

Part I

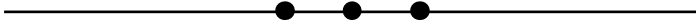


IT'S ABOUT TIME

Getting honest about what
defines success

Honesty is such a lonely word.

—BILLY JOEL, musician



Does This Sound Familiar?

Watson, you see but you do not observe.

—SHERLOCK HOLMES, detective

You are exhausted. Despite your best efforts to cross tasks off your To-Do list, endless interruptions, a deluge of email, and drawn-out meetings have a grip on your day. By midday you feel like the contortionist trying to escape from a straightjacket; your efforts look impressive, but get you nowhere. The paper is piling up, your list just got longer, and it seems the hallway outside your office has become social-central.

Sound familiar? Welcome to the club.

People just like you come to my workshops every year—looking for solutions to their ongoing treadmill of conflicting deadlines, unfinished projects, disappointments, and frustrations.

I usually start every session with the same three questions:

- 1) “Do you usually have more work to do in a day than you have time for?” All the hands in the audience quickly shoot up.

- 2) “Do you frequently finish your day saying to yourself, ‘The day is over and I have no idea where it went?’” Everyone groans in affirmation.
- 3) “In the past three months, have you tried any new way—however small—to reorganize your day, prioritize work differently, change your patterns, or manage your time better?” Now only a few hands go up.

And there lies the irony—most people know they have a time-management problem, yet few take the time to do anything about it.

If we don’t change our patterns, our ineffective approaches to workload and distractions will keep repeating themselves. The work may change, but there is little improvement in the approach. It’s like the old joke: What is the definition of insanity? Answer: Doing the same thing over and over again, expecting a new result.

Here’s a better question: What is the definition of *sanity*? Answer: Doing things differently until you get the result you are looking for.

Eventually you may reach the point of work overload where you think, “Enough is enough! I don’t want to work this hard anymore, and I need to do something about it.” Do you need to manage your time better? Of course. But first, ask yourself this: Will just crossing more items off my list satisfy me, or do I want to *experience* my time differently?

Anthony is, by all accounts, a winner. Good paying job, lots of responsibility, a healthy family, and he likes his work—maybe a bit too much. “I rarely turn work off. I can’t,” he admitted to me in a phone conversation. “If I don’t stay on top of everything, I will pay later.” Just like millions of hard-working people everywhere, Anthony’s dedication to his vocation will have a cost, and eventually something will give. It’s not unreasonable to predict that his work will suffer and that possibly his health and even relationships will follow suit.

Following the strategies I'm presenting in this book, Anthony now practices specific disciplines to unlock himself from work *before* he arrives home. Perhaps for the first time in years, he is committing himself to his time *away* from work with the same dedication and vigor that he commits to his work-time. Instead of working to have more time, this is how you would *make time work for you*.

My guess is that *you* also want more sanity and more balance between work, with all of its allure and complications, and your personal life, with all of its richness. All of this is possible, but it's not going to happen by learning a few email tricks or how to shuffle paper faster.

The approach I've taken in this book is based on my own experience of unfolding the layers of ineffectiveness that have plagued my working career for three decades. I have looked at the patterns, habits, systems (you'll hear a lot about systems), and beliefs that have conspired to frustrate my efforts to create success and to have the kind of life I desire.

Of course, I will be providing you with some tools and better ways to plan and manage the distractions and work volume, but I hope you will agree that this book isn't just about tips and techniques.

I want you to rethink your approach to time *itself* and from there, to rebuild your approach to work, leisure, and life. This journey is full of potential and (unfortunately for most) is fully optional. But it is possible. I know, because I've done it.

I am well aware that self-help authors usually make bold claims about how their lives have turned around due to their new-found insights. They boast of their wonderful lifestyles, numerous homes, snazzy cars, and frequent trips to luxurious islands where they inevitably are sipping from drinks with umbrellas . . .

. . . I'm not going to do that.

*Once you make
the decision, the
universe conspires
to make it happen.*

—R.W. EMERSON,
philosopher and leader
of the Transcendentalist
movement

When I started writing this book, it quickly became a cathartic experience of self-reflection. With every chapter, I found myself asking, “Am *I* really doing this?” It was painful to be promoting a formula for success while, in my own estimation, *still falling short*. Despite this, I continued to put these ideas on paper because I realize that perfection isn’t my goal.

I don’t work in a factory where work processes and tasks are repeated over and over; I live in a world that is constantly changing and challenging me to respond in the best possible way. And my guess is you live in that same world.

So, dear reader, I’m not predicting perfection, more wealth, or time sipping from drinks with umbrellas. But I am predicting that this book can provide something even better: growth.

If you use even one of the strategies in this book, you will grow in your ability to enjoy more success, have more free time, and get more of what you are looking for. That’s what I *can* promise.

The solutions provided in this book are simple, and yet they work. I know this, because more than 3,000 people who have attended my live training sessions have experienced successful changes immediately. And because I use them myself, and they are still turning my life around for the better.

GETTING THE MOST FROM THIS BOOK

*Being busy is a form of laziness—
lazy thinking and indiscriminate action.*

—TIM FERRISS, author, serial entrepreneur
and ultra vagabond

Rest assured, these methods are simple to implement, and you won't have to purchase an expensive time-management system or new software. What you need to do—if you are committed to creating real change—is to:

- 1) Read this book.
- 2) Do the short exercises at the ends of the chapters.
- 3) Choose the solutions most relevant for you.
- 4) Practice those solutions for thirty days.

By the end of thirty days, your new habits will be formed. These habits will put you onto a path of change that will give you more time, more freedom, and more success.

If you are like me, you might get distracted somewhere in the third chapter with another book, or a new project, or some other life distraction. Don't. I'm going to suggest that you approach this book differently. I don't want you to read this book word for word—it's not necessary, nor is it a great use of your time.¹

Instead, I want you to read this book more like a manual. Start with an overview (that's what this next section is about) and get an understanding of the *flow* of the book, so you know what to expect.

1. I am sure some readers are quick readers, who read every word. But as 90% of the people who buy business books never finish them, I suggest there is both a reading and a motivation problem. See my side bar for how to double your reading speed.

Next, I encourage you to learn to read faster (see page 9). And whenever I provide an exercise, do it. These are going to help you to focus on what is important *for you*, to help you create real, lasting change. Your objective should be to find and pull out the concepts and skills that you need, not to plan for an exam.

