Let's look at this like a fifth-grade math problem. Two hard-working chaps are headed toward each other. Chap A moving at 80 hours per week and Chap B moving at 10 hours per week. They both make \$50,000 per year. Who will be richer when they pass in the middle of the night? If you said B, you would be correct, and this is the difference between **absolute** and **relative** income.

Absolute income is measured using one holy and inalterable variable: the raw and almighty dollar. Jane Doe makes \$100,000 per year and is thus twice as rich as John Doe, who makes \$50,000 per year.

Relative income uses two variables: the dollar and time, usually hours. The whole "per year" concept is arbitrary and makes it easy to trick yourself. Let's look at the real trade. Jane Doe makes \$100,000 per year, \$2,000 for each of 50 weeks per year, and works 80 hours per week. Jane Doe thus makes \$25 per hour. John Doe makes \$50,000 per year, \$1,000 for each of 50 weeks per year, but works 10 hours per week and hence makes \$100 per hour. In relative income, John is *four times* richer.

Of course, relative income has to add up to the minimum amount necessary to actualize your goals. If I make \$100 per hour but only work one hour per week, it's going to be hard for me to run amuck like a superstar. Assuming that the total absolute income is where it needs to be to live my dreams (not an arbitrary point of comparison with the Joneses), relative income is the real measurement of wealth for the New Rich.

The top New Rich mavericks make at least \$5,000 per hour. Out of college, I started at about \$5. I'll get you closer to the former.

10. Distress Is Bad, Eustress Is Good.

Unbeknownst to most fun-loving bipeds, not all stress is bad. Indeed, the New Rich don't aim to eliminate all stress. Not in the least. There are two separate types of stress, each as different as euphoria and its seldom-mentioned opposite, dysphoria.

Distress refers to harmful stimuli that make you weaker, less confident, and less able. Destructive criticism, abusive bosses, and smashing your face on a curb are examples of this. These are things we want to avoid.

Eustress, on the other hand, is a word most of you have probably never heard. Eu-, a Greek prefix for "healthy," is used in the same sense in the word "euphoria." Role models who push us to exceed our limits, physical training that removes our spare tires, and risks that expand our sphere of comfortable action are all examples of eustress—stress that is healthful and the stimulus for growth.

People who avoid all criticism fail. It's destructive criticism we need to avoid, not criticism in all forms. Similarly, there is no progress without eustress, and the more eustress we can create or apply to our lives, the sooner we can actualize our dreams. The trick is telling the two apart.

The New Rich are equally aggressive in removing distress and finding eustress.

-Q&A: QUESTIONS AND ACTIONS

- i. How has being "realistic" or "responsible" kept you from the life you want?
2. How has doing what you "should" resulted in subpar experiences or regret for not having done something else?
3. Look at what you're currently doing and ask yourself, "What would happen if I did the opposite of the people around me? What will I sacrifice if I continue on this track for 5,10, or 20 years?"



Dodging Bullets

-FEAR-SETTING AND ESCAPING PARALYSIS

Many a false step was made by standing still.

—FORTUNE COOKIE

Named must your fear be before banish it you can. —

YODA, from *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*

RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL

Twenty feet and closing. "Run! Ruuuuuuuuuun!" Hans didn't speak Portuguese, but the meaning was clear enough—haul ass. His sneakers gripped firmly on the jagged rock, and he drove his chest forward toward 3,000 feet of nothing.

He held his breath on the final step, and the panic drove him to near unconsciousness. His vision blurred at the edges, closing to a single pinpoint of light, and then ... he floated. The all-consuming celestial blue of the horizon hit his visual field an instant after he realized that the thermal updraft had caught him and the wings of the paraglider. Fear was behind him on the mountaintop, and thousands of feet above the resplendent green rain forest and pristine white beaches of Copacabana, Hans Keeling had seen the light.

That was Sunday.

On Monday, Hans returned to his law office in Century City, Los Angeles's posh corporate haven, and promptly handed in his three-week notice. For nearly five years, he had faced his alarm

clock with the same dread: I have to do *this* for another 40-45 years? He had once slept under his desk at the office after a punishing half-done project, only to wake up and continue on it the next morning. That same morning, he had made himself a promise: two more times and I'm out of here. Strike number three came the day before he left for his Brazilian vacation.

We all make these promises to ourselves, and Hans had done it before as well, but things were now somehow different. He was different. He had realized something while arcing in slow circles toward the earth—risks weren't that scary once you took them. His colleagues told him what he expected to hear: He was throwing it all away. He was an attorney on his way to the top—what the hell did he want?

Hans didn't know exactly what he wanted, but he had tasted it. On the other hand, he did know what bored him to tears, and he was done with it. No more passing days as the living dead, no more dinners where his colleagues compared cars, riding on the sugar high of a new BMW purchase until someone bought a more expensive Mercedes. It was over.