OVERVIEW

Part I—“It’s about Time” is about getting real about where time goes and how you are doing for time-efficiency. (Don’t read these chapters alone—it’s scary!) If you want to get to the heart of why you do what you do, pay particular attention to “Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall” (you’ll thank me later).

Part II—“Systems” will give you the foundations for creating more time-success in all aspects of your work. This section is all about your systems: your planning, interruptions, meetings, email, and clutter. Be prepared—no sticky note, phone message, or wasted minute will be spared. Everything is under scrutiny (you *might* thank me later).

Part III—“Habits” is your toolbox for great habits (some of which you may have never thought of as habits). I want this to be a fun tour through options that are easy to apply, but that could have impressive long-term impact.

Part IV—“This is the Time” focuses on constant improvement and on keeping the flame lit. Getting the new System or Habit is only the start—the real benefit comes from practice.

Throughout the book, there are one-page worksheets. If you are anything like me, you will be tempted to skip these. Don’t. It’s important that you do some of the work of creating improvements as you read the book. I’ve kept it simple—take time for a little reflection,

jot a few notes, make a few decisions. Your time commitment for each of these short exercises should be ten minutes or less.

I have also referenced some online resources that can be found at www.hughculver.com/breakbook. These are designed to support you as you practice your new strategies (feel free to share these with friends and colleagues).



Note: From time to time, I have inserted this symbol. Pay special attention to these thoughts and tips. These gems could make a big difference in the results you create.

Once and For All, How to Read

I took a speed-reading course and read ‘War and Peace’ in twenty minutes. It involves Russia.

—WOODY ALLEN, actor and playwright

How do you read a book? Are you a ‘skimmer’, flying through the pages, gleaning only what is valuable for you? Are you a ‘starter’—slowly reading each word for the first five chapters and then losing interest or getting distracted with a new book? Simply based on statistics, I know it’s unlikely you are a ‘finisher’—few people are.

So I thought it would be helpful to give you some tips on how to get the most from this book. This is a simple approach, and certainly there are far more complicated approaches; but if you are a slow reader, you probably won’t get through those, so here’s a short version.

The average person reads at about 200–250 words per minute. With a few small improvements and a bit of practice, you should be able to double your reading speed and still have a comprehension rate of at least 75%. Here are some quick tips for reading faster and getting better retention and value out of books:

- **Plan to read.** You will have greater speed and retention if you read in a quiet place, at a time of day when you are fully awake, and when you have committed time to read.
- **Read the Table of Contents.** To get some idea of the flow of the book, take a couple of minutes and scan the list. The table of contents should also give you some idea of what parts of the book will have the most value for you, and what parts can be skimmed.
- **For each chapter, read the first paragraph,** then the sub-heads, and finally the last paragraph. Decide whether the chapter has any value for you. If not, move on to the next one.
- **Stop re-reading.** Use a device—a piece of paper, a ruler, or your finger—to move down the page, keeping your eye moving along with the device. Keep moving at a steady pace, slightly faster than comfortable.
- **Skip words.** You don't need to read every word to get sufficient comprehension. Start by reading the third or fourth word in from both ends of the line of text. This will prepare you to take “snapshots” of lines, rather than reading every word.

- **Create a goal.** You can quickly calculate your reading speed by averaging the number of words on a line and multiplying that number by the number of lines on the page. From there, it is easy to measure your speed for reading the page. Set a goal to double your reading speed. You will save time and probably not miss anything. For more tips on speed-reading, see www.hughculver.com/breakbook.

Ready to try your new skills? Here we go . . .



The Ultimate Currency

Running into the sun but I'm running behind.

—JACKSON BROWNE, “Running on empty”

Long before recorded history, we have been keeping track of time. The earliest examples were crude lunar calendars that predated the reforms of Julius Caesar’s more exact Gregorian calendar by some 34,000 years. We’ve come a long way with recording time, and its importance in our everyday thinking and life has continued to increase. We use time as a measure of our day, as a record of our history, as a tool to compete against others, and as a way to find our location.

Think of time as the ultimate, universal, non-renewable currency. Virtually anywhere in the world, you can live a rich life by using it well, or you can squander it like a weekend gambler on a sortie to Las Vegas. High performers, who enjoy wonderful lives of wealth and personal freedom, have the same amount of time as the millions who are convinced that there is never enough time. Either way, once you use it, it is gone.

Whether we operate a stall in Marrakesh, teach primary school in Santiago, or arrive at our Seattle office by 9 am, time is democratic: we all get the same amount to start with. It's no different than the first cast of the die in a game of Monopoly. In life, every player gets the same amount of currency every time we wake up and pass 'GO': 24 hours; 1,440 minutes; 86,400 seconds.

What we do with time is always up to us, and that all starts with our perception.

As I have grown older, my perception of time has changed. When I was young, time seemed to go too slowly and I was restless for it to pass. In my twenties, I felt like I had all the time in the world and, for the most part, I enjoyed the luxury of designing my days as I wished. In my thirties, I learned to resent how other people could demand some of my time, and in my forties, I felt I had no time: work, schooling, family, and relationships filled every waking hour. I was busy perfecting "busy." Now, past the half-century mark, I truly regret time's passing—the lost opportunities and all the should-haves that I can't recapture. It's the same me—just a different perception of time.

Are You Satisfied?

There may be no 'i' in team, but there are two in 'idiot'.

There must be some reason why you have this book in your hand. Maybe you are already successful and are looking for an extra insight that will create even more success. Maybe you haven't achieved the success you want, and you want to learn how to better reach your goals. Or maybe you are frustrated with the way time slips through your fingers, and you want to change your habits but don't know how.

At a recent seminar that I was leading for university professors, a woman in the audience expressed exasperation about her workload

and the impact on her family. She admitted she wasn't happy with some of her time habits.

"Every night I bring home my 'Guilt Bag,'" she admitted. The woman explained that her Guilt Bag is her case, with laptop, notes,



and files that need her attention. When I asked her what she does with the bag once she arrives home, she described how she usually leaned it up against a wall and rarely worked on it. "And all night," she continued, "it stares at me,

reminding me of my workload, and I feel more tired, anxious, and guilty." That's what I call negative programming—and it's all self-induced. It's also preventable.

For more than twelve years, I have been studying and teaching time management. I have probably read every current book on the subject, taken courses, written articles, interviewed masters, and spent endless hours working on my own performance. Here is the simple truth that I have discovered: *Time management is not the goal.*

In the end, nobody will care how we organize our minutes. *The only thing that will be measured is the value we create in the minutes we have.*

Before you read any further, I want you to ask yourself these three questions:

- 1) Do I start my day excited about what I am going to work on, and about what I am going to accomplish?
- 2) Do I usually finish my day smiling, with the feeling that comes from a day well spent?

- 3) Do I feel, for the most part, that I am in control of how I spend my time?

If you are reading this book with the ambition of becoming more time-effective, you will definitely learn some great skills and techniques for ‘saving’ time and getting more done in a day.²

But while becoming more effective at work is a laudable goal, it’s not entirely why I wrote this book. I am interested in *how* you use your time, not in how much you can pack into your time. *Give Me a Break* is not only about better time management or about taking a physical break; it is also about developing a new outlook on how time can work *for* you.

Perhaps the best question to consider as you dive into this book and discover ways to reclaim more time in your day is: *What will you do with your new-found time?*

A LOOK IN THE MIRROR

If you fail to plan, you plan to fail.

—ANONYMOUS

Hyrum Smith, author of *The 10 Successful Laws of Time and Life Management* and modern pioneer of the day planner concept, discovered that most people have two self-limiting beliefs:

- 1) That someday we will have more time, and
- 2) That somehow we can save time.

Does this ring true for you? I certainly know that I lived with these same delusions for thirty years as I took my sloppy time-

2. In our post-seminar surveys, we find that 95% of participants are saving at least one hour a day. This is time they can redirect to more important results in their work and life.

management habits with me, from business to business, from committee to committee, and into my personal life.

I was constantly dreaming up new projects and starting them before finishing the old ones. I could easily justify procrastination as a by-product of my ambitious nature, and multi-tasking was my badge of productivity. As I tried to accomplish three things at once, I did none of them well, and mostly ignored everyone around me.

Although I was rarely late for business meetings, I had a poor track record for picking up my daughters from school or piano lessons (twice I was actually on time, but at the wrong location). It seemed that I never had enough time and my appointments, meetings, and phone calls plagued my schedule and filled my To-Do lists.

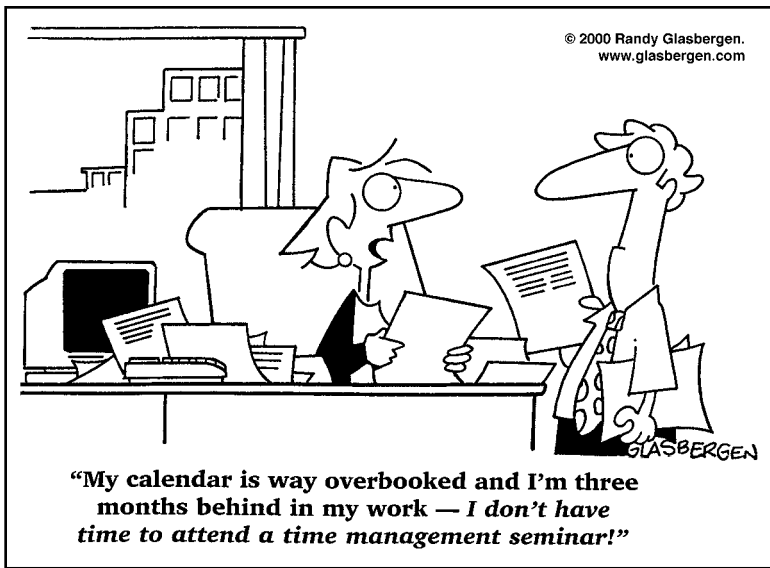
My work and personal life were so out of balance that seven-day workweeks and sleeping at the office were not uncommon, nor were last-minute business trips to South America or cancelled dates with friends. I was frustrated. I knew I needed to change my patterns, but I didn't have a clue how to be successful and actually go home at a reasonable hour.

My ultimate excuse was that someday I would have more time for the pleasures of life. Just as Smith predicted, I believed that working faster than everyone else would save me time, but that mysterious bank of time never seemed to appear. I was oblivious to the evidence staring me in the face—that as I changed jobs, locations, and careers, the pattern simply traveled with me. Each time I found circumstances and people to blame (never me, of course!) for my woeful lack of work/life balance and high stress level.

Luckily, my condition wasn't permanent. Using the concepts and tools in this book, I eventually managed to create more success in my work, more balance with my family, and more satisfaction in my life.

So, how are you doing? Do you know where your time is being used well and where it isn't? Do you know which systems in your office are serving you and which are not? Do you really know the areas that you need to work on?

The first step in any development program or self-enlightenment program is always about awareness. You need to get very clear about the strengths that you want to keep and grow, and the areas of opportunity that are passing you by.



For years, I was delusional about my situation. I was convinced that I was working as hard as humanly possible.

Maybe I was, but I was a long way from working smart. It wasn't until I got clear about the cost my weaknesses were exacting on my business success, relationships, and health that I became serious about making change happen.

Self-assessment is the place to begin your path to a healthier

relationship with time. The short quiz that follows mirrors the curriculum in this book and asks you to rate how well you are utilizing certain essential systems and habits.

I want you to take the quiz now, and again in thirty days.

In my seminars I call the first thirty days after the learning experience the “thirty-day challenge.” This is the time it takes to create a new habit. It is also the time when you will either apply some of what you learned and benefit from it, or lose it.

The challenge is to see how much value you can get from those first thirty days.

Also, we need to repeat a new habit *with intent*. In other words, you have to really want the new habit to stick. Obviously you won’t stick with a change in your diet, like from dairy to a diet of tofu and soy milk, if either one of these makes you nauseous. Similarly, adopting any strategies from this book won’t stick if you don’t have the intent to make them stick (or if they make you nauseous).

Take the quiz now. It should only take about three minutes to complete, and it will open your eyes to what needs to change.

If you are like me, you might be tempted to jump ahead to the next section. Don’t do it. This quiz is an important starting point—it will help align the curriculum in this book with your specific needs. Go ahead and take the quiz now!

Time Management Self-Assessment Quiz

Based on a typical day, rate yourself against the following statements by circling one of the numbers (1=never, 2=rarely, 3=sometimes, 4=often, 5=always).

PRIORITIES

I start my day by reviewing what I will accomplish that day (high priority).