Immediately, a strange shift began—Hans felt, for the first time in a long time, at peace with himself and what he was doing. He had always been terrified of plane turbulence, as if he might die with the best inside of him, but now he could fly through a violent storm sleeping like a baby. Strange indeed.

More than a year later, he was still getting unsolicited job offers from law firms, but by then had started Nexus Surf, a premier surf-adventure company based in the tropical paradise of Florianopolis, Brazil. He had met his dream girl, a Carioca with caramel-colored skin named Tatiana, and spent most of his time relaxing under palm trees or treating clients to the best times of their lives.

Is this what he had been so afraid of?

These days, he often sees his former self in the underjoyed and overworked professionals he takes out on the waves. Waiting for the

swell, the true emotions come out: "God, I wish I could do what you do." His reply is always the same: "You can."

The setting sun reflects off the surface of the water, providing a Zen-like setting for a message he knows is true: It's not giving up to put your current path on indefinite pause. He could pick up his law career exactly where he left off if he wanted to, but that is the furthest thing from his mind.

As they paddle back to shore after an awesome session, his clients get ahold of themselves and regain their composure. They set foot on shore, and reality sinks its fangs in: "I would, but I can't really throw it all away."

He has to laugh.

The Power of Pessimism: Defining the Nightmare

Action may not always bring happiness, but there is no happiness without action.

—BENJAMIN DISRAELI, former British Prime Minister

To do or not to do? To try or not to try? Most people will vote no, whether they consider themselves brave or not. Uncertainty and the prospect of failure can be very scary noises in the shadows. Most people will choose unhappiness over uncertainty. For years, I set goals, made resolutions to change direction, and nothing came of either. I was just as insecure and scared as the rest of the world.

The simple solution came to me accidentally four years ago. At that time, I had more money than I knew what to do with—I was making \$70K or so per month—and I was completely miserable, worse than ever. I had no time and was working myself to death. I had started my own company, only to realize it would be nearly impossible to sell. Oops. I felt trapped and stupid at the same time.

I should be able to figure this out, I thought. Why am I such an idiot? Why can't I make this work?! Buckle up and stop being such a (insert expletive)! What's wrong with me? The truth was, nothing was wrong with me. I hadn't reached my limit; I'd reached the limit of my business model at the time. It wasn't the driver, it was the vehicle.

Critical mistakes in its infancy would never let me sell it. I could hire magic elves and connect my brain to a supercomputer—it didn't matter. My little baby had some serious birth defects. The question then became, How do I free myself from this Frankenstein while making it self-sustaining? How do I pry myself from the tentacles of workaholism and the fear that it would fall to pieces without my 15-hour days? How do I escape this self-made prison? A trip, I decided. A sabbatical year around the world.

So I took the trip, right? Well, I'll get to that. First, I felt it prudent to dance around with my shame, embarrassment, and anger for six months, all the while playing an endless loop of reasons why my cop-out fantasy trip could never work. One of my more productive periods, for sure.

Then, one day, in my bliss of envisioning how bad my future suffering would be, I hit upon a gem of an idea. It was surely a highlight of my "don't happy, be worry" phase: Why don't I decide exactly what my nightmare would be—the worst thing that could possibly happen as a result of my trip?

Well, my business could fail while I'm overseas, for sure. Probably would. A legal warning letter would accidentally not get forwarded and I would get sued. My business would be shut down, and inventory would spoil on the shelves while I'm picking my toes in solitary misery on some cold shore in Ireland. Crying in the rain, I imagine. My bank account would crater by 80% and certainly my car and motorcycle in storage would be stolen. I suppose someone would probably spit on my head from a high-rise balcony while I'm

feeding food scraps to a stray dog, which would then spook and bite me squarely on the face. God, life is a cruel, hard bitch.

Conquering Fear = Defining Fear

Set aside a certain number of days, during which you shall be content with the scantiest and cheapest fare, with course and rough dress, saying to yourself the while: "Is this the condition that I feared?"
—SENECA

Then a funny thing happened. In my undying quest to make myself miserable, I accidentally began to backpedal. As soon as I cut through the vague unease and ambiguous anxiety by defining my nightmare, the worst-case scenario, I wasn't as worried about taking a trip. Suddenly, I started thinking of simple steps I could take to salvage my remaining resources and get back on track if all hell struck at once. I could always take a temporary bartending job to pay the rent if I had to. I could sell some furniture and cut back on eating out. I could steal lunch money from the kindergarteners who passed by my apartment every morning. The options were many. I realized it wouldn't be that hard to get back to where I was, let alone survive. None of these things would be fatal—not even close. Mere panty pinches on the journey of life.