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

I avoid distractions and focus on what is most important, most of the time.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

My goal is to accomplish priority tasks first, every day.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

I plan my activities and priorities for the next day before leaving work.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

GOALS

I have goals for the month or week.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

I routinely set goals for all major projects or committee work.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

My goals are visible and I constantly review them (at least weekly).

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

I constantly use my weekly goals to keep me on track and effective.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

SYSTEMS

I have a time-management system that I use and keep updated.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

My workspace is free of files, paper, sticky notes, etc.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

I manage my email and other message volume well.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

I try to match my work to my energy (e.g. hardest work in the morning).

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

HABITS

I am able to remove distractions and focus on the single task at hand.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

When I find myself wasting time, I get back on track.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

I manage my energy well and take regular health breaks every day.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

When I leave work, I leave it behind.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

CONSTANT IMPROVEMENT

I learn from others to improve my systems and habits.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

I frequently review my habits and improve old habits that waste time.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

In the last month, I have made an improvement to my time management.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

I make time for education, relationships, and self-improvement.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

OVERALL SCORE (Total each column and then get the sum of those 5 totals.)

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As you review your scores for each of the five sections, here are some questions to consider:

HIGH SCORES (you rated yourself between 85 and 100): Look at the high scores you gave yourself. Why did you rate yourself high in those areas? What is the process or habit that supports that score? Often you can perform at a high level in some aspect of time management and not be aware that what you are doing is unique. Record at least one process or habit you are doing well that resulted in your high score.

.....
.....

MID-RANGE SCORES (you rated yourself between 70 and 85): Look for areas where you excel and have good performance. How can you reinforce these and support them always happening? Look at areas that you rated a '1', '2', or '3'—what is the pattern that is keeping you from scoring higher? Record at least one habit you have that resulted in the low score.

.....
.....

LOW SCORES (you rated yourself below 70): What are you doing that is inhibiting your performance? Think about your office set-up, your habits, your approach to creating and keeping goals. By becoming more aware of your patterns, you will be more able to create the change you need. List three of the most obvious areas in need of improvement (here are some examples):

- I know I procrastinate about the hardest goals.
- I don't start my day with a plan and by mid-morning I feel out of control.

- I have all the papers on my desk in neat piles, but they constantly distract me. I know I need to do something about it, but I don't want to forget anything.
- People drop by my desk all day. I don't want to be rude, but it makes it difficult to focus and get any work done.

I want to change/improve

.....

I want to change/improve

.....

I want to change/improve

.....

Keep these areas of development in mind. The more focused you are on what you want to change, the more likely you are to find the solution in this book.

Where Does the Time Go?

*Take care in your minutes,
and the hours will take care of themselves.*

—LORD CHESTERFIELD, ambassador to Spain

“The day is over and I have no idea where the time went!”
Do you ever wonder where the time goes? For many people, the day is a blur of meetings, phone calls, interruptions, email, and last-minute problems that need to be dealt with right now.

With all of our clients, the same three distractions always seem to be at the scene of the crime:

- 1) Email
- 2) Interruptions
- 3) Meetings

We call these the “Big Three Time Thieves” and they are the rust that eats away at performance and seems to grow incessantly. Here’s a quick rundown on them:

Email—Most people have no idea how much time they actually are spending on email. It can become one long stream of lost minutes between morning scans while commuting (not while driving, obviously!), a constant bombardment while at your desk, quick peeks during meetings, in elevators, waiting in line at Starbucks, or at the ball park while pretending to watch your child chewing gum in left field.

One Microsoft survey found that employees were spending, on average, one hour and forty-five minutes a day on email (note that this means some people are spending much more time than this). My guess is that, for many of us, we spend twice that amount of time.

The ubiquitous nature of email (on your computer at work, your laptop at home, your smart phone in your car, etc.) means that it can become a normal part of the day, like breathing and walking, that fills most of your available moments.

Is it really necessary to be that available? Certainly we used to survive admirably with only phones, faxes, and meetings. Common sense would suggest (and if it doesn't, I will) that there is a downside to being always connected and constantly checking who has sent you something on your phone. But as Will Rogers once quipped, "Just because something is common sense, doesn't mean it is common."

Interruptions—Interruptions can eat up your day. Just think of the people who drop by to chat, the non-urgent phone calls, the interruptions from vendors with their latest pitches, and distracting office noise. Workshop participants typically tell me that they have to deal with at least one hour of interruptions a day.

What percentage of your day is lost due to low-value interruptions that could be diverted to someone else, dealt with faster, or avoided altogether?

Meetings—If you are in meetings just one hour per day (many of

our clients report that meetings typically eat up about three hours of their day), and you work 250 days per year, more than thirty-one of those days are spent in meetings over the course of a year. What percentage of this time is really necessary, and what percentage is being chewed up in poor-quality or unnecessary meetings?

As part of your look in the mirror, let's put some numbers together to show how your time is being spent. Below you will



find a table designed to help you calculate where your time goes. In the example on the left-hand side, I have inserted average time spent per day by our clients on the Big Three (email, interruptions, and meetings): 1.75 hours on email, 1 hour on interruptions, and 1 hour in meetings. Calculated over 250

working days in a year, this adds up to twenty-three work-weeks (based on a forty-hour work week) per year.³

Do I have your attention now?

In a nutshell, you spend about one-half of your working years on email, interruptions, and meetings.

Now try it for yourself: do the calculation in the following chart (using the formula provided).

3. Allowing for an average of a one-day holiday per month, there are about 250 working days in a year.

Annual Time Used on the Big Three

TYPICAL AMOUNT OF TIME USED			YOUR AMOUNT OF TIME USED		
The Big Three	Calculation	Work-weeks per year	The Big Three	Calculation	Work-weeks per year
Email	$(1.75 \text{ hrs.} \times 250 \text{ days}) / 40 \text{ hrs.}$	11	Email	$(\text{___ hrs.} \times 250 \text{ days}) / 40 \text{ hrs.}$	
Interruptions	$(1 \text{ hr.} \times 250 \text{ days}) / 40 \text{ hrs.}$	6	Interruptions	$(\text{___ hrs.} \times 250 \text{ days}) / 40 \text{ hrs.}$	
Meetings	$(1 \text{ hr.} \times 250 \text{ days}) / 40 \text{ hrs.}$	6	Meetings	$(\text{___ hrs.} \times 250 \text{ days}) / 40 \text{ hrs.}$	
Total time		23 weeks	Total time		

Were you surprised by the total? Most people don't think in terms of week after week of time losses, and certainly not in terms of a full year. But if you are going to value your time more and be committed to making the small changes every day, this is exactly the perspective you need to take.