I realized that on a scale of 1-10, 1 being nothing and 10 being permanently life-changing, my so-called worst-case scenario might have a *temporary* impact of 3 or 4. I believe this is true of most people and most would-be "holy sh*t, my life is over" disasters. Keep in mind that this is the one-in-a-million disaster nightmare. On the other hand, if I realized my best-case scenario, or even a probable-case scenario, it would easily have a *permanent* 9 or 10 positive life-changing effect.

In other words, I was risking an unlikely and temporary 3 or 4 for a probable and permanent 9 or 10, and I could easily recover my

baseline workaholic prison with a bit of extra work if I wanted to. This all equated to a significant realization: There was practically no risk, only huge life-changing upside potential, and I could resume my previous course without any more effort than I was already putting forth.

That is when I made the decision to take the trip and bought a one-way ticket to Europe. I started planning my adventures and eliminating my physical and psychological baggage. None of my disasters came to pass, and my life has been a near fairy tale since. The business did better than ever, and I practically forgot about it as it financed my travels around the world in style for 15 months.

Uncovering Fear Disguised as Optimism

There's no difference between a pessimist who says, "Oh, it's hopeless, so don't bother doing anything," and an optimist who says, "Don't bother doing anything, it's going to turn out fine anyway." Either way, nothing happens. — YVON CHOUNARD,⁶ founder of Patagonia

Fear comes in many forms, and we usually don't call it by its four-letter name. Fear itself is quite fear-inducing. Most intelligent people in the world dress it up as something else: optimistic denial.

Most who avoid quitting their jobs entertain the thought that their course will improve with time or increases in income. This seems valid and is a tempting hallucination when a job is boring or uninspiring instead of pure hell. Pure hell forces action, but anything less can be endured with enough clever rationalization.

Do you really think it will improve or is it wishful thinking and an excuse for inaction? If you were confident in improvement,

6. http://www.tpl.org/tier3_cd.cfm?content_itemjd = 5307&folder_id = 1545.

would you really be questioning things so? Generally not. This is fear of the unknown disguised as optimism.

Are you better off than you were one year ago, one month ago, or one week ago?

If not, things will not improve by themselves. If you are kidding yourself, it is time to stop and plan for a jump. Barring any James Dean ending, your life is going to be LONG. Nine to five for your working lifetime of 40-50 years is a long-ass time if the rescue doesn't come. About 500 months of solid work.

How many do you have to go? It's probably time to cut your losses.

Someone Call the Mattre D'

You have comfort. You don't have luxury. And don't tell me that money plays a part. The luxury I advocate has nothing to do with money. It cannot be bought. It is the reward of those who have no fear of discomfort.

— JEAN COCTEAU, French poet, novelist, boxing manager, and filmmaker, whose collaborations were the inspiration for the term "surrealism"

Sometimes timing is perfect. There are hundreds of cars circling a parking lot, and someone pulls out of a spot 10 feet from the entrance just as you reach his or her bumper. Another Christmas miracle!

Other times, the timing could be better. The phone rings during sex and seems to ring for a half hour. The UPS guy shows up 10 minutes later. Bad timing can spoil the fun.

Jean-Marc Hachey landed in West Africa as a volunteer, with high hopes of lending a helping hand. In that sense, his timing was great. He arrived in Ghana in the early 1980s, in the middle of a coup d'etat, at the peak of hyperinflation, and just in time for the worst drought in a decade. For these same reasons, some people would consider his timing quite poor from a more selfish survival standpoint.

He had also missed the memo. The national menu had changed, and they were out of luxuries like bread and clean water. He would be surviving for four months on a slushlike concoction of corn meal and spinach. Not what most of us would order at the movie theater.

"WOW, I CAN SURVIVE."

Jean-Marc had passed the point of no return, but it didn't matter. After two weeks of adjusting to the breakfast, lunch, and dinner (Mush a la Ghana), he had no desire to escape. The most basic of foods and good friends proved to be the only real necessities, and what would seem like a disaster from the outside was the most life-affirming epiphany he'd ever experienced: The worst really wasn't that bad. To enjoy life, you don't need fancy nonsense, but you do need to control your time and realize that most things just aren't as serious as you make them out to be.

Now 48, Jean-Marc lives in a nice home in Ontario, but could live without it. He has cash, but could fall into poverty tomorrow and it wouldn't matter. Some of his fondest memories still include nothing but friends and gruel. He is dedicated to creating special moments for himself and his family and is utterly unconcerned with retirement. He's already lived 20 years of partial retirement in perfect health.

Don't save it all for the end. There is every reason not to.

-Q&A: QUESTIONS AND ACTIONS

I am an old man and have known a great many troubles, but most of them never happened. —MARK TWAIN

If you are nervous about making the jump or simply putting it off out of fear of the unknown, here is your antidote. Write down your answers, and keep in mind that thinking a lot will not prove as fruitful or as prolific as simply brain vomiting on the page. Write and do not edit—aim for volume. Spend a few minutes on each answer.