Now imagine being able to get back even five percent of that lost time. That alone, over the course of a year, could be as much as a whole work-week. In fact, here is a great formula to remember:

Ten minutes a day saved is equivalent to about one week per year of recovered time that you can redirect to more important work, to planning, to relationship-building, or to growing your business.⁴

Ten minutes per day = One week per year

4. This is a rough calculation that obviously depends on the hours you work in a year. $10 \text{ min/day} \times 250 \text{ days/year} = 2,500 \text{ minutes}$. $2,500 \text{ min}/60 = 41.6 \text{ hours}$, or about one forty-hour work-week.

This is the power of making small changes consistently every day to maximize your use of time. It's no different from putting deposits in your bank, starting an exercise routine, or improving your diet. Initially you can feel discouraged because the results aren't visible, but over time the small improvements become big payoffs you can enjoy.

And now I'm going to show you how . . .



A Model for Change

*Opportunity is missed by most people because
it is dressed in overalls and looks like work.*

—THOMAS EDISON, inventor extraordinaire

If you don't get your work done today, you will have it tomorrow. The pile of unfinished work will accumulate, and with it will come frustration, anxiety, and stress. So you have two choices: work harder (which most of us try to do already) or work smarter.

In school we learned about cell biology, dividing exponential numbers, and conjugating verbs. Unfortunately, our sixth grade teacher didn't provide us with more practical life lessons, like how to prioritize.

Rarely at school were we asked to decide what was the most important work. Instead, we were rewarded for getting everything on our list done, without exception.

Once the responsibilities and workloads build up to the point where you know you can't get it all done, this approach doesn't work

anymore. You are left knowing that mitochondria has something to do with ATP, but no clue what to do with your ever-growing To-Do list.

What you need is a new way of looking at your workload, and a new approach for moving from overwhelm to getting work done. Unfortunately, this won't happen just because you buy a new day planner or learn a few tricks on your BlackBerry. And while most well-meaning time management training programs are about making you more efficient at processing work faster, I doubt that this is your aspiration.

Beware the Downward Slide

Just as water always prefers to flow downhill, we typically migrate to what is easier in life. Maybe your habit is to put off making sales calls, or coaching that recalcitrant, underperforming salesperson, until you have spent the morning reviewing emails. Or maybe a project you committed to hasn't gotten off the ground because of minor interruptions and general busy-ness.

That pattern won't change by learning a little trick for sending emails faster. It requires a more wholesale change, and that starts with your beliefs and the mental pattern of prioritization that you have established over time.

Darren, a manager at a large insurance company, is responsible for thirteen insurance adjusters. He has many responsibilities, including training new staff, coaching existing staff, and conducting performance reviews. His time-management style was what I call the Radar Approach—when something came into view, he treated it with the same priority as everything else, regardless of its real value, who sent it, or how old it was.

The Radar Approach is a chaotic way to manage workload, because you are constantly chasing after the newest interruption

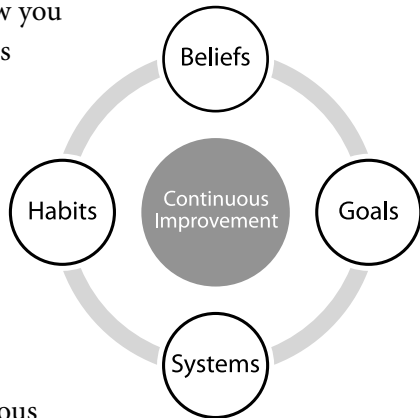
and leaving behind what you are already working on. No doubt Darren was achieving some success with this approach, but the problem was that nothing long-term was being addressed. Darren's workdays were full of frenetic, 'put-out-fires' experiences that left him exhausted and frustrated.

Without a new system, he was destined to repeat this frustrating pattern over and over again.

Sound familiar?

Coming Full Circle

The model I am going to show you is what Darren and hundreds of our clients are using to get a fresh start on their patterns and to create dramatic improvements in their results. First, I will give you a quick overview of the five parts of the model—Beliefs, Goals, Systems, Habits, and Continuous Improvement. Then, in the remainder of the book, I will provide more detail about each part, starting with the chapter, "Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall."



Confession time: I know that every time-management book worth its salt has a model. Some models are about the three ways, seven habits, 101 secrets, etc. I realize that, by introducing *my* model, I'm following a predictable path. Please bear with me. This simple model is just to provide some glue to the sections in the book. The real heart of the book is found in the individual parts: Beliefs, Goals, Systems, Habits, and Continuous Improvement.

Beliefs

After awareness, when we recognize an opportunity to improve, we have to always revisit our beliefs. It is our belief about our ability to create change that is the pivotal point for changing results. Negative, self-defeating beliefs such as: “There is only so much I can get done in a day,” or “Interruptions make it impossible for me to concentrate and complete my work,” will stymie our best efforts to get work done effectively or to improve.

You need to believe that you are the master of your time, and not the victim of other people’s agendas. Remember that you will always get more of what you focus on—this is never truer than with time management. If you think you are swamped by your workload and will never get caught up, guess what? You won’t! And if you think other people’s agendas are constantly interfering with your ability to get work done, guess what? They are! Just as Henry Ford famously forewarned, “Whether you think you are right or you think you are wrong, you are probably right!”

If, instead, you think that you are capable of finding time to get organized and to work on priorities, guess what? Opportunities will show up for moving forward on your biggest goals. By switching your focus from what *you can’t do* to what *you can do*, you open up a world of possibilities.

Sound like simplistic, positive-thinking mumbo jumbo? Maybe so, but it works. In the chapter, “Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall,” I am going to challenge you to really look at what you believe about time, and to recreate those beliefs so that they serve you, every day.

Goals

Our client research has discovered an alarming fact: people don’t make personal goals. Of course, they probably have a plan for their business, their marketing strategy, or their product launch, *but they don’t use the one thing that will generate the biggest results: personal goals.*

In a post-program study of participants in our program, we found that those participants who began a new habit of setting goals at the end of each day and of planning the next day's schedule had by far the most dramatic increases in time-management success (by the way, I define success as feeling satisfied with how my time was spent).

The “Goals Work” chapter will give you a simple formula for goal setting, and the “Plan like a Pilot” chapter will show you how to create your Action Plan for the week—this is easily the best improvement you can make to your time-management thinking and results.

Systems

Systems are great sources of efficiency and productivity (think filing systems, phone systems, or bookkeeping systems). When you lack good systems, you are destined to forever repeat your time-wasting behavior. For example, if you don't have a good paper management system, you will always be frustrated by clutter on your desk. And lack of a system for email means time wasted re-reading emails, dealing with unwanted messages, and manually sorting your Inbox.

The good news is that small changes in your systems can create enormous time savings. For example, if you could save just ten minutes every day by starting meetings on time and having a well-designed agenda, you could free up an entire work-week every year.

Habits

More than 300 years ago, Samuel Johnson accurately described the incredible influence of habits when he said, “The chains of habits are too weak to be felt until they are too strong to be broken.” When you improve a habit (how you plan your week, start your mornings, or how you tackle big projects), your new habit automatically,

and with little effort, starts working for you. It's like finding that perfect investment—once you see the opportunity and make the investment, it will start working for you.

Continuous Improvement

Be honest: what have you done in the last month to improve your time-management success? If you are anything like most participants in our training programs, the answer is *nada*.

In our seminars, 80–90% of participants have never taken a course or spent more than one hour learning how to use Microsoft Outlook—yet most of them are using it every day!

Most haven't changed their office layout in years, are always rushed in the morning (and don't know why), use the same excuses to explain their procrastination, and allow the same people to interrupt them all day.

One of the best ways to improve your success is to continually renew and improve. By asking yourself what is working and what could be improved, you will start to see opportunities for improvement. Having this attitude of continuous improvement will make work more interesting, provide you with more freedom, and bring you more success—every day.

I'm glad we have gotten the one and only model in the book out of the way. Now it's time to get to the biggest source for change: what you say to yourself.

Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall

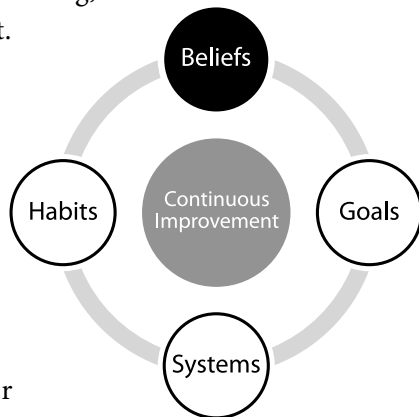
*It's easier to say 'No'
when there is a deeper 'Yes' burning inside.*

—STEPHEN R. COVEY, international best-selling author

Most of our challenges are self-created because of our self-limiting beliefs. And the same applies to our frustrations with time. Our beliefs got us into the time management challenges we are experiencing, and our beliefs will get us out.

As Pogo, Walt Kelly's famous 1960s comic strip character, famously exclaimed, "We have met the enemy and he is us."

Your belief about your ability to get work completed, and your belief about your ability to change your



patterns, will be either the lock or the key to creating more success. It's as simple as that—and as hard as that: all significant changes in our lives begin by changing our beliefs. The challenge is that the ones that don't serve us are invisible, working in the background to sabotage our efforts, and are frustratingly difficult to reverse.

“When we learn a bad habit, it takes over the brain map in that area,” explains Norman Doidge, M.D. in his remarkable book, *The Brain That Changes Itself*. “This is why it is so hard to ‘unlearn’ a bad habit. It has residency first, like an unwanted roommate.”

When I was in the tourism industry, my belief was that I needed to keep my schedule open every day to see what would happen. I operated from a simple To-Do list that seemed to have a life of its own as it grew longer daily. My days were packed with phone-call interruptions, friends dropping in (our office was in a public marketplace in Vancouver), impromptu meetings, and conversations with customers and staff. It was chaotic, but I had no idea that I was the architect of the chaos. In fact, I became a pro at blaming my frustrations on others and on my environment.

I was convinced that successful people must be really good at handling crisis. My logic was simple: I was successful and surrounded by chaos; therefore people more successful must just be better at dealing with chaos.

What I failed to pay attention to were the successful business leaders who were also extremely efficient. You know—the leaders with uncluttered desks, meticulous planning, and measured habits developed over years of trial and error. I assumed that *those* leaders must have other people doing all the work for them.

Beliefs, Beliefs, Beliefs

Only now do I recognize that, by believing chaos was a normal, I actually allowed it to happen. In short, I was putting my energy into convincing myself that I was doing my best instead of looking for *how I could improve*.

Until I changed what I believed, I was destined to operate from crisis—in that business and in every enterprise I created. This led to a stressful pattern of desperate, last-minute efforts to meet deadlines, and missed opportunities. The more I justified my belief with evidence, the more entrenched I became in my ineffective approach.



Here's a simple formula that applies to literally all aspects of your life. It is the secret to why you experience success in certain areas of your life—like a relationship, or your education, or your ability to earn money—and it is the exact cause of where you fail.

- ✓ *First, we make up our beliefs. Rightly or wrongly, we are the author of our stories.*
- ✓ *Second, we forget we made them up. Yep! We believe what we believe, and we love to be right.*
- ✓ *Next, we act as if the belief is true. Ever been convinced you were in the right, despite pretty strong evidence to the contrary (like arriving home late for dinner because you decided to work “just a few more minutes” at the office)?*
- ✓ *And finally, we look for evidence to prove we are right. That's right—if you think that co-worker is an idiot, guess what you will notice?*

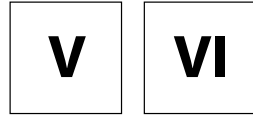
Here's a quick exercise to prove to you the incredible influence of your beliefs.

To make this exercise most effective, you need to hold a piece of paper over the right-hand column of figures. Please do that now.

As I ask you each question, try to answer it, and then slide the paper down just enough to reveal the correct answer in the right-hand column.

Let's try it with the first example.

If the following image is a Roman numeral, how do you add a single line to make it a six?



Okay, you got that one right. Do a happy dance and now go to the next one . . .

And, if the following image is a Roman numeral, how do you add a single line to make it a seven?

Again, slide your paper down to reveal the answer.



(answer below)



And, if the following image is a Roman numeral, how do you add a single line to make it an eight?