- i. Define your nightmare, the absolute worst that could happen if you did what you are considering. What doubt, fears, and "what-ifs" pop up as you consider the big changes you can—or need—to make? Envision them in painstaking detail. Would it be the end of your life? What would be the permanent impact, if any, on a scale of 1-10? Are these things really permanent? How likely do you think it is that they would actually happen?
2. What steps could you take to repair the damage or get things back on the upswing, even if temporarily? Chances are, it's easier than you imagine. How could you get things back under control?
3. What are the outcomes or benefits, both temporary and permanent, of more probable scenarios? Now that you've defined the nightmare, what are the more probable or definite positive outcomes, whether internal (confidence, self-esteem, etc.) or external? What would the impact of these more-likely outcomes be on a scale of 1-10? How likely is it that you could produce at least a moderately good outcome? Have less intelligent people done this before and pulled it off?
4. If you were fired from your job today, what would you do to get things under financial control? Imagine this scenario and run through questions 1-3 above. If you quit your job to test other options, how could you later get back on the same career track if you absolutely had to?
5. What are you putting off out of fear? Usually, what we most fear doing is what we most need to do. That phone call, that conversation, whatever the action might be—it is fear of unknown outcomes that prevents us from doing what we need to do. Define the worst case, accept it, and do it. I'll repeat something you might consider tattooing on your forehead: *What we fear doing most is usually what we most need to do.* As I have heard said, a per-

son's success in life can usually be measured by the number of uncomfortable conversations he or she is willing to have. Resolve to do one thing every day that you fear. I got into this habit by attempting to contact celebrities and famous businesspeople for advice.

6. What is it costing you—financially, emotionally, and physically—to postpone action? Don't only evaluate the potential downside of action. It is equally important to measure the atrocious cost of inaction. If you don't pursue those things that excite you, where will you be in one year, five years, and ten years? How will you feel having allowed circumstance to impose itself upon you and having allowed ten more years of your finite life to pass doing what you know will not fulfill you? If you telescope out 10 years and know with 100% certainty that it is a path of disappointment and regret, and if we define risk as "the likelihood of an irreversible negative outcome," inaction is the greatest risk of all.
7. What are you waiting for? If you cannot answer this without resorting to the previously rejected concept of good timing, the answer is simple: You're afraid, just like the rest of the world. Measure the cost of inaction, realize the unlikelihood and repairability of most missteps, and develop the most important habit of those who excel and enjoy doing so: action.

System Reset

-BEING UNREASONABLE AND UNAMBIGUOUS

"Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?"

"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat.

"I don't much care where ..." said Alice.

"Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the Cat.

—LEWIS CARROLL, *Alice in Wonderland*

The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself.

Therefore all progress depends on the unreasonable man. —

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW, *Maxims for Revolutionists*

SPRING 2005, PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

I had to bribe them. What other choice did I have? They formed a circle around me, and, while the names differed, the question was one and the same: "What's the challenge?" All eyes were on me.

My lecture at Princeton University had just ended with excitement and enthusiasm. At the same time, I knew that most students would go out and promptly do the opposite of what I preached. Most of them would be putting in 80-hour weeks as high-paid coffee fetchers unless I showed that the principles from class could actually be applied.

Hence the challenge.

I was offering a round-trip ticket anywhere in the world to anyone who could complete an undefined "challenge" in the most impressive fashion possible. Results plus style. I told them to meet me after class if interested, and here they were, nearly 20 out of 60 students.

The task was designed to test their comfort zones while forcing them to use some of the tactics I teach. It was simplicity itself: Contact three seemingly impossible-to-reach people—J.Lo, Bill Clinton, J. D. Salinger, I don't care—and get at least one to reply to three questions.

Of 20 students, all frothing at the mouth to win a free spin across the globe, how many completed the challenge?

Exactly ... none. Not a one.

There were many excuses: "It's not that easy to get someone to ..." "I have a big paper due, and ..." "I would love to, but there's no way I can. . . ." There was but one real reason, however, repeated over and over again in different words: It was a difficult challenge, perhaps impossible, and the other students would outdo them. Since all of them overestimated the competition, no one even showed up.

According to the rules I had set, if someone had sent me no more than an illegible one-paragraph response, I would have been obligated to give them the prize. This result both fascinated and depressed me.

The following year, the outcome was quite different.

I told the above cautionary tale and 6 out of 17 finished the challenge in less than 48 hours. Was the second class better? No. In fact, there were more capable students in the first class, but they did nothing. Firepower up the wazoo and no trigger finger.

The second group just embraced what I told them before they started, which was ...

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