Again, slide your paper down to reveal the answer.

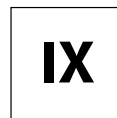


(answer below)



Okay, you are on a roll! Now, in the following image, how do you add a single line to make it a six?

When you are ready, slide your paper down to reveal the answer.



(answer below)



If you are like virtually everyone who takes this exercise (assuming you didn't peek), you got stumped at the fourth iteration. Your brain couldn't come up with a solution for adding a single line to make "IX" into six. But wait!

Are you looking at the problem from an *objective* point of view, unobscured by history or beliefs you might have conjured up based on the previous instructions? Or are you looking at it *through your belief window* and spending more time looking for evidence to prove that you are right ("I knew it, there is no solution for making this Roman numeral into a six with only one line!") instead of thinking creatively?

Notice that I didn't tell you that the last example was Roman numerals but, because the first three examples were about Roman numerals, almost everyone makes the assumption that the last one would be as well.

The reality is that, if you were presented with the last iteration of this problem first: "How do you add a single line to 'IX' to make it 'SIX,'" I think you would quickly arrive at the correct answer—that you just need to add an 's' to 'IX' to make 'SIX'.

Let's go through what I think happened here:

First, you were given enough evidence to create a belief that you were working with Roman numerals, *and* you were successful in creating the right answers. This combination of a belief and a confirmation that the belief was correct, was repeated enough times to make it reliable.

Next, you were provided with quite a different challenge, but your belief that this was all about Roman numerals inhibited your willingness to examine the problem more closely, and you got stuck.

Your new belief (which was created in a matter of moments) tells you that you are good at Roman numerals, but this last puzzle is a tough one. You think, maybe it can't be solved? Or it's a trick

question. But in fact, the answer is so incredibly simple that a six year-old could probably solve it (if that was the only problem they were given to solve).

As an adult, we love being right and, once we create a belief, we go to work to prove that it is a correct one.

What beliefs do you have that prevent you from creating more success? Maybe, for example, you believe:

- You work better under pressure.
- Nothing can improve until your boss changes her or his ways.
- The nature of your job is to blame for the long hours you work.
- No one can prepare a quotation/letter/proposal/agenda as well as you can.

Certainly, in the tourism industry we always had the ultimate excuse—the time of year. I can remember trying to get staff to plan ahead and to work more from goals. But between May and September, the excuse was that there was too much going on to revisit our goals and adjust our strategies. In the slow season, I would again try to rally the troops to get organized and look at goals, but by then the excuse was that they didn't have the energy for it. So we would repeat this cycle of feast to famine and never really get ahead of the game with our planning.

Let's take a look at some old beliefs (maybe they will look familiar), and how to rewrite them to better advantage.

Old Belief, New Belief—It's Your Choice

For each 'old belief' I present, ask yourself if it sounds at all familiar, and then ask yourself if it still serves you. Be honest with yourself. The first (and hardest) step in all change is awareness; we have to be honest about what is holding us back from making changes.

Okay, here we go. I'm going to present just five dysfunctional beliefs and some better alternatives. You will probably be able to add to this list with ones of your own. If so, let me know!

1) Old Belief: "I've done pretty well so far, so why change?"

Yes, you probably do have some approaches to time management that work for you. For example, many of the people who have taken our course are already well-organized when it comes to preparing for and attending meetings. On the other hand, after they leave the meetings, they procrastinate on what they committed to.

*"I was going to buy a copy of *The Power of Positive Thinking*, and then I thought: 'What the hell good would that do?'"*

—RONNIE SHAKES,
comedian

Better Belief: "I know that better is always possible and I am looking forward to earning more freedom with my time."

2) Old Belief: "I work best under pressure."

This is a classic belief, and one that I embraced for many years. When we learn that we are good under pressure, and in fact get rewarded for it, it's inevitable that our success will depend on last-minute rushing. This belief can lead to procrastination, unnecessary crises, and frustration with others on your team.

Better Belief: "I enjoy working from a plan, crossing tasks off my list, and having less stress."

3) Old Belief: "It's impossible to plan for my day. I have to be able to respond to the chaos around here."

This is a hugely popular belief for people who work in customer-service roles, such as front counters in banks, hotels and

recreation centers, or deep in the IT and administrative departments of many companies. The reality is that if you don't plan, you will constantly be frustrated by interruptions, and these interruptions will emerge as part of your self-fulfilling prophecy.

Better Belief: "With a plan I can keep long-term projects moving forward."

4) Old Belief: "I don't have a good track record for keeping promises to myself."

It is true that most people have a hard time keeping promises to themselves. I read once that only 12% of people keep their New Year's resolutions. Don't be too hard on yourself—it is possible that you aren't paying attention to successes you have created. Do you show up for work on time? Do you obey traffic laws? You are already a promise-keeper. You just need to get into a habit of creating even more goals, and committing to completing them.

Better Belief: "I am a promise-keeper and I am strengthening that skill every day."

5) Old Belief: "I have tried time-management systems in the past and I never stick with them for more than a week."

Okay, I have to admit I am also one of those people who have taken time-management courses and only stuck with the plan for a short while. Here's the problem with many time-management courses: they take too much time! There are special pages to be completed each day, review charts to fill out, and percentages-of-an-hour to be calculated. Within a week, you are spending more time filling in your Day-Timer than you are spending

getting work done. What you need is a process for being more effective that seems effortless to execute. Don't worry: that's what this book is about.

Better Belief: "With a simple system I can manage my time better and still have flexibility for what comes up."

New beliefs are not created by positive thinking. The brain will never be fooled by your attempts to change years of patterned thinking by just chanting a new mantra. The synapse pathways are too entrenched and the knee-jerk reactions too engrained.

What is needed is a combination of the new belief married with some tangible evidence. In other words, prove to your brain that the belief works, and you are well on your way to creating a new pathway.

A Formula for Success

When I used to race whitewater kayaks, I had to learn how to maneuver my wafer-thin racing boat around hanging poles (called 'gates') as fast as possible, while negotiating through some pretty wild whitewater. If you make one small mistake, the river's current will blow you past the gate and you are penalized.

It was easy to be intimidated by the power of the river, and the ruthless way it discarded paddlers who missed critical strokes, and flushed them downstream. I can remember standing on the river shore, watching paddlers struggling to stay upright and hold their course, and noticing my own doubts surfacing.

The trick I learned was to be aware of what was happening and to change my belief quickly. Watching other paddlers struggle was making me doubt my own abilities (not a good thing), and weakening my resolve for when it would be my turn (really not a good thing).

Next, I had to remind myself of my training and all the days I had spent on rivers wilder than this one. And then the critical last step was to really pay attention to little successes I enjoyed when I was in my boat. I nailed that turn; I powered over to number four gate and got through clean; I made the spin and backed through number five clean.

With every success, I reinforced my belief in my abilities; I was adding evidence to the belief.

On race day, my belief was entrenched and ready to serve me. Small setbacks were overlooked because of the strength of my belief in my abilities. In effect, this is exactly how we create successful change in our life:

- 1) Become crystal clear about the challenge,
- 2) Determine the best possible solution,
- 3) Adopt a belief that you will succeed,
- 4) Take action and pay attention to evidence of your success, and
- 5) Repeat.

Let's look at a simple formula to represent this process: adopt a new belief, prove it works, and repeat.

$$(\text{New Belief} + \text{Evidence}) \times \text{Repeat} = \text{New Success}$$

Here is another great example: I used to believe that I worked better under pressure (see Old Belief #2, above). This helped me to get a lot done, and to get it done faster than most people I knew.

The problem was, I was looking at the wrong evidence. While I was focusing on what a hero I was for doing all-nighters and accomplishing incredible amounts of work, I was ignoring how



disastrous my life was in other areas. My lack of planning meant that I was constantly going from unproductive to overwhelmed. There was no steady state and I was ignoring the important, but not urgent, leadership work of building successful relationships and planning.

My new belief is that I love the feeling of working from a plan and having less stress. The evidence I focus on is the clarity and productivity I enjoy at work, and being able to go home at a reasonable hour. I also notice that short periods of ‘unproductive’ time (going for a walk, reading, meeting with a friend) in the day can reward me with a sense of calm and better attention for when I am re-engaged. The more I focus on evidence that working from my plan is paying big dividends, the more entrenched and useful my belief becomes.

$(\text{New Belief} + \text{Evidence}) \times \text{Repeat} = \text{New Success}$

Think about your own beliefs—which ones serve you well and which ones do you need to change?

Once you have defined the new belief, start to look for evidence that supports it. Is your new belief that you can be satisfied with ‘good quality’ work (as opposed to seeking perfection)? Or maybe that other people can—and should—have more ownership over work that you have controlled in the past? Great!

Now notice any evidence that this new belief is serving you. Maybe you notice that the meeting agenda you had someone else prepare (for a change) was actually quite good. And notice that you saved yourself twenty minutes of tedious work putting the agenda together.

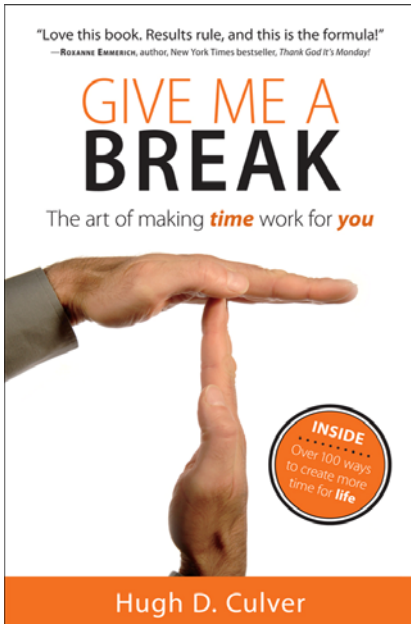
The next time the same task comes up, revisit your evidence and remind yourself of your new belief. Just like a river carving a new path, the more it runs its course, the more entrenched and permanent the path becomes.

Now, it is time to put it on paper . . .

Give Me a Break

Hugh D. Culver

"Always busy" and "multitasking" is old news. In Give Me a Break, Culver reveals the proven formula for getting things done and having a life.



The always-on, striving for more, multitasking, 24/7 world we live in is having its toll. We are getting busier, but not happier. While the "time management" movement created more list-makers, it failed to address the heart of why "To-Do's" tended to trump time for family, and time to think, reflect, and plan was replaced by a bulging email Inbox. In *Give Me a Break*, Hugh Culver presents a model for getting to the heart of why we never seem to have enough time and how to create the time we actually need.

A past workaholic, successful business owner, and consultant to large corporations, Culver knows a lot about being busy and what defines success. His solution is to first redefine the beliefs that drive the behavior and from there reset priorities, create better systems, practice better habits, and finally, invest in reflection, review, and renewal.

The five systems in *Give Me a Break* are based on observations with thousands of employees in over a dozen industries. For each system, Culver presents persuasive arguments for investing in a redesign of your approach to work.

For example, reducing unwanted interruptions by just twenty minutes a day is the equivalent of finding two weeks of new time a year. Like committing to making deposits in a bank account, Culver explains, the benefits of creating the time you want can be exponential.

Rather than the usual list of productivity habits, Culver suggests eight original approaches he has tested with participants in his live training seminars over the past twelve years. For example, *Honor the Mundane* is the perfect active meditation for the always-on mind while *Go with the Flow* matches work difficulty to the natural rhythms of our energy in the day. A favorite habit of his clients is *Start a Stop-Doing List* where you stop doing low-value, unwanted, or simply out-dated tasks in favor of *Me-Time* (Culver is big on recharging the mind and spirit with regular exercise, and down-time).

If you have tried the usual litany of time management books and still find you procrastinate and never seem to have time for yourself, this could be the solution for you.

Buy the e-book online at:
<http://bit.ly/GiveMeABreak>

Give Me a Break, the art of making *time* work for you

Hugh D. Culver

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Hugh Culver's adventure exploits have taken him from the Arctic to the Antarctic, and from mountain peaks to whitewater rapids. His business enterprises have included creating the world's most expensive adventure tours, operating a private airline in Southern Chile, pioneering eco-whale watching, teaching as an adjunct university professor, and being CEO of a corporate consulting firm.

Culver's presentations on personal leadership are sought after by leading organizations, including: Imperial Oil, Shoppers Drug Mart, Royal Bank of Canada, Investors Group, Western Union, Suncor, Telus, United Way, and the Red Cross. Hugh is a passionate advocate of the enduring power of vision, personal choice, and constant improvement. He lives in Kelowna, British Columbia with his wife Kirsten, and their two daughters.



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